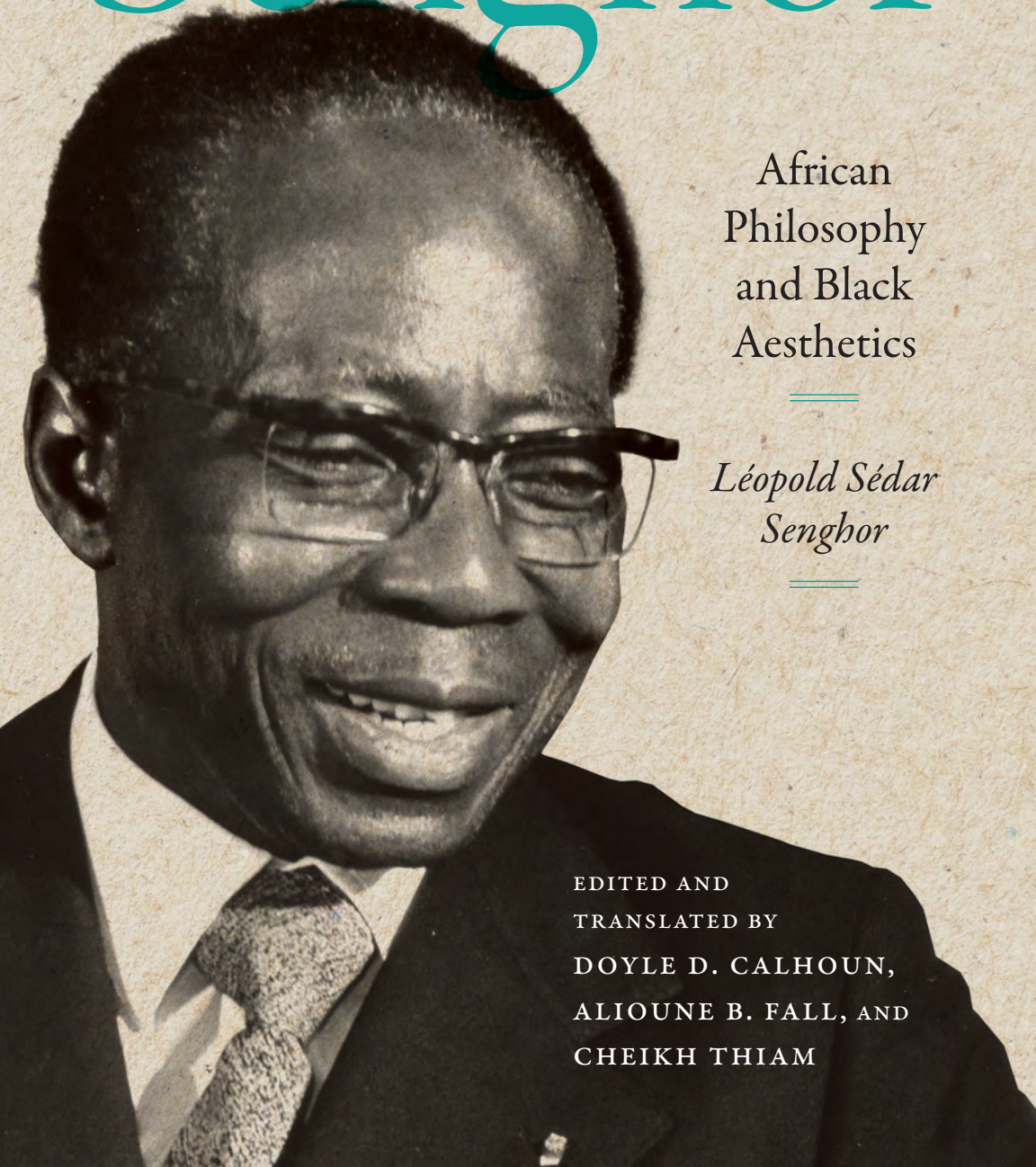
The Essential Senghor

African Philosophy and Black Aesthetics

Léopold Sédar Senghor



EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY
DOYLE D. CALHOUN, ALIOUNE B. FALL, AND CHEIKH THIAM

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from *Liberté 1, 3 & 5*

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PART III. NEGRITUDE, *MÉTISSAGE*, AND THE DIALOGUE OF CULTURES

Translators' Note

The texts assembled here are translations of the final, definitive editions of Senghor's prose, as published in the volumes *Liberté 1* (1964), *Liberté 3* (1977), and *Liberté 5* (1993). However, these texts all had a life of their own—as lectures, conference papers, prefaces or postfaces, forewords or afterwords, academic articles, essays, or speeches—before they were edited and printed (or reprinted) in the *Liberté* volumes. This heterogeneity on the level of genre and genesis helps explain some of the rhetorical features of certain texts as well as the diversity of bibliographic apparatuses deployed. For instance, texts that began their lives as speeches typically provided minimal citations, even in their edited form in the *Liberté* volumes, whereas texts conceived initially as academic articles or essays generally have more robust bibliographic information in the original. We provide details of original publication (which Senghor often includes at the end of his texts) in the first, unnumbered note for each text. While we have chosen to group essays thematically, and not in strict chronological order, it is imperative to keep this publication information in mind as one reads and engages with Senghor's texts, since their contexts of publication differ widely, in terms of both setting and historical moment. The earliest text here was published in 1937, under colonization and still decades before independence (1960); the latest was published in 1983, in the wake of Senghor's resignation from the presidency (1980).

More than a translation, we have sought to offer a critical edition for readers in English. Thus, we have provided complete bibliographic references for Senghor's citations (which, in the original texts, are often incomplete or missing), corrected and noted obvious errors, and introduced bibliographic references in the notes where they are absent, including many implicit or unattributed citations. In the case of multiple versions or editions of a given text cited or

mentioned by Senghor, we have tried to reference the edition used by Senghor wherever possible; when necessary, we have cross-checked inventories of books held in Senghor's own collections. In some cases, we have had to rely on modern editions. We have also noted instances where Senghor's citations or translations appear to be incorrect or modified. Inevitably, we could not be truly exhaustive in this bibliographic labor, though in the process we have consulted editions in libraries and archives in the United States, France, and Senegal. Our hope is that the present volume at least gives a more complete sense of the sheer range of Senghor's citational practice.

In addition, we introduce discursive notes to clarify or explain relevant historical, cultural, literary-historical, and linguistic (including etymological) details that might otherwise escape the attention of contemporary readers. In particular, we have done so with an eye to matters related to Wolof and Sereer languages and cultures. For Wolof citations, we typically provide modern transcriptions in the notes but retain Senghor's original orthography in the body of the text; we follow this practice because Senghor often makes precise points regarding the transcription of African languages, whether implicitly or explicitly (famously, Senghor did not believe Wolof had geminate consonants, and his spelling reflected this assumption). However, we have preferred modern orthography for common Wolof words that occur frequently in the body of the texts (i.e., *Kocc Barma* instead of *Kotche Barma*, *boroom* instead of *borom*, *tagg*, not *taga*). Along these lines, we use contemporary terminology and spelling for African languages (e.g., "Sereer" for *sérère*, "Pulaar" for *poular*).

In the case of the French *peul* and *Peul*, used throughout Senghor's texts, we have drawn the following distinctions in English: We use the words "Pulo" (singular) and "Fulɓe" (plural) to refer to the people, based on the Pulaar roots *pul-/ful-* (*peul* is a French spelling of the Wolof word *pël*, used to designate speakers of Pulaar). For the language, we use the term "Pulaar." Senghor very occasionally uses the word *poular* to refer to what he calls "a Senegalese dialect of *peul*," in which case we translate *poular* as "Pulaar" and *peul* as the macrolanguage "Fulah" but include Senghor's French *poular* in square brackets. The Tukolor (from the French colonial designation *toutcouleur*) are Pulaar speakers who were traditionally sedentary, as opposed to the Fulɓe, who were itinerant; we use the terms "Haalpulaar" (singular) and "Haalpulaaren" (plural), which literally means "speakers of Pulaar," to translate *toutcouleur*.

We have sought to retain Senghor's original use of italics, which might strike the modern reader as excessive, and capitalization, which can be inconsistent, for emphasis wherever possible out of faithfulness to Senghor's often academic, sometimes pedantic style. We have also retained his use of hyphens to draw

attention to the etymology (usually Latin or Greek) of certain words (e.g., *é-mouvoir*). We have left the French term *métissage*, which designates both cultural and biological mixture and hybridity, untranslated because, more than a word, it is a key concept in Senghor's theoretical arsenal, one that draws on and resignifies the colonial-era *métis*, which was used throughout West Africa and much of the French empire to refer to the children of European and African unions.[1] We have tried as much as possible to preserve Senghor's original syntax in English, though some smoothing over has been necessary to ensure readability.

