



The postcolonial cultural transaction: rethinking the Guinea crisis within the French cultural strategy for Africa, 1958–60

Frank Gerits

To cite this article: Frank Gerits (2019) The postcolonial cultural transaction: rethinking the Guinea crisis within the French cultural strategy for Africa, 1958–60, *Cold War History*, 19:4, 493-509, DOI: [10.1080/14682745.2019.1576170](https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2019.1576170)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2019.1576170>



© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 29 Apr 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 984



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

The postcolonial cultural transaction: rethinking the Guinea crisis within the French cultural strategy for Africa, 1958–60

Frank Gerits

Department of History and Art History, Utrecht University, Utrecht, the Netherlands, International Studies Group, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

ABSTRACT

In 1958 Guinea voted to become independent. Historians have argued French administrators left Conakry as a form of punishment while Soviet aid offers turned Guinea into a Cold War frontline. This article, however, argues that the French handling of the Guinea crisis was fundamentally shaped by disagreements about cultural assistance. French culture, which in the early 1950s was viewed as a tool aimed at cultivating African loyalty, during the crisis became a modernising force uniquely suited to boosting African development. In 1960, cultural assistance became explicitly transactional: African countries that were expected to remain loyal to France received culture in return. The story of cultural assistance, therefore, elucidates the French understanding of empire and the Cold War in Africa.

KEYWORDS

Public diplomacy; cultural assistance; Guinea; de Gaulle; Touré

1. Introduction: Guinea's independence and the challenge to French prestige

On 28 September 1958, Guinea, a French territory in West Africa led by Ahmed Sékou Touré, rejected the new French constitution in a referendum. After his return as prime minister of the fourth French Republic, de Gaulle introduced a new constitution. The French Union was replaced with the French Community. An Executive Council – *Conseil exécutif* – that brought together the President and the leaders of different territories was instated, and a senate and a court created. In effect, the French President also became the president of the new French Community. In a referendum, de Gaulle gave the French territories two options: accept a subordinate position in the newly created Community, or choose immediate independence and suffer the loss of French aid. Touré's Parti Démocratique de Guinée-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (PD-RDA) advocated the 'no-vote' under the impulse of students, trade unionists, and the party's youth wing.¹ Subsequently, French civil servants packed their suitcases and destroyed much of the infrastructure. The Soviet Union's aid offer turned the former French colony into a Cold War battle ground.

CONTACT Frank Gerits  f.p.l.gerits@uu.nl; [@FrankGerits](https://twitter.com/FrankGerits)

¹Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 307; Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonization?* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2002), 232; Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 174; and Georges Chaffard, *Les carnets secrets de la décolonisation II* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1967), 189.

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

The strained relationship between Guinea and France was an episode of the Cold War as well as a turning point in the decolonisation of the French empire. Scholars such as Elizabeth Schmidt have shown how Touré's departure was driven by grassroots activists on the left side of the political spectrum who convinced Touré to cut ties with France. She considers the repression of the Communist-leaning RDA by French officials to be a 'Cold War choice'. Mairi MacDonald's work on Guinea also refers to 'Cold War preoccupations in Washington and Paris'.² Historians who focus on the French stance towards Conakry, such as Fred Marte and Laciné Kaba, have emphasised the importance of clientelism in the French Africa policy. In their interpretation, the radical French retreat from Guinea was due to the conflicting personalities of de Gaulle and Touré, while Cold War historians like Sergei Mazov claim the international Cold War dimension should not be ignored.³

An examination of declassified sources on Guinea, obtained 'sous dérogation' in the diplomatic archives of La Courneuve, reveal how French public diplomats worked hard to blunt the impact of decision-making in Paris.⁴ It is argued here that the French handling of the Guinea crisis was fundamentally shaped by debates about the workings of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy has been defined as 'an international actor's attempt to conduct its foreign policy by engaging with foreign publics'. It also included cultural diplomacy, an interaction with the public that relies on exhibitions, art, and theatre rather than pamphlets, radio, and film.⁵ French public diplomacy towards Africa was not about creating and selling an image of grandeur to create 'prestige', not about hiding cynical agendas of weapons shipments and business deals, nor were French operatives naïve enough to think that cultural, technical, commercial, and linguistic aid would simply entice the former African colonies to develop according to a French model, as scholars have argued.⁶ Instead, the cultural projection into Africa was based on a colonial management strategy that wanted to modernise African minds via the offering of culture, and cultural assistance, which developed into a transaction that offered French culture in return for support.

²Elizabeth Schmidt, 'Cold War in Guinea: The Rassemblement Démocratique Africain and the Struggle Over Communism, 1950–1958,' *The Journal of African History* 48, no. 1 (2007): 95; Mairi Stewart MacDonald, *The Challenge of Guinean Independence, 1958–1971* (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2009), 7; and Guia Migani, 'Sékou Touré et la contestation de l'ordre colonial en Afrique sub-saharienne, 1958–1963,' *Monde(s)* 2, no. 2 (2012): 257–73.

³Kaba Lanciné, 'From Colonialism to Autocracy: Guinea under Sékou Touré, 1957–1984,' in *Decolonization and African Independence: The Transfers of Power, 1960–1980*, ed. Prosser Gifford and William Roger Louis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 228; Fred Marte, *Political Cycles in International Relations: The Cold War and Africa 1945–1990* (Amsterdam: VU Press, 1994), 148; and Sergei Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956–1964* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 57.

⁴Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), x.

⁵Cull, *Cold War and the United States Information Agency*; Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, 'What Are We Searching For? Culture, Diplomacy, Agents and the State,' in *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy*, ed. Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried, vol. 6 (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 4–5.

⁶Note pour le premier ministre, 'a/s. Conception et organisation d'ensemble de l'action culturelle et technique française à l'étranger,' 8 October 1959, 1–3, 2DE61, f. Juin 1958–février 1962, Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, Paris (FNSP); Martin Garret, 'Conclusion: A Gaullist Grand Strategy?', in *Globalizing de Gaulle: International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies, 1958–1969*, ed. Christian Nuenlist, Anna Locher, and Martin Garret (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 302–3; Robert Frank, 'La Machine Diplomatique Culturelle Française Après 1945,' *Relations Internationales* 115 (2003): 332; Louisa Rice, 'Cowboys and Communists: Cultural Diplomacy, Decolonization and the Cold War in French West Africa,' *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 11, no. 3 (2010), http://0-muse.jhu.edu.biblio.eui.eu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v011/11.3.rice.html (accessed December 18, 2018); and Joanna Warson, 'France in Rhodesia: French Policy and Perceptions throughout the Era of Decolonisation' (PhD diss., University of Portsmouth, 2013).