We discuss in detail the challenges of translating the constellation of terms in French related to Blackness and Black or Black African identity in our introduction. As we explain there, the French term *nègre* is especially fraught and complicated. Charged with the histories of enslavement and anti-Blackness—in fact, synonymous with "slave" in many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts—the term was rehabilitated by African and Afro-Caribbean writers working in French from the 1920s onward, most famously in the 1930s by the Negritude thinkers, among them Senghor, whose project was founded on reclaiming and "rehabilitating" this term. As Senghor writes in "Negritude, as the Culture of Black Peoples, Shall Not Be Eclipsed": "We have used the word *Nègre* to designate the Black man, despite the pejorative nuance people have wished to attach to it [. . .] precisely to rehabilitate this man with the word."[2] The translation of *nègre* into English has given rise to different approaches, including "Negro," "Black," leaving *nègre* untranslated, and even the N-word. Across the body of his work, Senghor deploys the terms *Negre/negre*, *Noir·e/noir·e*, and *Négroïde/négroïde*, as well as the prefixes *Négro-/négro-* (as in *négro-africain·e*, *négro-américain·e*, and *négro-espagnol·e*) and *Afro-/afro-* (*afro-américain·e*, *afro-latin·e*, *afro-français·e*) extensively, consistently, and with precision. He uses such terms both as substantives and adjectives (to modify words for peoples, languages, cultures, ways of being, art forms, and cultural artifacts). Most often, Senghor capitalizes terms such as *Négro-africain* when he is referring to a person or peoples (i.e., *le Négro-africain* or *les Négro-africains*), especially when these are definite nouns, and uses lowercase letters when the words are deployed as adjectives (e.g., *l'art négro-africain*), though there are some exceptions to this pattern (e.g., rarely, *un négro-african*). His capitalization of *nègre* and *noir* is somewhat less consistent. While Senghor often seems to use capitalization, like italics, for emphasis or to designate types or concepts (e.g., *l'Homme noir* and *le Noir* versus *des noirs païens*), this is not always uniform across his essays. In general, when used as adjectives, *nègre* and *noir* appear in lowercase (e.g., *les poètes nègres*, *le rhythme nègre*, *les peuples noirs*), and when used as nouns they

are frequently capitalized, especially when definite. Following English convention, we capitalize "Black" in our translation, unless the word refers exclusively to the color, and capitalize "Negro" when used as a noun. However, when it is used as an adjective, we capitalize "Negro" only when the noun it modifies is capitalized in the original or when *nègre* (adj.) itself is capitalized in Senghor (we thus translate *Art nègre* and *Art Nègre* both as "Negro Art" but *art nègre* as "negro art"). We do this out of respect for Senghor's original text.

Senghor sometimes also combines terms related to Blackness in ways that might strike readers as redundant or paradoxical (e.g., *Nègres noirs*, "Black Negroes"). Put simply, Negritude, Blackness (*noirceur*), and Africanness (*Africanité*) in Senghor's work cannot, in English, be collapsed into a single signifier: "Black." For these reasons, we have decided to follow Senghor's usage, which he maintained until the 1990s, translating *nègre* as "Negro" and *noir* as "Black," except where these words are referred to *as words*, in which case, we leave them untranslated. The translation of *nègre* as "Negro" underscores the affinities between Negritude and the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro movement, which Senghor discusses at length in these essays, but it also, in later texts, helps to telegraph the ways in which Senghor's language may have begun to appear dated in the last decades of the twentieth century. In our introduction, we discuss possible advantages and disadvantages of this approach.

This translation, from its inception to its completion, was a fundamentally collective undertaking. While we often arrived at preliminary drafts of individual essays separately, we worked over each text together, as a unit. One person would read the French original aloud; another, the proposed English translation; the third would listen to both. We would then revise, puzzling over a paragraph, a sentence, or—often—a single word. Occasionally, we would call on our colleagues and friends for their expertise in Wolof, Sereer, and Pulaar. Our process for rendering Senghor's prose in English was ultimately an exercise in collaborative translation, "co-translation," or even "multiple translatorship."[3] *Liggéeyu tekki bi ñoo ko bokk* (The work of translation is shared). This axiom was even more meaningful given our shared fluency in English, French, and Wolof despite our distinct linguistic backgrounds: One of us is a native English speaker, while the other two are native speakers of Wolof and French, and one with working knowledge of Sereer. Beyond these linguistic particularities, our disciplinary orientations further enriched the collaboration. Although we each identify as scholars of Negritude and have studied and published in the field, our areas of specialization differ: One works on the philosophy of Negritude, another on African and Caribbean literature and cinema, and the third on African literature and decolonial theory from an Afro-diasporic perspective. The

diversity of our linguistic and intellectual points of reference made this collaboration especially rich, stimulating, and enjoyable.

Our collaborative process also extended from our constant reflection on style and approach in translation, to our framing of Senghor and his reception in the critical introduction. One of the most significant challenges we faced while translating, rereading, and reintroducing Senghor to an Anglophone audience was striking a balance between acknowledging Senghor's contested and controversial political legacy and doing justice to the intellectual complexity of his work. Drawing on our own disciplinary orientations and training, we sought to show that while fields such as Francophone studies, Black studies, philosophy, and literary studies might have been institutionalized in the West within nationalist perspectives, when placed under the broader rubric of African studies, these areas of inquiry are mutually enriching, or mutually fecundating, to borrow a term frequently used by Senghor. This mutual enrichment or cross-pollination underscores not only the vital importance of translation to our disciplines but also the value of cross-disciplinary, collaborative translation work. It seems especially fitting that a translation of Senghor's works be the result of a collective effort and the fruit of cross-disciplinary exchange. Such a process exemplifies the spirit of Senghor's commitment to "conciliatory harmony" between different intellectual and linguistic traditions.

NOTES

1. On the history of the term *métis* under French colonialism, see Emmanuelle Saada, *Les Enfants de la colonie: Les métis de l'Empire français entre sujétion et citoyenneté* (La Découverte, 2007).

2. [See chapter 5, page 131, in the present volume.—Eds.]

3. Hanne Jansen and Anna Wegener, "Multiple Translatorship," in *Authorial and Editorial Voices in Translation 1: Collaborative Relations Between Authors, Translators, and Performers*, ed. Hanne Jansen and Anna Wegener (Éditions québécoises de l'œuvre, 2013), 1–39. On collaborative translation, see Anthony Cordingley and Céline Frigau Manning, eds., *Collaborative Translation: From the Renaissance to the Digital Age* (Bloomsbury, 2017).

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This volume has been an enormous collective undertaking, spanning several years. The bulk of the work was completed during our summers spent together in Senegal: in Dakar, Nianing, and Palmarin. Above all, we are grateful to our friends and families who have given us the time and space to pursue this project and who have supported us in myriad ways.

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Introduction

LÉOPOLD SÉDAR SENGHOR (1906–2001): A REINTRODUCTION

Doyle D. Calhoun, Alioune B. Fall, and Cheikh Thiam

Negritude therefore [. . .] will not disappear; it will play, once more, its role, an essential one, in the edification of a new humanism, more human because it finally will have brought together in their totality the contributions of all continents, all races, all nations.
—LÉOPOLD SÉDAR SENGHOR, "La Négritude, comme culture des peuples noirs, ne saurait être dépassé," 1993

A Poet-Politician at the Crossroads

Black, French, and African; poet, philosopher, politician; universalist, essentialist, theoretician of Negritude and *métissage*; colonial subject, anticolonial scholar, African head of state; student of the Latin trivium, specialist of African languages, Sereer traditionalist—Senghor can be described by many epithets, each seemingly contradicting the other. His vast and varied oeuvre, encompassing lyric poetry as well as writings on philosophy, aesthetics, linguistics, and politics, spans over half a century and both the colonial and postcolonial periods. Senghor's major prose works—collected and edited into a five-volume series titled *Liberté* (Freedom) and published by Le Seuil in Paris over the course of several decades—testify to a highly syncretic thought. Dense with intertextual references ranging from classical antiquity to contemporary continental philosophy and steeped in diverse philosophical and linguistic traditions, Senghor's writings nonetheless remain resolutely African: They return us always to the

"source," insisting on the value and vitality of African languages, literatures, and worldviews. Senghor's work is that of a poet, linguist, philosopher, and politician who lived and theorized at the crossroads of multiple languages, cultures, and intellectual and spiritual traditions.