Nevertheless, French cultural assistance has been analysed in public relations (PR) terms. How exactly French officials believed their operations would lead to influence over target audiences and how those views framed their understanding of the African landscape in which French ambassadors and cultural attachés had to operate remains underexamined. Historian Laurence Saint-Gilles, for instance, has credited France with being the first country to understand the potential of soft power.⁷ Soft power is the ability of one nation to attract others to its cultural values and consequently adopt its way of thinking – which is distinct from hard power, where others are coerced through offers of compensation, through bargaining and negotiating, or by making threats. However, the soft power concept amounts to a distortion of the French strategy, since it is a partial justification of the Cold War projection of US ideals abroad. Joseph Nye devised the concept in 1990 in response to Paul Kennedy's argument that the US was going through its phase of imperial decline.⁸ Moreover, the opening of archives that document French cultural diplomacy and psychological warfare in the French colonial territories has served to further complicate our understanding of the French tactics in the battle for hearts and minds. Jennifer Dueck's work on French cultural diplomacy in Syria and Lebanon elucidates how the distinction between propaganda, as 'causing people to leap to conclusions without adequate examination of the evidence', and information or education, 'which invites inquiry' did not apply to French public diplomacy, whereas it was a core dilemma for US operatives. Louisa Rice has examined how Hollywood films and American cultural centres in Senegal were perceived as a threat to French influence.⁹

In the absence of a close examination of French public diplomacy activities, politicised narratives of French foreign policy towards Africa have been presented as exceptional and have centred on de Gaulle.¹⁰ Scholarship that examines *Coopération* and the *Francophonie* emphasises the modernising and progressive qualities of those cooperative structures that were set up in the 1960s to bring French colonies and Francophone countries together around a common cultural heritage. Those stand in sharp contrast with more realist accounts in which Jaques Foccart is key. Together with de Gaulle, he forged alliances with authoritarian African statesmen, like the Congolese leader Mobutu Sese Seko, secretly sent out French advisers, and worked out arms deals.¹¹ In historical accounts that occupy a middle ground, de Gaulle also appears as the driving force behind policy.¹²

⁷Laurence Saint-Gilles, 'La culture comme levier de la puissance: le cas de la politique culturelle de la France aux Etats-Unis pendant de la guerre froide,' *Relations Internationales* 28, no. 4 (2009): 99.

⁸Joseph S. Nye, 'Soft Power,' *Foreign Policy* 80 (Autumn 1990): 160; Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), 1–10.

⁹Jennifer M. Dueck, *The Claims of Culture at Empire's End: Syria and Lebanon Under French Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Rice, 'Cowboys and Communists' and Warson, 'France in Rhodesia,' 105–11.

¹⁰For an analysis of this historiography: Tony Chafer, 'Franco-African Relations: No Longer Exceptional?' *African Affairs* 101, no. 404 (2002): 346; and Gordon Cumming, 'Nicolas Sarkozy's Africa Policy: Change, Continuity or Confusion?' *French Politics* 11, no. 1 (2013): 25.

¹¹Marine Lefèvre, *Le soutien Américain à la Francophonie: enjeux Africains 1960–1970* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 2010); François-Xavier Verschave, *La Françafrique: le plus long scandale de la République* (Paris: Stock, 1998); François-Xavier Verschave, *De La Françafrique à La Mafiarique* (Brussels: Éditions Tribord, 2004); and Jean-Pierre Bat, *La fabrique des barbouzes: Histoire des réseaux Foccart en Afrique* (Paris: Nouveau Monde éditions, 2015).

¹²Maurice Vaïsse, *La Grandeur: Politique Étrangère Du Général de Gaulle, 1958–1969* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 284; Frédéric Turpin, *De Gaulle, Pompidou et l'Afrique (1958–1974): Décoloniser et Coopérer* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2010); Pierre-Michel Durand, *L'Afrique et Les Relations Franco-Américaines Des Années Soixante: Aux Origines de l'obsession Américaine* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2007); Guia Migani, 'De Gaulle and Sub-Saharan Africa: From Decolonization to French Development Policy, 1958–1963,' in *Globalizing de Gaulle: International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies, 1958–1969*, ed. Christian Nuenlist, Anna Locher, and Martin Garret (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 251–2; Jean-Pierre Bat, *Le Syndrome Foccart: La Politique Française En Afrique, de 1959 à Nos Jours* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2012); and

From the vantage point of cultural assistance, the de Gaulle-centred explanations become less convincing and it emerges that a French presence was maintained in Guinea. For France, the Cold War threat was part of a multifaceted competition for influence in Conakry. Taken together, the changing views on the workings of public diplomacy shed light on what motivated French decision-making in the 1950s and how views on empire and the Cold War in Africa changed. Guinea provides a starting point to determine in what way the Cold War should be ‘reduced in significance by future historians’, as Odd Arne Westad writes.¹³ A first part of this article will therefore analyse how French cultural diplomats believed their activities would generate influence on the continent after 1945. Those beliefs were the product of a mindset in which French culture was considered to be a privilege bestowed upon Africans hungry for modernity. When confronted with the challenge of Guinea, where Soviet influence was rumoured to be mounting, this cultural assistance approach became the subject of harsh debates between French officials in West Africa and Paris. Those changes are examined in a second section of this article.¹⁴

2. Cultural assistance as the means for social mobility

2.1. Africans as consumers of modernity, 1945–55

In Europe, public diplomacy was a weapon in the Cold War battle for hearts and minds. On the African continent, however, where the Soviet threat was minimal in the 1950s, information and education became part of a ‘psychological modernisation’ effort aimed at fostering nation-building. Social psychologists like Talcott Parsons developed techniques to draw men and women into the modern mindset. Parsonian theory was rooted in the reception of European social theory in the United States and had its origins in academic debates of the 1920s and 1930s, a time when classic ethnography began applying psychiatric and psychological theories to analyse the so-called ‘native mind’. Consequently, the influential Harvard Department of Social Relations approached modernisation as a process that affected entire societies. Lucian Pye argued that ‘nation-building’ required leaders with a stable psychology.¹⁵ De Gaulle’s ‘plan quinquennal d’expansion culturelle’, a five-year cultural expansion plan that was approved in 1959, was written in the same vein and reorganised the French technical and cultural cooperation service, the Service de Coopération Technique Internationale, in light of this rationale. Cultural exchange, education, international technical cooperation, artistic performances, and assistance with administrative procedures all received an increase in funding. The Americans calculated that the plan promised a 10% increase in spending for Africa between 1959 and 1963, totalling a budget of 74 million. The United States Information Agency (USIA), which studied the French cultural activities in Africa, was convinced France had ‘one of the largest and most ambitious cultural and information programs of any Western country’.¹⁶

Yves Gounin and Jean-Christophe Rufin, *La France en Afrique le combat des anciens et des modernes* (Brussels: De Boeck, 2009).

¹³Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 6.

¹⁴Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa*, 242.

¹⁵Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, x; Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernisation Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 97, 170; and Charles Tilly and Gabriel Ardant, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), i–xiv.

¹⁶Confidential report, ‘US Paper Other Western Efforts French Informational and Cultural Activities in Africa,’ [1961], FO 953/2029, United Kingdom National Archives (hereafter: UKNA); Research and Reference Service, ‘French External Cultural and

Anticolonial intellectuals who lived under French rule, such as Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, rejected this psychological rationale. Fanon, a psychiatrist and key theorist of the Algerian War, rejected the so-called ‘dependence’ complex in his *Black Skin, White Masks* in response to Octave Mannoni, who had argued in 1950 that the Malagasy could not bear that they were not white men. Fanon exposed this claim as false: the ‘white man’ had imposed discrimination and had robbed the non-whites of their self-worth. Césaire also rejected Mannoni’s insistence on ‘the marginal, “separate” character of the non-whites’ and attacked the European claims of moral superiority. Europe bragged about its so-called achievements, the diseases it had cured, and the improved standards of living it had delivered, while in fact the Europeans had only taught men to have an ‘inferiority complex, to tremble, to kneel, despair and behave like flunkys’.¹⁷

In France, the issue of psychological modernisation did not only occupy armchair theorists, but was the subject of animated discussions among high-level policy makers in Paris and operatives on the ground. Conflict between the Elysée and officials in Africa resulted from profoundly different opinions on the most effective way to attain modernity, but was exacerbated by the complicated network of organisations that all had a stake in the spread of French culture in French West Africa, France’s main target area on the continent. While the cultural sections of embassies were the main public diplomacy coordinators, the Direction Générale des Relations Culturelles (DGRC) became more active during the 1950s, while the Service de Coopération Technique Internationale strengthened its position during the 1960s. Both institutions operated independently from the Foreign Affairs Department and had relations with the Alliance Française, a semi-private organisation which had been founded in 1883 to spread French culture around the globe. The loose organisational structure made the *action culturelle* appear non-political, but also hindered the use of culture as an effective diplomatic tool. As the post-war era progressed, French ambassadors in Africa grew increasingly dissatisfied with these overlapping responsibilities and debates ensued about the most effective way to utilise cultural assistance.¹⁸

When the political section of French Foreign Affairs tried to convince the DGRC in 1954 to expand into British Africa, arguing that French culture also had a political role to play and had to project French ideas abroad via film, exhibitions, and pamphlets, they were ignored.¹⁹ Cultural attachés and ambassadors on the ground supported the DGRC, French cultural assistance was considered to be a privilege bestowed upon Africans in French colonies eager for modern ideas, not a political instrument aimed at convincing anticolonial activists. Wielding it as such would only reward dissent. This logic emerges from the way in which in the early 1950s magazines such as *Paris-Match* and *Bingo* were offered in the *centres culturels*: 157 in West Africa by 1956. By granting access to French culture, the French Foreign Affairs Department argued, the aspirations for social mobility and progress of young people were met. French officials grossly

Informational Services,’ 7 May 1963, I, RG. 306, P142, Box 14, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (NARA).

¹⁷Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 21–3.

¹⁸Alain Dubosclard, *Histoire de La Fédération Des Alliances Françaises Aux Etats-Unis*, Culture et Diplomatie Française (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998), 155; Report, Senghor to Présidence du Conseil, ‘Voyage officiel en Afrique occidentale britannique, du secrétaire d’Etat à la Présidence du Conseil 22 Septembre – 7 Octobre 1955,’ October 1955, 21, Direction Afrique Levant (DAL).

¹⁹Généralités 1953-1959, 49QONT/66, Archives de Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, La Courneuve (AMAE).

misread the political potential of this situation in their territories: only external threats were considered important. Delegates from Cameroon, the Ivory Coast, and Senegal, who had attended the festival of the World Assembly of Youth in Singapore, for instance, were monitored because the anticolonial discourse which pervaded those gatherings was dreaded by the French colonial authorities. However, the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), the main political party in French West Africa, campaigned against the centres and wanted to transform them into *maisons des jeunes*, under their own control.²⁰

In East Africa, French officials employed a similar logic when offering French cultural products. The French consul in Nairobi, A.G. Morand, tried to promote the French language. He offered books to the Royal Technical College in Nairobi, which was planning to open its doors in 1956 in the hope that some students would become interested in learning French. His attempt to increase the funding for the French school in Zanzibar, built in the 1930s to uplift the tiny French speaking community at the Comoros, failed. His successor, Pierre Meyer, again tried to increase the funds of the school from 12,000 shillings to 20,000 shillings in 1956, and requested a teacher from France. The repeated refusal to invest in East Africa – and in that way expand French influence – underscores that French cultural assistance in Africa was defensive in character and aimed at keeping competitors beyond the boundaries of France's colonies, rather than an enterprise built to project French ideas abroad. The limited financial resources that were available after World War II were primarily directed towards French Africa in an attempt to hold on to empire. Even though the French made overtures towards non-French territories and an ambassador was sent to Rhodesia in 1948, French engagement outside of French Africa remained minimal up until the mid-1950s.²¹

These rationales behind French cultural assistance – an inward focus and the French culture as a privilege for Africans – also framed how French colonial officials and cultural attachés measured the influence of their competitors. In Senegal in 1950, French officials came into conflict with Perry N. Jester, the US Consul in Dakar who ran a small United States Information Service post (USIS). The French considered Jester to be confrontational. He hassled a religious leader, Ibrahim Diop, with questions about the tensions between Catholics and Muslims, as well as inquiries about anti-communism and Arab propaganda brochures. At the same time he had proposed cooperation with Diop in cultural matters, behind the backs of the French authorities. Diop tried to play both sides off against one another by informing the already irritated French authorities about his conversations with Jester. Jester was replaced by Jane Ellis, who assured the French Ambassador to Washington, Henri Bonnet, that she wanted to improve French–US relations. The French ambassador to the British colony of the Gold

²⁰Paper, 'La jeunesse de l'union française et l'assemblée mondiale de la jeunesse,' [1953], DAL, Généralités, 49QONT/64, f : CB-V-7 Communisme, mouvements clandestins, AMAE; Frédéric Turpin, 'La Communauté française: un avenir pour la république?' in *Pierre Mendès-France et Les Outre-Mers*, ed. Frédéric Turpin and Jacques Frémeaux (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2012), 59; Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa*, 133; and Louisa Rice, 'Cowboys and Communists.'

²¹Letter, A.G. Morand to DAL, 'a.s. fonctionnement école franco-comorienne,' 1 October 1953, letter, A.G. Morand to DAL, 'a.s. Visite de l'école franco-comorienne de Zanzibar,' 14 November 1953, letter, Pierre Meyer to DAL, 'a.s. Ecole franco-comorienne de Zanzibar,' 29 September 1956, letter, Pierre Meyer to DAL, 'a.s. Prévisions budgétaires pour l'exercice 1957,' 10 November 1957, DAL, Afrique Orientale Britannique, 35QO/6, AMAE.

Coast, Marc C. Renner, was less concerned and did not see USIS officers as threatening. He was impressed by their move into the biggest building in Accra, as well as the imposing cinema, reading room with glossy publications such as *Time Magazine*, and the sensational exhibitions. Yet, he considered this to be 'luxurious', but 'mediocre' propaganda.²² That judgement was the result of Renner's belief that USIS activities were manipulative and therefore ineffective. He was convinced the visit of Gold Coast leader Kwame Nkrumah, to Lincoln University in the US, had been orchestrated by the Americans. It made the US competitor a minor threat to French cultural prestige in Africa, which had barely been tarnished by the war. That lesson seemed to get confirmed during an embassy party, where indigenous chiefs told him they still admired France.²³

In short, for Renner and his colleagues the power to create a positive disposition among Africans was found in the cultural achievements themselves, not in the way in which messages were conveyed. The US might have been better at selling their message – 'manipulation' as Renner phrased it – but in their eyes, there was no competition to be had with French culture, which had achieved greater things. When anticolonial leaders such as Gamal Abdel Nasser stepped up their own cultural assistance activities, the quality of French culture became even more important.