Senghor's biography reflects the pluralism, hybridity, and irreducible complexity that characterize his thought. Born in a small Sereer village on the Petite Côte of Senegal only a few hours south of Dakar,[1] Senghor spent his childhood in Djiloor before moving to Joal for his formal education and later to Ngazobil, where he attended a local seminary. Senghor's early years in Djiloor and Joal were clearly formative. It was here, in his father Diogoye Senghor's home, and under the tutelage of his uncle Waly, that he received the initial formation of a young Sereer and attended several poetic and historical performances. Later, these would play an important role in his political and intellectual career. In 1928, Senghor left the seminary to continue his studies in Paris at Lycée Louis-le-Grand and then at the Sorbonne. It was in Paris that Senghor met several other colonial students who would all become central figures in the Negritude movement and Black Internationalism more generally: namely, Aimé Césaire and Jeanne and Paulette Nardal, from Martinique, and Léon-Gontran Damas, from Guyana. In 1935, he would become the first African student to receive the French *agrégation*. Senghor subsequently taught French and African languages and civilization for several years in France before being drafted at the beginning of the Second World War. It was during this period, including his time as a prisoner of war in a Nazi internment camp along with other *tirailleurs* (African riflemen), that he wrote some of his most important poems, which would be published shortly after the war ended. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Senghor served in various roles in the French government, notably as secretary of state, minister counselor (*ministre conseiller*), and member of the Assemblée nationale, advocating successfully for the extension of French citizenship to all French territories. When he became the first president of the newly independent Republic of Senegal in 1960, Senghor embarked on a twenty-year tenure marked by significant challenges. His presidency witnessed intense dissent, at least one assassination attempt, and censorship of the local press. However, it was also characterized by the establishment of a multiparty democratic system—an approach that contrasted sharply with the many other African leaders of the time who declared themselves de facto lifetime presidents. Today, while Senghor's poetry remains widely celebrated and his contributions to the Negritude movement generally acknowledged, his political legacy in Senegal is complex, and his prose works are largely overlooked.

Although widely recognized as central to the history of African thought, Senghor remains a polarizing figure. He is viewed variously as a colonial apologist, an antiracist racist, a repressive head of state, a Pan-African visionary, and a thinker who prioritized art, language, and culture in ways that—some argue—failed to address the social, economic, and political challenges of national independence and those that emerged in its wake. The reality is that Senghor does not fit neatly into the expectations of what an anti-, post-, or decolonial writer and thinker should be. He does not readily align with the categories of the militant, the revolutionary, or the radical. In many ways, Senghor refused to embody any single identity, choosing throughout his lifetime to fully embrace his multifaceted and multihyphenate self. This was a lonely and challenging path to tread in a (post)colonial world that Frantz Fanon presented as thoroughly Manichaean[2]—a Manichaeism that has led to radical positions on both sides of the (post)colonial divide, often resulting in absolutist positions for all parties.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Senghor is frequently decried for his ambiguous position vis-à-vis France's neocolonial policies in West Africa, for envisioning models of decolonization and national independence that were not predicated exclusively on state sovereignty, or for insisting on the compatibility of his philosophical understanding of Negritude, and its corollary the theory of *métissage*, with European modernity. As Paul Gilroy aptly observes in the first pages of *The Black Atlantic*, there remains little place within current discursive formations for such strategic, theoretical, or existential "in-betweenness," little room for "striving to be both European and black": "Where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination."[3] For this reason, Senghor's thought, and by extension Negritude more generally, has been mired in debate, controversy, and, perhaps above all, misinterpretations, especially among Anglophone intellectuals, since its emergence in the 1930s, despite the consensus that Negritude is one of the foundations of African studies.[4]

A Double Marginalization

Today, Negritude appears to have lost the debate. On the one hand, the new millennium and, in particular, the year 2006 or L'Année Senghor (The Year of Senghor), as it was dubbed by the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, marking the centenary of his birth, brought about a reappraisal

and celebration of Senghor's legacy, a brief period of what David Murphy has called "Senghormania."[5] An even more recent resurgence of interest in Senghor and Negritude has seen more than a dozen new book-length studies on the topics published in the past decade alone[6]—including much needed work on Senghor's own practice as an occasional translator, especially of American and British poets (such as Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Dylan Thomas).[7] On the other hand, in 2026—the 120th anniversary of his birth and the commemoration of twenty-five years after his death—Senghor's vast body of prose works remains largely inaccessible and greatly underread. His *Liberté* volumes, foundational texts in African studies and cognate disciplines, are out of print in French and difficult to access. Except for Mercer Cook's translation of a few of Senghor's speeches, collected in *On African Socialism* (1964),[8] Yohann C. Ripert's very recent *Senghor: Writings on Politics* (2025),[9] and a handful of well-known essays on Negritude, his prose has never been translated into English. Until now, Senghor's writings on African art, aesthetics, philosophy, and literature have not been collected into a single volume in either English or French.

The marginalization of Senghor's prose is particularly troubling given his role not only as one of the principal theoreticians of Negritude but also as one of the African scholars who wrote most extensively and published most widely on African languages, literature, art, philosophy, and history throughout the twentieth century. This negligence prompts a vital question: How has one of the key architects of a cultural movement and philosophical discourse so central to African studies become so overlooked today? Consider the following case in point. During a public lecture at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, one of the editors of this volume highlighted this issue by asking more than a hundred faculty members and students if they had read all five volumes of the *Liberté* series. Only a handful had done so, while most acknowledged being familiar only with Senghor's poetry. This unevenness in terms of access and engagement (familiarity with Senghor's poetry but only passing knowledge of his prose works) extends beyond students to established African and Africanist scholars who, despite critiquing Senghor, often base their assessments on limited readings of his work. Senghor is thus frequently reduced to widely circulated but decontextualized soundbites—"La colonisation est un mal nécessaire" (Colonization is a necessary evil) and "L'émotion est nègre, comme la raison héllène" (Emotion is negro, as reason Hellenic), for instance—that confirm oft-repeated characterizations about Senghor's Francophilia and colonialist apologism, but that ultimately obscure the depth, nuance, and sheer scope of his intellectual contributions.

One explanation for Senghor's marginalization stems from his dual identity as both a towering intellectual and a dominant political figure in Senegalese politics from the 1940s to the 1980s. His writings were frequently dismissed on an ad hominem basis, overshadowed by his role as a statesman. Compounding this treatment is the fact that the first generation of Senegalese university professors emerged from the cohort of students who experienced violent repression under Senghor's administration during the 1968 protests.[10] As a result, his intellectual contributions were often interpreted through the lens of his political actions.

A second reason for Senghor's marginalization lies in the fact that, as opposed to unequivocally radical figures such as Cheikh Anta Diop, Kwame Nkrumah, Marcus Garvey, Frantz Fanon, and Amilcar Cabral, who are particularly well received by the contemporary Pan-Africanist tradition, Senghor's intellectual and political legacies are characterized by nuance and an orientation toward conciliation and *métissage*. Above all, his philosophy of Negritude foregrounds a strong, Africa-centered search for meaning, an acknowledgment of the importance of experiences—including colonial ones that have undoubtedly transformed Africa in irreversible ways—and a firm belief that the very nature of life is movement, with every movement leading to exchanges. As he declares in his essay "Negritude and Mediterranean Civilization," "Since the upper Paleolithic period, and this is one of the characteristics of *Homo sapiens*, when two people meet, they often fight, but *they always mix*."[11] Far from rejecting the foundations of Euro-modernity, Senghor's vision sought to integrate African cultural and philosophical systems into a broader shared human framework where they would exist and contribute on the same footing as others.