2.2. French culture as a source of African development, 1956–58

Between 18 and 24 April 1955, Third World leaders gathered in Bandung, Indonesia, to discuss ways to strengthen their collective opposition to colonial rule. In his opening speech, Sukarno, the leader of Indonesia, called upon the attendees to 'inject the voice of reason into world affairs and mobilise all the spiritual, all the moral, all the political strength of Asia and Africa on the side of peace'.²⁴ Simultaneously, the influence of Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had come to power in a coup in July 1952, increased in West Africa as he funded the Voice of Arabs, an Arab language broadcast which began in 1953. A Swahili broadcast for East Africa was set up in 1954 and in April 1957 a new station, the Voice of Free Africa, began broadcasting to West and Central Africa. Officials at France d'Outre Mer, the French colonial department, were concerned about the rise of anticolonialism and Nasser's pan-Arab influence in Chad and the Sahel.²⁵

Nasser's pan-Arab propaganda and the Bandung moment forced French officials to re-evaluate their cultural assistance strategy. While some historians see growing French engagement beyond French West Africa only in the 1970s and 1980s, more recent research has stressed the gradually stronger ties between France and non-French

²²'propaganda mediocre mais luxueuse' see : letter, Monod to direction du personnel, 'Représentation française en Afrique Noire,' 20 April 1945, 27, DAL, Généralités 1944-1952, 94QO/96, AMAE; Memorandum, DAL, 'Représentation consulaire américaine,' 13 May 1949, 4, DAL, Nord-Est Afrique 1960-1965, 35QO/17, AMAE.

²³Letter, Monod to direction du personnel, 'Représentation française en Afrique Noire,' 20 April 1945, 27, letter Monod to Direction du Personnel, 'Mission de M. Monod en Afrique Noire,' 22 June 1946, DAL, Généralités 1944-1952, 94QO/96, AMAE.

²⁴Quoted in: Memorandum for the Operations Coordinating Board, 'Subject: Bandung Conference of April, 1955,' 12 May 1955, 3-4, OCB Central File Series, White House Office, National Security Council Staff Papers 1948-1961, Box 86, f: OCB 092.3 (File #2) (2) [April-November 1955], Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

²⁵James R. Brennan, 'Radio Cairo and the Decolonization of East Africa, 1953–64,' in *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, ed. Christopher J. Lee (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 174.

speaking Africa in the post-war period as well as an increased activity of the Alliance Française in the face of the Elysée's resistance to cultural diplomacy in Southern Africa.²⁶ However, plans for an official 'action culturelle' outside of French West Africa were already drawn up in 1956. Léopold Senghor, deputy of Senegal and minister responsible for international cultural matters, travelled to Lagos in Nigeria, where, on 11 October, he stepped off his plane at the airport in Ikeja. He declared brotherly greetings from France, a country where 'Muslims were an integrated part of society.' As he was whisked off to a waiting car to watch the rugby game between Abidjan and Lagos, journalists sent out press reports describing the man as cutting an impressive and cosmopolitan figure.²⁷

His immaculate suit and his eagerness to speak to the press were no coincidence. Senghor believed French prestige was in need of some repair due to the pan-Arab propaganda and the international public relations campaign waged by the Algerian Front de Libération National/National Liberation Front (FLN), but also because Soviet and US propaganda were on the rise. Prime Minister Antoine Pinay had been so surprised when the UN General Assembly condemned the French repression in September 1955 that he lashed out against Soviet Foreign Minister Vyachslav Molotov in New York. The French government approved of Senghor's visit to British West Africa, which was organised under the pretence of French-British cultural cooperation. Officially he set out to study the British educational system and their Colonial Welfare and Development programme.²⁸

His real mission, however, was to be kept secret: the export of the French language and culture beyond the boundaries of French West Africa and the introduction of French language education to advance the development of African peoples and increase French prestige. Specifically, Senghor's trip was a response to Nasser's Pan-Arabism because it was threatening the French position as the primary supplier of upward African social mobility. West African Muslim religious leaders, Marabouts, were attracted to the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, which was not only a political centre, but – more importantly – a place where the Arab language was being taught. Upon their return, the students would have a better grasp of the Arab language, which – in the French estimation – would lead them to a higher position in society. This was a problem for a colonial power that considered its language its most valuable resource.²⁹

When asked about the trip in the French-British talks in November 1955, French foreign affairs officials acted as if Senghor's identification of the problems in his report – too little French language education and no connection between elites in French and

²⁶Mélanie Torrent, *Diplomacy and Nation-Building in Africa: Franco-British Relations and Cameroon at the End of Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 13; Chris Alden, 'From Policy Autonomy to Policy Integration: The Evolution of France's Role in Africa,' in *Paris, Pretoria and the African Continent*, ed. Chris Alden and Jean-Pascal Daloz (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 11–25; Daniel Bach, 'Le Général de Gaulle et La Guerre Civile Au Nigeria,' *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 14, no. 2 (1980): 259–72; Alexander Keese, *Living with Ambiguity: Integrating an African Elite in French and Portuguese Africa, 1930–61* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007); Victor Moukambi, 'Relations between France and South Africa with Special Reference to Military Matters' (PhD diss., Stellenbosch University, 2008); Anna Konieczna, 'L'histoire d'une 'relation Spéciale': Les Relations Entre La France et l'Afrique Du Sud Dans Les Années 1958–1974' (PhD diss., Science Po, 2013); and Warson, 'France in Rhodesia,' 107–8.

²⁷'où il y a aussi des Musulmans', see: letter, Paul Raymond to DAL, 'a.s requitte adressée à M. Senghor,' 12 November 1955, 1, DAL, Généralités 1953-1959, 49QONT/66, AMAE.

²⁸Report, Leopold Senghor, 'Voyage officiel en Afrique occidentale britannique, du secrétaire d'Etat à la Présidence du Conseil 22 Septembre – 7 October 1955,' October 1955, 21, 2, DAL, Généralités 1953-1959, 49QONT/66, AMAE.

²⁹Report, 'Note sommaire sur les influences pan-islamiques et pan-arabes en Afrique Noire Française,' [1956], 8, 2261/2, Affaires Politiques, Centre des archives d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.

British Africa – had resulted from close empirical study, even though these had been forgone conclusions.³⁰ As a pioneer of the *Négritude* movement, Senghor namely sought to reaffirm ‘black’ values, art, and culture because – as he argued in *Présence Africaine* – African civilisations had fostered many of the European and American cultural achievements. That link between French and African cultures had to be reinvigorated in support of African progress, turning what was a literary project into a strategic framework for French cultural diplomacy in Africa. Language was essential to this cultural assistance venture because prestige was dependent upon French values, which found their expression first and foremost in its literary achievements. At the same time, language education had to facilitate the study of science, because France was a country of imaginative solutions, a ‘terre d’imagination’. Lastly, in Senghor’s opinion, the common practice of teaching indigenous languages in British Africa hindered the advancement of the African people as a whole because the lower classes – unlike the elites – could not seize upon the opportunity to familiarise themselves with French culture.³¹

More important than the emphasis on the French language as a tool to advance French prestige, science, and the societal model, was Senghor’s interpretation of *Négritude* as a civilising instrument because it allowed all members of the French bureaucracy to maintain their own view of what French cultural diplomacy was supposed to achieve. Senghor saw the French language as a way to ‘advance’ Africans of all social layers, while Prime Minister Antoine Pinay emphasised the potential economic gains of cultural centres, and the Direction générale des relations culturelles (DGRC) was excited about the opportunity to distribute information about France in Africa. This diversity of views stemmed from the fact that France had a long tradition of public and cultural diplomacy in which multiple aims and definitions had already been formed. What everyone thus essentially agreed upon was that a better organisation would further their own goals.³² French public diplomacy in Africa was therefore never a matter of simply implementing guidelines that came from Paris.

While this process of strategic improvisation was characteristic for the French cultural diplomacy efforts, it was not unique. In the US, covert and overt propaganda operation behind the Iron Curtain helped policy planners clarify what the United States’ aims and responses should be and what the threats consisted of.³³ What was distinctive about French policy, however, was the prominence of racial identity and pride which offered the French a set of powerful ideas to work with. For Senghor, *Négritude* was a way to elevate African societies, not only economically, but also culturally and spiritually, in cooperation with the metropole. We ‘mean to be Negro-African and French at

³⁰Memcon, ‘Point III Relations culturelles entre les territoires d’Afrique Occidentale Française et les Territoires Britanniques,’ 30 November 1955, DAL, Généralités 1953–1959, 49QONT/52, AMAE.

³¹Report, Leopold Senghor, ‘Voyage officiel en Afrique occidentale britannique, du secrétaire d’Etat à la Présidence du Conseil 22 Septembre – 7 October 1955,’ October 1955, 14, DAL, Généralités 1953–1959, 49QONT/66, AMAE; and Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Négritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015), 11.

³²Alain Dubosclard, *Histoire de la fédération des Alliances Françaises aux Etats-Unis* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998), 155; and Letter, Pinay to Senghor, ‘Voyage officiel de M. Senghor en Afrique Occidentale Britannique,’ 23 December 1955, letter, DGRC to DAL, ‘Récente mission de M. Senghor en Afrique Occidentale Britannique,’ 26 November 1955, 1, DAL, Généralités 1952–1959, 94QONT/66, AMAE.

³³Scott Lucas and Kaeten Mistry, ‘Illusions of Coherence: George F. Kennan, U.S. Strategy and Political Warfare in the Early Cold War, 1946–1950,’ *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 1 (2009): 39–66.

the same time' declared Senghor on Radio Accra.³⁴ Politically, Senghor's use of *Négritude* to build an alliance between the English-speaking and French-speaking African elite aimed at thwarting Nkrumah's brand of pan-Africanism, which wanted to eliminate existing borders, unite the continent, and sever the bonds between the metropole and the former colony. Alternatively, Senghor sought to create federations that maintained ties with France. By the end of 1958, efforts to establish a federation that would embrace Senegal, Mali, Upper Volta, and Dahomey fell apart when the latter two countries pulled out, under the impulse of Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Cote d'Ivoire who defended the primacy of newly independent states. Nonetheless, on 4 April 1959, Senghor and Modibo Keita, leader of the Union Soudanaise RDA, set up the Mali Federation between Senegal and French Sudan, which fell apart two months later.³⁵

Despite these failures, Senghor's emphasis on the French culture and language, as a modernising force uniquely suited to boosting African development rather than as a colonial tool aimed at cultivating African loyalty, proved to be durable. It returned in the French plan for cultural expansion that de Gaulle approved in 1958 and even seeped into the bilateral cooperation agreements that were concluded between France and its former African territories after 1960.

3. Africans as a target audience in an African Cold War crisis

3.1. *The independence of Guinea as a turning point, 1958–60*

On 25 August 1958 de Gaulle visited Conakry to advocate for the yes vote, but he was caught off guard by Touré's speech, which demanded revisions to the proposed constitution. Shocked by this opposition, measures were taken in the realm of culture. Eleven days before the referendum, the French ambassador, Jean Mauberna, asked teachers who were holidaying outside of Guinea not to return, a punitive measure that reflected the French views on development in which teachers and language were important.³⁶ Instead of an increased effort to fight a battle for Guinean hearts and minds, via the spread of information, the French cultural presence was thus reduced.

By January 1959, however, Paris began to realise that aid offers from other countries to Guinea had to be more directly countered, and they started negotiating a cultural protocol with Touré. The Quai d'Orsay sent an unofficial diplomat, Pasteur Mabilille, to different capitals to investigate what motivated the United Kingdom (UK) and the US to go to Guinea. At the Africa Department of the Foreign Office, Mabilille was assured that the UK had nothing to do with the Ghana-Guinea union. In his meeting with Dulles, he was asked why de Gaulle had granted Guinea independence if the general still wanted to intervene. On 16 June 1959, the psychological warfare committee of

³⁴Letter, University College Ibadan director of extra-mural studies to M.P. Goumain French Consul in Lagos, 'Interview with M. Senghor at the Accra Broadcasting Station,' 1955, 4, *Généralités 1952-1959*, 49QO/66, AMAE; and Richard Watts, 'Negritude, Présence Africaine, Race,' in *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World*, ed. Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 227–9.

³⁵Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*, 338, 373; Paul Nugent, *Africa Since Independence: A Comparative History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 48.

³⁶Elizabeth Schmidt, *Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946–1958*, *West African Studies* 17 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 166; Confidential letter, H. Carr CRD to A.C. Cameron BC, 27 October 1959, FO 371/138838, UKNA.