Although Senghor's understanding of Negritude has often been presented as an essentialism veering toward an antiracist racism, his desire for syncretism, his refusal of binaries, and his attention to difference are precisely why he never ceases affirming the values of universalism and the promise of (future) mutual intelligibility. This seemingly paradoxical stance is in line with his conception of the universal as fundamentally plural. There is a deep irony in the general disregard for Senghor's work in contemporary scholarship on postcolonialism and decoloniality, given that the very forms of cultural hybridity and difference explored by Senghor have since become major features in postcolonial theory, even though these discourses rarely invoke, and even disavow, his work. As Robert Young puts it, "It is curious that while (crudely speaking) endorsing Fanon and dismissing Léopold Senghor, postcolonial theory itself in many ways comes closer to the latter's exploration of interrelated forms of

cultural difference than the Manichaean world of Fanon."[12] For a generation of scholars and activists committed to radical opposition to Europe and to the pervasive structures of coloniality, Senghor's intermediary position—seeking a balance between African traditions and the ideals of Euro-modernity—has often been construed as obsequiousness to France. The new Pan-African and decolonial tradition, which calls for a radical rupture and complete epistemic "de-linking," has often dismissed Senghor's work, presented it as fundamentally paradoxical, or simply ignored it. This is symptomatic of a generation of "decolonising" scholarship which, as Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò suggests, tends to "neglect a significant class of African thinkers" in the name of a vaguely defined "Africa" that leaves little room for "any nuance or differentiation in the discussion of specific authors, works or even regions."[13] Senghor, for Táíwò, is one such unduly neglected thinker. As he puts it, "Our decolonisers are always talking about Senghor's terrible Francophilia. But when one reads deep studies of Senghor, *the complexity of his thinking* comes out clearly."[14]

Today, the opportunity has emerged to assess Senghor's work without the weight of historical animosity, now that many of the seasoned Africanists were either not yet born or were particularly young when Senghor stepped down almost half a century ago. This makes a renewed and more sustained engagement with Senghor's oeuvre not only possible but essential.

(Re)Reading Senghor

A now robust body of scholarship by French-speaking scholars illustrates the transformative potential that a deep engagement with the primary literature on Senghor's work can offer. We mention only a few notable recent examples here. Souleymane Bachir Diagne's *African Art as Philosophy* (2011), Gary Wilder's *Freedom Time* (2015), and Cheikh Thiam's *Return to the Kingdom of Childhood: Re-Envisioning the Philosophical Relevance of Negritude* (2014) and *Negritude, Modernity, and the Idea of Africa* (2023) all demonstrate the rich insights that access to Senghor's entire oeuvre can provide.[15] These studies offer close readings of Senghor's body of prose works as collected in the *Liberté* volumes—texts that remain largely inaccessible to non-French speakers. Such engagement allows for nuanced perspectives on Senghor's thinking on Black aesthetics and African philosophy, and especially Negritude, which emerges as a complex philosophical, political, and aesthetic theoretical framework that remains deeply embedded in and marked by the historical contexts out of which it developed even while it is able to engage contemporary theoretical discourses and speak directly to present social and political issues.

In *African Art as Philosophy*, for example, Diagne presents Negritude as a philosophy of African art developed in conversation with towering figures such as Henri Bergson, Teilhard de Chardin, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Leo Frobenius, and Pablo Picasso. By reading Senghor's scholarship as a serious philosophy that can stand on its own, Diagne challenges simplistic interpretations of Senghor's texts and demonstrates the value of engaging deeply and carefully with them. Focusing on the political writings of Aimé Césaire and Senghor, Wilder's *Freedom Time* foregrounds how these two thinkers and so-called colonial *évolués* responded to historical contingencies to chart paths forward for Martinique, Senegal, and the world out of the wreckage of colonization. In so doing, Wilder suggests, Negritude offers a means to rethink or "unthink" both France and the notion of the Republic. Finally, in *Return to the Kingdom of Childhood* and *Negritude, Modernity, and the Idea of Africa*, Thiam draws on the intellectual traditions of both African studies and Black studies to offer Africa-centered readings of Negritude, presenting Senghor as a fundamentally transdisciplinary thinker whose prose traverses the boundaries of philosophy, literature, political science, and anthropology, while drawing substantially on Sereer and Dogon world systems and ontologies.

Nuanced readings of Senghor depend on access to his work in the original French and a willingness to work across languages and all too often siloed disciplines. And yet, over six decades after decolonization in Africa, linguistic divisions across the continent and within the academy remain deeply entrenched. They are particularly evident in the sphere of knowledge production, where former colonial languages continue to dominate the processes of creating, acquiring, and disseminating knowledge in African and Euro-American academies. African studies, a discipline now dominated by Anglophone scholars primarily based in the United States and the United Kingdom, has perpetuated this divide. As a result, scholarship produced in French, Spanish, Portuguese, and even African languages is often marginalized or overlooked. A few Francophone scholars—almost invariably male—such as Cheikh Anta Diop, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and more recently, V. Y. Mudimbe and Achille Mbembe, stand out as exceptions to this trend, gaining significant traction in African studies and in English translation. By comparison, the case of Senghor is particularly striking. While Senghor's work is frequently acknowledged as central, if not foundational, to the discipline, his contributions remain misunderstood because of the limited accessibility of his writings to Anglophone scholars. This issue diminishes the ability of the discipline to fully examine and appreciate the theoretical and historical-cultural underpinnings of Negritude as articulated by its most important thinker.

It is in this context that we are reminded of a poignant assertion made by Abiola Irele, the Nigerian scholar largely responsible for introducing and popularizing Negritude writings in English, half a century ago regarding the then quite recent English translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's canonical essay "Orphée noir" (Black Orpheus), which first appeared as a preface to Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Anthology of new negro and malagasy poetry in French) (1948). Irele wrote:

> While the concept of negritude has met with considerable success in French intellectual circles, though not without inspiring some controversy among certain French African elements, it has met with either suspicion or open hostility (and even ridicule) among English-speaking Africans. Much of this attitude arises, I believe, from grave misconceptions about the *real* aims of the movement in general, and in some cases, from prejudice and complete lack of knowledge. It is in this respect that the recent separate publication of Sartre's preface in an English translation comes as a welcome move.[16]

Just like Irele, we hope that this English translation of Senghor comes as "a welcome move" and that it will also save Senghor's scholarship from "grave misconceptions" about its real meanings and orientations and from "prejudice and complete lack of knowledge." Yet the goal of the present volume is not to defend Senghor but rather to make room, in English, for the complexity of his thought. It is indeed legitimate to ask if Senghor's universalist framework is sound. It is necessary to question whether Senghor's work takes seriously the realities of power. There is also no denying that he too frequently repeated some of the most despicable racist claims of the nineteenth century. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí had a point when she suggested:

> Senghorian negritude [. . .] is actually a result of Senghor's acceptance of European categories of essence, race, and reason and the linkages among the three. Senghor asserts that since Africans are a race like Europeans, they must have their own brand of essence. [. . .] Stanislaus [*sic*] Adotevi is correct when he writes that "negritude is the last-born child of an ideology of domination."[17]

However, to critique Senghor, we must do more than simply dismiss a large and complex body of work as that of a Francophile entrenched in coloniality: We must try to read him, closely, on his own terms and in his own time. We are reminded here of the words of Henry Louis Gates Jr. on what it means to historicize and critically reengage with a writer (Fanon) whose legacy has been overdetermined by the contexts of his reception:

> It means *reading* him, with an acknowledgment of his own historical particularity, as an actor whose own search for self-transcendence scarcely excepts him from the heterogenous and conflictual structures that we have taken to be characteristic of colonial discourse. It means not to elevate him above his localities of discourse [. . .] nor simply to cast him into battle, but to recognize him as a battlefield in himself."[18]

What Gates wrote in reference to Frantz Fanon might equally apply to Senghor. Even beyond the contentious debates around Negritude, a new translation of Senghor's work in English may reveal Senghor's intellectual production to be a generative yet largely untested battleground for ongoing conversations in African studies and related fields.

Translating Senghor's work into English is particularly urgent, as English is now the predominant language of African studies, though we might hope for a future translation of Senghor in Wolof or Sereer. Ensuring broad access to his texts is the necessary foundation for reinscribing Senghor and reestablishing his rightful place in contemporary discourses on African philosophy, Black aesthetics, political theory, and intellectual history. The very fact of translating Senghor opens up the possibility of revisiting other moments in African intellectual history. Moreover, making Senghor's works available in English provides a timely opportunity to build lateral conversations between traditionally siloed disciplines—such as literature, linguistics, anthropology, art history, history, and philosophy—all of which may contribute to the intellectual repositioning of Senghor's oeuvre within the larger discipline of African studies. This translation arrives at a decisive moment, marked both by a rehabilitation of Negritude and a call for "decolonizing" the field of African studies. In this volume, we aim to offer a space that makes it possible to engage with the complexity and nuances that a close reading of Senghor's prose works can bring—a close reading possible only if Senghor's work is available in English.