France was instructed by Prime Minister Michel Debré to take action because he wanted to maintain Guinea in the French Franc zone and preserve some level of intellectual influence by providing the necessary educational infrastructure.³⁷ The committee, which had been created in October 1955, was headed by Charles Lacheroy and part of the French army, which was looking for ways to deal with FLN propaganda.³⁸ In mid-May, after other NATO members could not be convinced of the seriousness of the Soviet threat, a negotiation team led by the DGACT director Roger Seydoux was sent to Guinea to resume negotiations about an economic and cultural agreement.³⁹ That decision was driven less by the 4000 remaining French inhabitants and their economic interests than it was by competitors who had their feet in the door to Guinea, possibly unlocking the rest of French Africa in the process.⁴⁰

In the face of intense competition, public diplomats on the ground were forced to think about ways in which they could make their aid more attractive, a novel situation for public diplomats who had been convinced French culture needed little PR. The issue of attractiveness preoccupied one man in particular, Louis de Guiringaud, the French ambassador to Accra, who was confronted with a Ghanaian propaganda campaign in which France was depicted as Africa's enemy, while a growing group of African students chose the US or Germany over France.⁴¹ Guiringaud explained the lack of interest in French culture by pointing to Africans who were supposedly insufficiently prepared for a culture that came from a 'highly civilised' country. The terrain had to be 'psychologically prepared' by making the audience familiar with certain aspects of French life.⁴² Every cultural manifestation was bound to fail if it were not accompanied by an effort to disseminate news about France in an attractive way..⁴³ In defiance of the official policy in Paris, Guiringaud attended the signing ceremony of the Ghana-Guinea union, which had been set up by Nkrumah to keep Guinea afloat and to serve as the nucleus of a future African union. He felt Guinea was not yet lost, and wanted to convince the Ghanaian leader to let French technicians back into Guinea through Ghana. Touré told the French ambassador that he would not sign the Ghana-Guinea agreement if France could offer an alternative.⁴⁴

Guiringaud tried to make the civil servants in Paris see that a hostile attitude towards Guinea only gave the newly independent country of Ghana, which wanted to unify the continent, propaganda ammunition.⁴⁵ The minister of foreign affairs, Maurice Couve

³⁷'Note d'information Secret, premier ministere, Comité d'action Psychologique,' 16 June 1959, DAL Guinée 1958-1959 (sous dérogation), 51QO/35, AMAE.

³⁸Georges Fleury, *Histoire de l'OAS* (Paris: Grasset, 2002), 2.

³⁹Confidential letter, J.S.H. Shattock to J.H.A. Watson, 21 May 1959, FO 371/138837, UKNA.

⁴⁰MacDonald, 'The Challenge of Guinean Independence, 1958-1971,' 101, UKNA.

⁴¹'Letter, Louis de Guiringaud ambassadeur de France au Ghana to ministre des affaires étrangères, 'Enseignement du français au Ghana,' 21 April 1960, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, 50QO/72, AMAE.

⁴²'pour preparer psychologiquement le terrain et faire connaitre par ce moyen certains aspects de la vie française,' see: Letter, Guiringaud to DAL, 'Information politique', 14 May 1960, 2, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, 50QO/72, AMAE.

⁴³'effort culturel de notre part': Telegram, Louis de Guiringaud Ambassade Leopoldville to DGRC, 'Copie de ma lettre de ce jour RC/ 86, adressée au Département (Direction des Relations Culturelles) A.S Passage de la troupe de l'Union française,' 17 February 1954, DAL, Congo belge 1953-1959, 44QO/41, AMAE; Letter, Guiringaud to Monsieur le ministre des Affaires Etrangères, 'Enseignement du français au Ghana,' 21 April 1960, 1, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, 50QO/72, AMAE.

⁴⁴'Note pour le Ministre, Guiringaud, 'A/S Présence culturelle et technique française en Guinée,' 28 Novembre 1958, 51QO/28, f: Education Relations culturelle, AMAE.

de Murville, Debré, and de Gaulle, however, did not understand the PR dimension of the race to Guinea and had 'been unpleasantly' surprised by the ambassador's move. 'Being cordial was one thing', Debré remarked sarcastically, 'staying at a reception for two hours' was a different matter.⁴⁶ De Gaulle believed the Guineans needed France and would eventually return. The obstinacy of civil servants at the Ministry of France d'Outre-mer – who cast the Guineans as 'nègres communistes' – further marginalised Guiringaud. Instead, the ambassador began looking for new ways to genuinely promote France, leading him to observe his competitors.⁴⁷ Guiringaud became an eager student of print material. He read *Les Nouvelles de Moscou*, *American Outlook*, *London Press Service*, *Indian News*, *News of the Week*, *News from Israel*, *London Illustrated*, and *Commonwealth Today*. Guiringaud had been particularly inspired by the richly illustrated issue 73 of *Commonwealth Today*, which reported Princess Margaret's visit to the Commonwealth Exhibition. He asked Paris for a brochure on the French Community that could serve as a starting point for his own publication, which would also have large photographs and articles on de Gaulle's travels abroad.⁴⁸

Guiringaud was also impressed by the high-quality publications that Ghana's public diplomacy institution, the Bureau of African Affairs, produced. The French were interested in booklets such as *New Ghana* and *Ghana Today*, but particularly in the postcards that were disseminated depicting Africans as being the bedrock of every major intellectual achievement, such as mathematics and philosophy. 'Africans' had taught the Greeks the alphabet, and architecture had originated with 'African mothers' laying foundations for their houses. The Ghanaian propagandists themselves had borrowed, because the scenes had been painted by an American artist, Earl Sweeting, who had received a PhD at the University of Ghana.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the postcards' depictions were inspired by *The African Origin of Civilization*, a book written by Senegalese politician and anthropologist Cheik Anta Diop. He had argued the Egyptian culture was a black African culture and, as a result, Africans – not the Europeans – had provided the basis for civilisation in general.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, it was the postcards' qualitatively superior layout that had attracted the ambassador's attention, because he was seeking a way to improve the appeal of his own operation and produce more appealing publications.

Paris, however, was not convinced of the need to pay attention to appeal and therefore did not integrate this concern into the new plan for French cultural expansion, the *plan quinquennal d'expansion culturelle*. Instead, Paris remained focused on

⁴⁵'Je comprends bien que n'ont pas ici le même éclairage qu'à Paris. [...] des Africaines français, et je'en vois presque tous les qui ne sont pas not ennemies,' Letter, Guiringaud to de Murville, 11 décembre 1958, CM 7 1958, FNSP; and Gerits, Frank. "When the Bull Elephants Fight": Kwame Nkrumah, Non-Alignment, and Pan-Africanism as an Interventionist Ideology in the Global Cold War (1957–66)' *International History Review* 37, no. 5 (2015): 951–69.

⁴⁶'Ne pas se dérober à un entretien est une chose. Répondre à une convocation et rester pendant deux heures est une autre,' Letter, Debré to Guiringaud, 28 Novembre 1958, CM 7 1958, FNSP.

⁴⁷Memorandum, Monsieur Daridan, ambassade de France au Ghana, 21 Novembre 1958, DAL, Guinée, 50QO/36, f: Relations Guinée – Ghana, AMAE.

⁴⁸'Letter, Guiringaud to ministre des affaires étrangères, 'Information politique,' 14 May 1960, 4, 'Commonwealth Today,' 2, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, 50QO/72, AMAE.

⁴⁹G. K. Osei, *African Contributions to Civilizations* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1966), 18; Letter, Guiringaud to Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, 'Information politique,' 14 May 1960, 2, 'Histoire de l'Afrique racontée aux Ghanéens,' 22 February 1960, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, 50QO/72, AMAE.