Translating Senghor in English also shows the extent to which his prose, in the original French, is itself an exercise of translation. Senghor transcribes and translates Wolof, Sereer, Pulaar, and other African languages into French but also constantly mimics syntactic and rhetorical features of these languages in his prose. In this sense, our translation also entailed a constant reflection on and experience of linguistic pluralism and how it is brought to bear on knowledge production in Africa. The careful and critical engagement with Senghor's plurilingualism that this volume offers, both in the text and in the notes, allows us to rethink the horizon of African studies outside

the language divides inherited from colonization. It is perhaps not simply in rereading Senghor but in *translating* him that we find "the real answer to the questions of identitarian and exclusive nationalisms, grafted on the *génie des langues*."[19]

Put another way, the texts in the *Liberté* volumes all perform translation or (in Wolof) *tekki* as a process of cultural "unraveling."[20] By underscoring Senghor's irrigation of his texts with African languages such as Wolof, Sereer, and Pulaar, we highlight the potential of an Afrophone philosophical base, inclusive of autochthonous African languages and former colonial ones. In this vein, translating Senghor is arguably an exercise in revealing his prose to be an intercultural and intralingual contact zone predicated on a "special kinship" between languages, in Walter Benjamin's sense. "This special kinship," Benjamin wrote, "holds because languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express."[21]

Although we acknowledge the hegemonic place that English occupies in African studies today, our translation illustrates the limits of a monolingual engagement with African experiences. By revealing the complex nature of Senghor's multilingual understanding of culture, our volume gestures also toward a conception of the practice of translation as an alternative to the broadscale rejection of "Western" languages from African cultural production. As Táíwò suggests, "While people are happy to line up behind Ngũgĩ [wa Thiong'o]'s declamations, hardly anyone bothers to consider alternative takes on the question of language from other African thinkers."[22] By no means do we diminish calls to write and publish in autochthonous African languages, such as those issued by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Rather, we invite African scholars to take seriously the diglossic nature of imperial languages and rethink plurilingualism as an antidote to both Western hegemony and extremist nativism in African studies. We posit translation as a possible way forward. As Ngũgĩ himself has suggested, "the fear of exacerbating divisions along language lines is obviously genuine—but the solution is not to continue burying languages and the means of African memory under a Europhonic paradise. On the contrary [. . .] *the solution lies in translation*."[23]

In what follows, we reflect on the process of translating Senghor into English. First, we provide some background on the *Liberté* series from which the essays collected in this volume are drawn. We then explore the notion of freedom (*liberté*) in Senghor's thought before discussing some of the challenges in translating his texts, including the key word *nègre*. Finally, we explain the rationale for the selection and organization of essays.

On the *Liberté* Volumes and "Freedom"

Shortly after national independence (1960) and in the wake of his first reelection (1963), Senghor began editing and compiling his prose works—some previously published, others unpublished—into a series of five volumes under the title *Liberté* (Freedom), published by Le Seuil. Along with *Nation et voie africaine du socialisme*, published in 1961 by Présence Africaine, the *Liberté* volumes are the only collections dedicated exclusively to Senghor's vast and varied philosophical, aesthetic, and political writings. They represent a concerted effort (and remarkable foresight) on the part of Senghor to conceive of his extensive nonliterary production as a cohesive oeuvre.

Already, in 1964, when the first *Liberté* volume was published, Senghor had amassed almost three decades' worth of essays, articles, and speeches. At this juncture, he was prepared not only to look back on his intellectual output, curate it, and define its throughlines, but also to look forward to a series of volumes to come, each of which would treat the "ideas" or "obsessions" around which the entirety of his production revolves and which would lend the *Liberté* volumes their respective individual titles: Negritude, humanism, nation, socialism, the "dialogue of cultures," and the "civilization of the universal."[24] In the preface to the first *Liberté* volume, *Negritude and Humanism*, Senghor characterizes the texts grouped together in the *Liberté* series as constituting his "principle prose works" across various genres: "essays, prefaces, articles, conference papers, speeches, allocutions." He notes that compared to the manuscripts, the texts collected in *Liberté* present variants, corrections, and changes, but most often deletions and the removal of unnecessary citations (though what we have found, in translating and editing Senghor, is that he frequently seems to have removed the *sources* cited).[25] Senghor's reflection on the series title (*Liberté*) is revealing:

> The writings collected here have as a general theme the *conquest* of Freedom, as the recovery and affirmation, defense and illustration, of the collective personality of Black peoples: of *Negritude*. National *Independence* can have no other meaning. As if by accident, new neighborhoods in Dakar bear the same name: "Liberté I," "Liberté II," "Liberté III." . . . But this is no accident in the year 1963.[26]

The choice of *freedom* not merely for title but as theme and rubric for the collected prose works is significant. On the one hand, it reflects and reasserts the role of Negritude itself as a *philosophy of freedom* in the wake of formal decolonization, positioning Senghor and the other Negritude thinkers as major

theorists and architects of Black/African freedom and cultural liberation, as well as national independence—even if their preindependence political action sought, at times, forms of self-determination *without* or beyond state sovereignty.[27] The allusion to the Liberté neighborhoods in the Grand Dakar area, which he suggests had sprung up after independence but which really had been built up by SICAP (Société Immobilière du Cap Vert) beginning in the 1950s, seems a further attempt by Senghor to align his philosophical and political writings with a vision for a new, modern Senegal. On the other hand, there are evident paradoxes involved in Senghor's self-styling as an architect of freedom. Indeed, in 1964, the very year that the first *Liberté* volume was published, nearly thirty undercover Senegalese members of the Marxist-Leninist African Independence Party assembled in Cuba so as to prepare a "guerrilla war" against Senghor's regime, which they saw as neocolonial and oppressive.[28] Before and after independence, Senghor deployed questionable, often brutal tactics (including intimidation, imprisonment, torture, and assassination) to maintain power, forcefully quelling the anti-imperialist and anticapitalist student and union protests at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in 1968, imprisoning political rivals such as Mamadou Dia, banning media deemed critical to his regime (including, famously, Ousmane Sembène's 1977 film, *Ceddo*), and even torturing and killing political dissidents and activists, the case of Omar Blondin Diop (1946–73) being especially well known.

This political legacy would seem impossible to square with any narrow understanding of the term "freedom." And yet it is undeniable that Negritude has played a central role in articulations and understandings of Black liberation. While Senghor the statesman made oppressive and at times abhorrent decisions that actively contributed to the *unfreedom* of Senegalese citizens, Senghor the philosopher-poet never stopped theorizing Negritude as a privileged site of what Nathalie Etoké calls "Black existential freedom." In this light, Blackness itself "must be theorized as a never-ending commitment to individual and collective freedom" and, further, "the meanings of Blackness expand our understanding of freedom and what it means to be human in a dehumanizing white supremacist world."[29] Senghor's writings reflect and confirm this conception of Blackness. Across the *Liberté* volumes, Blackness is the privileged site for Senghor's reflections not only on freedom but also on rhythm, poetry, beauty, language, art, and philosophy. Senghor theorizes Negritude as a set of fundamental values that enables all people of African descent to subvert the colonial dialectic by accepting and affirming their experiences of Blackness and Africanness. Despite the broad scope and incredible variety of Senghor's intellectual and literary production, all his work nonetheless shares a primary

concern: to plumb the depths and elucidate the nature of the Black soul (*l'âme nègre*) while articulating a theory of Black liberation and a global—indeed planetary—vision of a symbiosis of human cultures. The latter prepares what he calls the "civilization of the universal," a concept that, across his oeuvre, remains a political horizon for Africa and for the world.

Translating Blackness: *Nègre*, *Noir*, Black, Negro(-)

"Blackness" in Senghor is, to borrow one definition of the "untranslatable," not a word that *cannot* be translated but "a word that one never stops (not) translating."[30] On the level of the word, the single most significant challenge in rendering Senghor's works in English today is the term *nègre*.[31] Readers familiar with the Francophone context and the histories of French slavery and colonialism will readily recognize the difficulties posed by translating into English the constellation of terms in French related to Blackness and Black or African identity, especially the notoriously fraught word *nègre*. From Jean-Paul Sartre's assertion, in "Black Orpheus," that the French language was "unsuitable" (*impropre*) for the articulation of Black subjectivities, to Franco-Cameroonian writer Léonora Miano's more recent suggestion, in *Afropea* (2020), that "Blackness" remains unthinkable and, ultimately, unsayable in French,[32] Blackness persists in French not only as an obstacle in and to translation but also as a generative site for thinking through questions of postcolonial untranslatability. The challenges of translating "Blackness" have given rise to a now robust body of scholarship and reflection.[33] However, we find it noteworthy that, with few exceptions (e.g., Lamine Senghor, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Achille Mbembe), such reflections are marked by a striking absence of Black African scholars' perspectives on these words. Critical engagement with the term *nègre* has overwhelmingly focused on its circulation in the Caribbean, the "Atlantic world," and the African diaspora, while its particular usages by writers in West Africa and on the rest of the continent remain underexamined.