⁵⁰Cheikh Anta Diop, *Antériorité Des Civilisations Nègres: Mythe Ou Vérité Historique?* Collection Préhistoire-Antiquité Négro-Africaine (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1967).

the quality of its cultural aid. Rather, the cultural expansion plan wanted to create a service mentality – ‘a genuine policy of offering services’ – to make French culture more attractive. Therefore, institutions such as the universities, cultural centres, and language schools had to be renovated, French books had to create an appetite for the French language by focusing on scientific, technical, and medical knowledge and, where possible, educational cooperation had to be improved by making the services more useful.⁵¹

De Gaulle’s spectacular and radical retreat has obscured that French DGCT officials – working behind de Gaulle’s back or with his tacit permission – maintained a presence in Guinea. The decision of 78 French teachers to stay in Guinea in 1958 delighted the DGCT, because it meant that in 1960 – when France officially recognised Guinea – only 25 new teachers needed to be hired while the inflow of teachers from the Soviet bloc had remained limited.⁵² By 1960, an increasing number of teachers wanted to leave, which was detrimental for the French, who believed that the future Guinean leaders could not be oriented towards France without proper schooling. Teachers in Guinea left for a variety of financial and emotional reasons, but above all because they felt threatened by the anti-French broadcasts which were produced by Radio Conakry with the help of Ghana.⁵³ Pierre Siraud, the chargé d’affaires in Guinea, therefore wanted to encourage the teachers to stay. ‘The problem of maintaining our cultural presence in Guinea is pressing,’ Siraud complained. ‘If the teachers who are here refuse to remain at their posts’, the French had to work to ‘change their minds’, because they were needed ‘to ensure a sustained influence of French culture in this African country which politically and economically is moving closer to the countries of the East each day’.⁵⁴ When France accorded Guinea diplomatic recognition on 2 January 1960, Roger Sedoux sent M. Mauffrai – the former inspector of primary school education in Morocco – to Guinea to re-establish a cultural service within the embassy.⁵⁵

However, Guiringaud again came into conflict with Paris because he believed French language education could not be separated from the political climate of a particular country. In Ghana for instance, French language classes would not increase French prestige, but undermine the French Community by facilitating the exchanges between French and British Africa. Guiringaud signalled to Seydoux that the Ghanaians who had signed up had admitted that they wanted to learn French so they could visit the countries of the French Community and spread the ‘Ghanaian gospel’.⁵⁶ The ambassador to Tunis had similar complaints, while the French intelligence service agreed with

⁵¹ ‘véritable politique d’offre de services’: Note pour le premier ministre, ‘a/s. Conception et organisation d’ensemble de l’action culturelle et technique française à l’étranger,’ 8 October 1959, 1-3, 2 DE 61, f: Juin 1958-février 1962, FNSP.

⁵² Note pour le ministre, DGCT, Enseignement et Oeuvres, 10 May 1960, DAL, Guinée, 51QO/61, f: Guinée: Education et relations culturelles, AMAE.

⁵³ Letter, Siraud to Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, ‘a/s: Situation des professeurs en Guinée,’ 21 May 1960, 2, DAL, Guinée, 51QO/67, f: Guinée: Education et relations culturelles, AMAE.

⁵⁴ ‘Le problème du maintien de notre présence culturelle en Guinée se trouve donc posé. Si les professeurs qui sont ici refusent de demeurer dans leurs poste [...] revenir sur leur décidé [...] d’assurer la pérennité de la culture française dans ce pays d’Afrique qui, sur le plan politique et économique, s’oriente chaque jour davantage vers les pays de l’Est,’ see: Letter, Siraud to Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, ‘a/s: Situation des professeurs en Guinée,’ 21 May 1960, 3, DAL, Guinée, 51QO/67, f: Guinée: Education et relations culturelles, AMAE.

⁵⁵ Schmidt, Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946–1958, 176; Telegram, Seydoux to Chargé d’Affaires Conakry, ‘a/s: Mission de M. Mauffrais,’ 11 January 1960, DAL Guinée, 51QO/67, f: Guinée: Education et relations culturelles, AMAE.

⁵⁶ Memorandum, Roger Seydoux, 22 May 1959, DAL, Généralités, 49QONT/65, AMAE.

Guiringaud that the introduction of compulsory French language education in Ghanaian schools was not necessarily a victory for French cultural diplomacy. Accra was eager to introduce these language programmes because these could reduce the language barriers and foster African unity, something that would not further French interests.⁵⁷

Nonetheless, Foreign Affairs in Paris held on to the conventional logic behind language education: the spread of the French language and culture would – irrespective of political views – instil the African with an admiration for French culture and should thus be encouraged where possible.⁵⁸ French lack of attention for the political aspects of education opened the path to competitors, the Soviets, as well as the US and the UK, who all wanted to be the first to get their feet in the door.

3.2 Making French development aid visible, 1960–61

Guinea's independence created a ripple effect across the French colonies in Africa. In 1960 de Gaulle was confronted with a cascade of independence declarations from Cameroon, Senegal, Togo, Mali, Madagascar, Benin, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, the Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, and Gabon.

In response, bilateral and multilateral agreements with African countries were hurriedly elevated to the level of official policy, known as *Coopération*. The Brazzaville group, created in 1960 by former French colonies which wanted a strong connection to France, transformed itself into the Union africaine et malgache (UAM) which voted with France in the UN General Assembly. De Gaulle's televised speech on cultural and economic cooperation in July 1961 was indicative of the level of improvisation. The cost of empire had made disengagement inevitable, de Gaulle declared, in his calculated political vernacular. But if France could 'establish new relations based on friendship and cooperation', *'tant mieux'*, all the better!⁵⁹ It took the French government until 1963 to establish a commission – led by and named after Jean-Marcel Jeanneney – that was tasked with devising a doctrine for *Coopération*.⁶⁰ Even the *Francophonie*, a cooperation among the totality of French speaking peoples and France's cultural coating of postcolonial structures, was not created by Paris, but advocated by Jean Marc Léger in Québec and adopted by Senghor. Moreover, until Senghor reintroduced the concept in November 1962 in an article for *Esprit* that analysed the international implications of the *Francophonie*, the term *'francité'* was more commonly used. De Gaulle's talent for adopting ideas that had been accepted and had proven to be workable even led his personal Africa adviser, Jacques Foccart, who was building his network of African leaders at the Secrétariat général pour les Affaires africaines et malgaches, to conclude that the general was not interested in Africa.⁶¹

⁵⁷S.D.E.C.E bulletin, Présidence du conseil, 'Ghana : Activités Pan-Africaines', 26 June 1958; NARA, RG. 59, CDF 1955–59, 550.60/6-958-556D.973/9-957, U.S. Embassy Tunis, 'The Alliance Française in Tunisia', 24 November 1958, DAL, Ghana 1953-1959 (sous dérogation), 50QO/28, f: Education – Question culturelles Bulletings S.D.E.C.E: Juin-Juillet 1958, AMAE.

⁵⁸Note, DAL, 13 August 1959, DAL, Généralités, 49QONT/65, AMAE.

⁵⁹Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, vol. III (Paris: Plon, 1970), 329–30.

⁶⁰Migani sees the Jeanneney report as an example of the successful French management of decolonisation, but she does not explain why the report was only written after the cooperation structure had already been created, see Migani, 'De Gaulle and Sub-Saharan Africa,' 264.