For Anglophone readers unfamiliar with such debates, the stakes of translating terms such as *nègre, noir*, and the prefix *négro-*, all of which occur frequently in Senghor's texts, may be less clear.[34] Above all, these terms testify to the overdetermined lexical history of writing Blackness in French, a history whose contours have been shaped by the enduring legacies of colonialism and neocolonialism as well as Black resistance, internationalism, and activism. Both *nègre* and *noir* have been translated variously into English as "Black" and "Negro," or simply left untranslated; *nègre* has also, occasionally, been translated using the N-word in English (though the latter is closer to *sale nègre*).

English translations of *nègre* have had to grapple with the term's history of use not only as a racial epithet but also as a synonym for "slave" in colonial discourse, especially in French Caribbean texts.[35] Indeed, Doyle Calhoun notes, "by the nineteenth century—and perhaps even earlier—the idea of Blackness was thoroughly conflated with that of slavery; in French, the word *nègre* was the lexical sign of this conflation."[36] As Brent Hayes Edwards writes, the association, in fact, synonymity, between the words *nègre* and *esclave* ("slave") was "cemented in early dictionaries [. . .] in a phrasing copied in almost all the dictionaries of the next two hundred years."[37]

Importantly, Edwards points out the "heterological slippage" between *nègre* and *noir*, noting that these words circulated differently in different contexts structured by American racism and European colonialism—the Americas, Africa, and Europe.[38] These terms, moreover, were gradually rehabilitated by Black Caribbean, African, and French writers and activists, even before the Negritude writers, beginning in the 1920s. An early example of this rehabilitation is Lamine Senghor's 1927 essay "Le 'Mot' Nègre." In this essay, published in the radical periodical *La voix des Nègres*, Lamine Senghor draws a clear distinction between *nègre* and *noir*, identifying the latter, not the former, as a colonial imposition and part of a "divisive maneuver" intended to drive a wedge between Black subjects:

> They are extracting two new words out of the word *nègre*, in order to divide the race into three different categories, namely: "*hommes de couleur*," "*noirs*"—simply—and *Nègres*. The former are made to believe that they are "*hommes de couleur*" and neither *noirs* nor *nègres* (first category); the others are made to believe that they are "*noirs*" simply and not *nègres* (second category). As for the "leftovers" [Quant aux "restes"], they are *nègres* (third category).[39]

Maintaining a distinction between *noir* and *nègre*, Lamine Senghor went on to reclaim *nègre* as both honorific and rallying cry, in a move Christopher L. Miller characterizes as a "radical" and "space-clearing" rerouting (or uprooting) of etymology.[40] Senghor explained:

> We do not think that the word "*noir*" can serve to designate all the *nègres* in the world, given that all African *nègres* recognize with us that there exist, in various points of the continent, *nègres* as white as some European whites, *nègres* who have nothing *nègre* aside from their features and hair. We refuse to admit that only those who live in the depths of the Senegalese jungle, those who are exploited in the cotton fields of the

> Niger valley, the sugarcane cutters in the plantation fields of Martinique and Guadeloupe, are *nègres*. [. . .] We do ourselves honor and glory by calling ourselves *Nègres*, with a capital *N*.[41]

There is much that could be said about these passages. In many ways, Lamine Senghor's radical expansion of the term *nègre* anticipates Léopold Senghor's own. But we focus on the fact that translating the words *nègre* and *noir* both as "Black" would not only produce a tautology in this text but also flatten a distinction central to Lamine Senghor's efforts to push the term *nègre* beyond chromatism, beyond "Black" as colonial phenotype.

This radical expansion of *nègre* is a major feature of Senghor's thought and of the Negritude movement more broadly. For Senghor, *nègre* designated less a racial or phenotypical concept based on geographical origins and biological essences than a definition of the human conceptualized through historical experience and psychology. Negritude was not a skin color but "a culture."[42] It is perhaps better translated as "Negrohood" than "Blackness." This becomes clear in Senghor's essay "Concerning Negritude" ("Problématique de la Négritude"). For Senghor, Negritude was expansive, capacious, and spiritual, whereas Blackness (*noirceur*) was concrete. Had this not been the case, Senghor writes, the Negritude writers would have chosen another word, such as *nigrité* or *nigritude*:

> It is true, people have not failed to reproach Césaire for choosing the word *negritude* over *negroness* [*négrité*]. Once again, the two words have the same meaning, formed as they are with suffixes having the same meaning; it is only that the suffix *-itude* is more learned. But, according to the Strasbourg grammarians, it serves to form less abstract words, designating a state more often than a quality. Which has allowed me, elsewhere, to use the word *Arabness* [*arabité*] in some cases, and *Berberitude* [*berbéritude*] in others. We also find the word *nigritudo* in Latin, in Pliny. It has a concrete meaning and signifies: "the fact of being black, the color black, blackness [*la noirceur*]." And the word *nigritude* exists in English with the same meaning—if we are to believe the *Harrap's* French-English dictionary. As we will see, however, in various places, the meaning has remained quite concrete. The originality of the French word is to have moved from the concrete to the abstract: from the material to the spiritual.[43]

In this vein, at the beginning of his essay "What the Black Man Offers" ("Ce que l'homme noir apporte"), Senghor extends his reflection on the use of *nègre*

versus *noir*. Regarding the notoriously fraught term *nègre*, he writes, "I adopt the word following others: It is convenient. Are there Negroes [*Nègres*], pure Negroes [*des Nègres purs*], Black Negroes [*Nègres noirs*]?"[44]

Once again, we are confronted with the nonsynonymity of the terms *noir* and *nègre* and the risk of producing a tautology in English translation if we translate both as "Black" or both as "Negro," given that, the use of the term *noir* in French during the first decades of the twentieth century was in many ways closer to the English "Negro" than to contemporary uses of the word "Black." In the 1990s, the English word "black" effectively replaced the term *noir·e* in France, though, as Matthew B. Smith points out in the preface to his translation of Aimé Césaire's *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai* (translated as *Resolutely Black*), "*Noir* has since reemerged as the term most frequently used to speak of black experience in France."[45]

If *nègre* and *noir* already pose problems in the original French, the terms used to translate these words into English—"Black," "Negro"—are also far from neutral. This is especially the case in our current historical moment, in the wake of intense anti-Black violence in the United States and the Francosphere and the rise of global Black Lives Matter movements in all corners of the globe. Such words (as well as their translation or resignification) are ultimately more than words: They are "*framing* gestures" that demarcate a particular semantic, and thus ideological, field related to Blackness. They are sites where "racial meanings are negotiated."[46] For these reasons, as Edwards puts it, "the best 'translation' of *nègre* . . . might not be a literal translation at all, but a linguistic nuance, an effect achieved in *a particular nongeneralizable discursive instance*."[47]

The question remains, then, how to translate *noir* and *nègre* as they appear in Senghor's texts. Edwards's caution against generalization is well taken. Senghor's *nègre* is not Césaire's, is not Fanon's, and so on; nor, in any given "discursive instance," should it be assumed that the best or only way of rendering *nègre* in English is "Negro" and *noir* as "Black," or vice versa. However, we have opted here for what some might consider a more or less "literal" translation: We translate *nègre* as "Negro" and *noir* as "Black." We have done this for two main reasons. First, as we write in our translators' note, across the *Liberté* volumes, Senghor deploys the terms *Nègre* or *nègre* and *Noir·e* or *noir·e* as well as the prefixes *Négro-* or *négro-* (e.g., *négro-africain·e*, *négro-américain·e*, *négro-espagnol·e*) and *Afro-* or *afro-* (e.g., *afro-américain·e*, *afro-latin·e*) consistently and with precision (even if his use of capitalization occasionally varies). Given this distribution, we have, in the process of reading and translating Senghor, reached the consensus that translating *nègre* and *noir* by the same word in

English ("Black") would flatten important nuances legible in the original French, both within and across texts, in ways that would distort or attenuate Senghor's arguments—namely, his theorization of Blackness. At the same time, the sheer frequency with which the term *nègre* is used, both as an adjective and as a noun, made leaving the word untranslated or consistently glossing it in square brackets somewhat unwieldly; "to be *nègre*" seems viable in English, but "*nègre* art" or "*nègre* rhythm" less so. Second, we take seriously Sartre's suggestion, in "Black Orpheus," that one of the foundations of Negritude is the very possibility of using the term *nègre*.[48]

For Senghor, to live the values of Negritude was also to use its key term, fraught and difficult as it may have been. This is perhaps why, like Aimé Césaire, who used the term *nègre* instead of *noir* well into the 2000s, Senghor retained the word *nègre* even when other, less embattled options became available (e.g., *noir·e*, *personne de couleur*, *black*). The adherence to the term *nègre*, in other words, is not just a political stand for these thinkers but a way of living out the values of Negritude. Césaire expressed this adherence to the term *as a philosophical way of being* in a late interview with Françoise Vergès, where he stated the original commitments of the Négritude writers: "Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai" (Negro I am, negro I shall remain).[49] It is understandable that the theoreticians of Negritude would want to retain this key term—the rehabilitation of which was so hard won and truly marked an "event" in the French language—even when the tides of culture and common usage seemed to have irreversibly shifted. In this, we should also honor Senghor's (and Césaire's) long-standing commitment to the term as telegraphing their commitment to being not simply "resolutely Black" but resolutely *nègre*.

Organization and Structure

As with any selection of texts, it could be said of the present volume that this or that important text has been left out. Our choice to focus on three of the five *Liberté* volumes for the present collection of essays is due to their thematic coherence. As Jane Hiddleston points out, "Volumes one, three and five successively track the evolution of negritude from the 1930s to the 1970s, whilst volumes two and four delineate [Senghor's] more practical reflections on African socialism."[50] In our choice of texts, we have attempted to strike a balance between a thematic focus on Negritude, aesthetics, and philosophy, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a certain representativeness, that is, a sense of Senghor's prose oeuvre across the three volumes, given that the writings collected therein span almost five decades. There is also a pedagogical aspect to

this selection: Put simply, these are works that we have taught in French and hope to be able to teach in English. In addition to making Senghor's work available to the greater Anglophone community, we have attempted to provide in a single volume a representative selection of his most significant philosophical and aesthetic writings. By doing so, we hope to facilitate the synthetic work necessary for a deeper understanding of this complex thinker, even for French-speaking scholars who may already have access to his extensive body of work. Senghor's oeuvre is vast, encompassing some 2,300 pages of prose across the five volumes. Presenting a curated selection of these texts can significantly ease the burden on scholars, who would otherwise expend considerable resources to engage more fully with his ideas.

We have sought to feature a set of texts in which Senghor articulates his understanding of Negritude, with a notable focus on his polemical defense of Negritude against critics who dismissed it as obsolete and passé. With these texts, we aim to enable scholars and students to revisit the core ideas of Negritude by situating it within a broader Africa-centered intellectual tradition, rather than confining it to the narrow framework of anticolonial resistance and the interwar period. It is important to note that Negritude has been predominantly understood and taught through the lens of Jean-Paul Sartre's and Abiola Irele's writings. Sartre's influential "Black Orpheus," often cited as the text that introduced Negritude to the world, and Irele's pivotal role in bringing Negritude to Anglophone audiences, framed the movement as a revolutionary response by Black students in 1930s Paris grappling with pervasive racism and France's colonial assimilationist policies. Within this framework, Negritude is interpreted as either a revolutionary cultural movement or the dual-natured counterpart to Pan-Africanism. As Irele put it, "Negritude is a version, a distinctive current, of the same cultural nationalism expressed in different ways among black people and at various times in their reaction against white domination."[51] Its historic, geographic, and conceptual scope has thus been somewhat limited to what one editor calls the "the narrow historical circumstances that enframed its emergence":[52] to the metropole, during the interwar period, as a response to colonial conditions and, specifically, France's assimilationist policies. However, this way of framing Negritude, while influential, has constrained the movement to a reaction disconnected from its deeper philosophical and cultural dimensions. Moreover, it does not reflect the timeline of Senghorian Negritude, which extends well into the last decades of the twentieth century and becomes a distinctly *African* humanism. Senghor himself explicitly rejected this reductionist view of Negritude, which he consistently framed as more than an anti-

colonial movement, grounding it instead in a longer intellectual and cultural history of Africa.

By including several texts that highlight Senghor's rejection of the traditional framing of Negritude, we highlight the complexity of Senghor's scholarship and move the critique of Negritude beyond the dichotomies through which it is often characterized. Our hope is that these texts encourage scholars and students alike to reexamine Negritude not as a simple reactionary schema but as a complex philosophical, aesthetic, and political framework centering Black/African humanity and in conversation with modern Europe and the rest of the world. We highlight Senghor's multifaceted vision of Negritude as a movement, rooted in African and Afro-diasporic cultures, that transcends simplistic binaries and continues to hold enduring relevance for African studies and beyond. This perspective offers a deeper and more nuanced understanding of its philosophical foundations.

The texts published in the *Liberté* volumes were originally arranged chronologically, which has certain advantages. This organization "reveal[s] both the significance of their timing, and the overlapping and evolving formation of [Senghor's] thought."[53] It also has the potential to situate Senghor's work in the context of its political and intellectual production, allowing us to better understand Negritude as a pragmatic philosophical engagement with clear political objectives that must be read in connection with the political atmosphere of the moment and the intellectual conversations of the time. The risk, however, is that a chronological structure presents Senghor's thought in terms of a linear evolution that might be divided into "early" and "late" works. The reality is that Senghor's thought is, in many ways, cyclical and recursive. Although he revisited and reformulated earlier concepts—and occasionally corrected or revised himself—he never fully abandoned them; his commitments and preoccupations remained consistent even as they took different guises and adapted to different discursive and political contexts. Moreover, Senghor frequently (and, by his own account, quasi-obsessively) revisited, reworked, and reprised earlier ideas and even entire passages from one text to another. This practice reflected in part the nature of certain texts (similar speeches were given on different occasions and in different venues and may have been developed later as articles or essays) and in part the fact that he was a busy head of state who drafted quickly, leading him to recycle parts of texts and, occasionally, to contradict himself. Senghor was also a strong polemist who saw himself as the defender of Negritude against the attacks of a young generation of African scholars who in 1969, at the conference of Algiers, declared it dead and buried.[54] We hope that

these aspects of his writing, too, emerge in the present volume. For as Senghor himself was wont to say, *reprisal is neither redundancy nor repetition*.

The texts that follow have been grouped thematically, rather than chronologically, into three sections. The first, "Negritude: A Humanism for the Twentieth (and Twenty-First) Century," presents Senghor's major texts on Negritude as a Black/African humanism and philosophy, thus offering an overview of his formulation and successive reformulations of the term and its stakes, from its emergence in the 1930s, to the period of vehement critique in the sixties and seventies, to Senghor's reflections on its enduring relevance at the close of twentieth century as he began to envision Negritude in connection to the "civilization of the universal." Part 2, "Negritude, Aesthetics, and Philosophy," brings together a series of texts that reflect on Black aesthetics in the visual and verbal arts in Africa, the Americas, and Europe—namely, poetry, painting, sculpture, and music. Across these texts, Senghor's understanding of Negritude as an aesthetic philosophy emerges clearly and is articulated alongside and through insightful reflections on African oral traditions as well as the artistic, literary, and musical contributions of Black Americans and the Harlem Renaissance, in addition to French poets such as Arthur Rimbaud. The final section, "Negritude, *Métissage*, and the Dialogue of Cultures," introduces Senghor's philosophical and political vision for the new century, in which Negritude was to play a major role: a "civilization of the universal" characterized by *métissage*, a form of cultural hybridity and mixing without dilution. From his earliest texts—for example, "The Problem of Culture in West Africa"—to his last, "The Dialogue of Cultures," Senghor's vision for a syncretic African polis enriched by contributions from different languages and cultures emerges as Negritude's as yet unfulfilled political horizon.

NOTES

Epigraph: Léopold Sédar Senghor, "La Négritude, comme culture des peuples noirs, ne saurait être dépassé," in *Liberté 5: Le dialogue des cultures* (Seuil, 1993), 108.

1. There is no consensus on the exact birthplace of Léopold Sédar Senghor. While his official birth certificate lists Joal, oral historians often argue that he was born in Djiloor, a small community approximately fifteen minutes by car from Joal, where his mother lived.

2. Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (La Découverte, 2002), esp. 44–45, 52–53.

3. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 1.

4. See Abiola Irele, "A Defence of Negritude," *Transition* 13 (1964): 9–11. Irele notes the particular "suspicion or open hostility (or even ridicule) among English-speaking Africans" regarding Negritude that results from "grave misconceptions about the *real*

aims of the movement in general, and in some cases, from prejudice and complete lack of knowledge" (3).

5. David Murphy, "Léopold Sédar Senghor: Race, Language, Empire," in *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World*, edited by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (Liverpool University Press, 2009), 157.