⁶¹Jacques Foccart, *Dans les bottes du général. Journal de l'Élysée – III, 1969–1971* (Paris: Fayard/Jeune Afrique, 1999), 525, 530; Durand, *L'Afrique et les relations*, 443–5; and Lefèvre, *Le soutien Américain à la Francophonie*, 12.

After 1960, new ways of promoting French culture were therefore eagerly discussed in the freshly created Ministry of Cooperation, because it provided cultural aid as well as economic and military assistance.⁶² Officials at the French Ministry of Cooperation felt they had to catch up with the British, who had invested massive amounts of money in their communications strategy in the early 1960s. A British white paper they had been able to obtain struck the Ministry of Cooperation as highly relevant to their own situation, which demanded the marketing of the French socio-economic solutions and cultural achievements in a new and competitive environment. 'As a nation, Great Britain has a great deal to offer', the UK paper stated, yet 'we delude ourselves if we think that in a fiercely competitive world these things are self-evident.' Every effort had to be made to ensure the peoples of other countries understood UK ideas and policies. Word for word, that was what the French felt they needed in a world where the Soviets, as well as allies, courted the favour of an African target audience.⁶³

Nonetheless, in Paris French culture was still seen as a matter of rewarding Africans who were hungry for modernity, rather than as a means to attract others to French republican values. Senghor's claim, in 1956, that the French language was a modernising force uniquely suited to boosting African development was now expanded to the entire assistance operation. As Debré phrased it in 1963, there was a 'spiritual need' for France.⁶⁴ It was important that the French *action culturelle* contributed to the relief of societal needs and was clearly distinguishable from what the French territorial governments were doing.⁶⁵ Even though Debré founded the Ministry of Cooperation to manage the different bilateral cooperation agreements, it was at the meetings of the chiefs of missions where concrete decisions were made. In January 1961 it was decided that assistance projects had to be highly 'visible'. Rather than simply a form of publicity, it was essential that projects were effective to elucidate that French aid had the power to develop societies. In that way France would acquire a 'moral advantage' over its competitors and acquire a good reputation.⁶⁶ Assistance was about more than aid-grants; it also represented a certain impression of France as a nation at the forefront of development.

The French cultural projection into Africa was less about creating an elaborate illusion of 'great power status' than it was about gaining genuine influence. French culture was offered as a form of development aid in exchange for the support of de Gaulle's international policy. The decision to use French culture in a more political way

⁶²Turpin, *De Gaulle*, 151–4; Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa*, 223–36; and Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 3–15.

⁶³The French estimated, 6.6 million francs for the BBC, 5.1 million for the British Council and the same amount again for the FO, CRO and the CO, see: Memorandum, 'Note sur les moyens d'information demandés par le Secrétariat d'Etat aux Relations avec les Etats de la Communauté,' [1960], Ministère de la Coopération, Direction de la coopération technique et culturelle, 19810443/47 Historique de la DCT, f. Historique de la DCT Organisation, Centre historique des archives nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine Cedex, Paris (CHAN).

⁶⁴Letter, Debré to de Murville, 3 January 1963, CM 8 1963, FNSP.

⁶⁵Notice d'information secret, 'Le Ghana et le Panafricanisme,' 16 September 1960, Note pour M. le Directeur de la Coopération Culturelle et Technique, 'Premiers éléments d'une étude relative aux programmes d'action culturelles des états africains et malgache d'expression française,' 16 March 1961, Ministère de la Coopération, Direction de la coopération technique et culturelle, 19810443/47, f. Historique de la DCT, CHAN; Memorandum, 'Contribution à une définition du comportement psychologique africain en face de l'information et de l'action culturelle étrangères,' [1960–61], DAL, Généralités, 49QONT/69, f. AFR-III-1 Documentation générale sur la zone géographique, AMAE.

⁶⁶'bénéfice moral,' see: Rapport, 'Conférence des chefs de mission: Synthèse des rapports des chefs de mission,' January 1961, 1–7, DAM, Généralités, 10891NVA/239 Coopération 1961–1975, f: Débuts politiques de la coopération (1961–1963), AMAE.

in the early 1960s did not mean, as many have argued, that cultural resources were used as propaganda to somehow entice the former African colonies to develop according to a French model.⁶⁷ Cultural resources were more consciously granted to those territories that were expected to remain loyal to France, a lesson learnt in Guinea.

4. Conclusion: the transactional relationship with empire and a multifaceted Cold War story

In French Africa, Cold War concerns were entangled with a shifting perception of the postcolonial political situation. Consequently, French public diplomacy in Africa became a form of cultural assistance. In the early 1950s French culture was not a political instrument aimed at convincing anticolonial activists, but a means to manage African populations in French colonies, who were perceived to be eager for modern ideas. When Guinea rejected French tutelage, the initial harsh French retreat – which historians have emphasised – was quietly reversed when Debré noticed other countries were eager to offer Touré assistance. In defiance of, or with his quiet permission, de Gaulle's punishment was quickly softened because of the resolve to retain Guinea in the French Franc zone and the desire to preserve some level of intellectual influence. By 1960, Paris' view on cultural assistance had become more explicitly transactional: cultural resources were more consciously granted to those countries that were expected to remain closely allied with France. The pleas of French ambassadors to pay more attention to the competitive PR environment fell onto deaf ears in Paris.

Foccart's strategy, which relied on personal ties with African leaders, was therefore not only a response to emerging Cold War conflicts on the continent, but part of a longer interpretation of modernisation. Cultural assistance became a frame of reference of French diplomats in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, and as such adds a layer of complexity to Cold War-inspired analyses and interpretations of interventionism and conflict in Africa. In the French estimation, the Soviet Union was only one of many competitors besides the UK, the US, and Ghana that France had to contend with in Conakry. For the French, Touré's defection was not proof of his leftist convictions, since they were well aware that he played off different parties against each other to obtain aid. Rather than increase France's Cold War sensibilities in Africa, setting the stage for an unholy alliance with Mobutu and others, Touré's defection highlights the continuity of French assumptions about the power of the postcolonial cultural transaction.⁶⁸

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Prof. Dr. Iris Borowy for the collaboration during his time as a visiting fellow at the Center for the History of Global Development at Shanghai University. The

⁶⁷Garret, 'Conclusion: A Gaullist Grand Strategy?' 302–3; and Frank, 'La Machine Diplomatique Culturelle Française Après 1945,' 332; and Rice, 'Cowboys and Communists.'

⁶⁸René Dumont, *L'Afrique Noire Est Mal Partie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962); and Nathaniel Kinsey Powell, 'France's African Wars, 1974–1981' (PhD diss., Graduate Institute Geneva, 2013).

productive discussions and inspiring atmosphere in which he worked between September and November 2018 allowed him to finalise this article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Frank Gerits is a lecturer in the history of international relations at Utrecht University, research fellow at the International Studies Group of the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, and Senior Editor for History, Politics, IR, and Social Science for the *European Journal of American Studies*. He was the Agnese N. Haury postdoctoral scholar at NYU in 2015, NRF Innovation fellow at the University of the Free State in 2016, and Lecturer in Conflict Studies at the University of Amsterdam in 2017. He has published articles in *Cold War History*, the *International History Review*, and *Diplomatic History*.