6. These include F. Bart Miller, *Rethinking Négritude Through Léon-Gontran Damas* (Rodopi, 2014); Cheikh Thiam, *Return to the Kingdom of Childhood: Re-Invisioning the Legacy and Philosophical Relevance of Negritude* (Ohio State University Press, 2014); the special issue titled "Negritude Reloaded," *African Philosophy*, no. 11 (2015); Reiland Rabaka, *The Negritude Movement: W. E. B. Du Bois, Léon Damas, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and the Evolution of an Insurgent Idea* (Lexington Books, 2015); Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Duke University Press, 2015); Carrie Noland, *Voices of Negritude in Modernist Print: Aesthetic Subjectivity, Diaspora, and the Lyric Regime* (Columbia University Press, 2015); Jean-Pierre Langellier, *Léopold Sédar Senghor* (Perrin, 2022); Sébastien Heiniger, *Décolonisation, fédéralisme et poésie chez Léopold Sédar Senghor* (Classiques Garnier, 2022); Mohamed Aziza et al., *L'Héritage de Senghor* (L'Harmattan, 2022); Cheikh Thiam, *Epistemologies from the Global South: Negritude, Modernity, and the Idea of Africa* (University of KwaZuu-Natal Press, 2023; Routledge, 2024); Mamadou Diouf, Sarah Frioux-Salgas, and Sarah Linger, eds., *Senghor et les arts: Réinventer l'universel* (Musée Quai Branly, 2023); Ela Bertho, *Léopold Sédar Senghor* (Puf, 2023); Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *African Art as Philosophy*: *Senghor, Bergson, and the Idea of Negritude*, trans. Chike Jeffers (Other Press, 2023); Yohann C. Ripert, *Senghor: Writings on Politics* (Duke University Press, 2025).

7. See *La Rose de la paix et autres poèmes*, trans. Léopold Sédar Senghor with John Amery, ed. John Furness (L'Harmattan, 2001). See also Patrick Hersant, "'Une traduction du dedans': Hopkins dans le fonds Senghor," *Continents manuscrits* 21 (2023), http://journals.openedition.org/coma/10524.

8. Léopold Sédar Senghor, *On African Socialism*, trans. Mercer Cook (Frederick A. Praeger, 1964). John Reed and Clive Wake published an English translation of some of Senghor's prose and poetry as early as 1965. Reed and Wake, trans., *Senghor: Prose and Poetry* (Heinemann, 1965).

9. Ripert, *Senghor*.

10. For an overview, see Abdoulaye Bathily, *Mai 1968 à Dakar ou la révolte universitaire et la démocratie: Le Sénégal cinquante ans après* (L'Harmattan, 2018).

11. Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Négritude et civilisation méditerranéennes [*sic*]," in *Liberté 5: Le dialogue des cultures* (Seuil, 1993), 86 (our emphasis).

12. Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Blackwell, 2002), 255.

13. Olúfémi O. Táíwò, *Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously* (Hurst, 2022), 63.

14. Táíwò, *Against Decolonisation*, 63 (our emphasis).

15. Diagne, *African Art as Philosophy*; Wilder, *Freedom Time*; Thiam, *Return to the Kingdom of Childhood*; Thiam, *Epistemologies from the Global South*.

16. Abiola Irele, "A Defence of Negritude: A Propos of *Black Orpheus* by Jean Paul Sartre," *Transition* 13, no. 50 (1975): 39.

17. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Woman: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 20.

18. Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Critical Fanonism," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 3 (1991): 470.

19. Barbara Cassin, "The Energy of Untranslatables: Translation as a Paradigm for the Human Sciences," *Paragraph* 38, no. 2 (2015): 154.

20. In *The Tongue-Tied Imagination*, Tobias Warner uses the Wolof verb *tekki* to describe translation as a process of unraveling or untying semiotic knots. In Senghor's world, these semiotic knots call for multilingual engagement with his text that frames translation as an act of "pulling a thread that may unsettle others." Warner, *The Tongue-Tied Imagination: Decolonizing Literary Modernity in Senegal* (Fordham University Press, 2019), 7.

21. Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, ed. Marcus Bullock and Micheal Jennings (Harvard University Press, 1996), 255.

22. Táíwò, *Against Decolonisation*, 79.

23. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (Basic Books, 2009), 95 (our emphasis).

24. Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Liberté 1: Négritude et humanisme* (Seuil, 1964), 7.

25. Senghor, *Liberté 1*, 7–8.

26. Senghor, *Liberté 1*, 7.

27. See Wilder, *Freedom Time*.

28. On this moment, see Fatoumata Seck, "The Cultural Underground of Decolonization," *Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 10, no. 3 (2023): 287–309.

29. Nathalie Etoké, *Black Existential Freedom* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2023), 3.

30. Barbara Cassin, "Traduire les intraduisibles, un état de lieu," *Cliniques méditerranéennes* 2, no. 90 (2014): 26.

31. On philosophical untranslatablity, see Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood, eds., *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (Princeton University Press, 2014). See also Michael Syrotinski, "Postcolonial Untranslatability: Reading Achille Mbembe with Barbara Cassin," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 55, no. 6 (2019): 850–62.

32. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée noir," in *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, ed. Léopold Sédar Senghor (Presses universitaires de France, 1948), xviii. Miano leaves the English word untranslated in the French original: "This *blackness* that the French language has not allowed itself to think" ("Cette blackness que la langue française ne s'est pas autorisée à penser"). Léonora Miano, *Afropea* (Grasset, 2020), 94.

33. For discussions of the term *nègre* and other terms related to Blackness in French, see Laurent Dubois's introduction to his translation of Achille Membe, *Critique de la raison nègre* (La Découverte, 2013); Laurent Dubois, translator's introduction to Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Duke University Press, 2017), ix–xv. See also Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Harvard University Press, 2003), 26–68; Nigel C. Gibson, "Relative Opacity: A New Translation of Fanon's Wretched of the Earth—Mission Betrayed or Fulfilled?," *Social Identities* 13, no. 1 (2007): 69–95, esp. 73; Grégory Pierrot, "Nègre (Noir, Black, Renoi, Négro)," *Small Axe* 26, no. 2 (2022): 100–107; and Doyle Calhoun,

"Fanon's Lexical Intervention: Writing Blackness in *Black Skin, White Masks*," *Paragraph* 43, no. 2 (2020): 159–78. See also Corine Tachtiris, "Introduction: The Unbearable Whiteness of Translation," in *Translation and Race*, ed. Corine Tachtiris (Routledge, 2024), 1–30.

34. See N. Gregson Davis's translation of Aimé Césaire's *Journal of a Homecoming / Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Duke University Press, 2017), esp. 97.

35. Richard Philcox characterizes *nègre* as "that word dreaded by all translators of French Caribbean texts." Philcox, "Retranslating Fanon, Retrieving a Lost Voice," in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove, 2004), 247.

36. Calhoun, "Fanon's Lexical Intervention," 172.

37. Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 26.

38. Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 20,

39. Lamine Senghor, "Le Mot 'Nègre,'" *La voix des Nègres* 1 (January 1927), cited in Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 31–32.

40. Christopher L. Miller, *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 36.

41. Lamine Senghor quoted in Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 32–33 (Edwards's translation).

42. Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Problématique de la Négritude," in *Liberté 3: Négritude et civilisation de l'universel* (Seuil, 1977), 270.

43. See chapter 4, page 107, in the present volume.

44. See chapter 8, page 190, in the present volume.

45. Aimé Césaire, *Resolutely Black: Conversations with Françoise Vergès*, trans. Matthew B. Smith (Polity Press, 2020), vii. For the original, see Aimé Césaire, *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai: Entretiens avec Françoise Vergès* (Albin Michel, 2005).

46. Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 38 ("*framing* gestures"); Tachtiris, "Introduction," 22 ("negotiated").

47. Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 35 (our emphasis).

48. Sartre wrote: "Le Nègre [. . .] se redresse, il ramasse le mot de 'nègre' qu'on lui a jeté comme une pierre, dans la fierté" (The Negro [. . .] rises, takes up the word *Negro* which they had thrown at him like a stone, with pride). Sartre, "Orphée noir," xiv.

49. Césaire, *Resolutely Black*, 9 (translation modified).

50. Jane Hiddleston, *Decolonising the Intellectual: Politics, Culture, and Humanism at the End of the French Empire* (Liverpool University Press, 2014), 42.

51. Abiola Irele, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (Indiana University Press, 1981), 91.

52. Doyle D. Calhoun, "Negritude and the Promise of African Literature," in *Intellectual Traditions of African Literature, 1960–2015*, ed. Cajetan Iheka and Jeanne-Marie Jackson (Cambridge University Press, 2026), 67.

53. Hiddleston, *Decolonising the Intellectual*, 42.

54. Lindfors Bernth, "Anti-Negritude in Algiers," *Africa Today* 17 (1970): 5–7.