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Circulations, decolonizations, unbalances.

**Anticolonial networks and links between the literary reviews
Mensagem, Présence Africaine and Black Orpheus**

Alfieri, Noemi, 2024

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Abstract

This working paper looks at the connections between the editorial projects of *Mensagem* (edited in Lisbon, by *Casa dos Estudantes do Império*, 1948 – 1965), *Présence Africaine* (Paris, France and Dakar, Senegal, from 1947) and *Black Orpheus* (Ibadan, Nigeria, 1957 - 1975). It will reflect on the mobility of objects and ideas through the networks established within Africa and Europe by the negritudinists, Pan-African, or anticolonial writers and intellectuals discussed in those reviews. The circulations of texts, authors, and translations between those three literary projects were connected to a conception of art committed to the dignification of cultures and knowledges beyond Eurocentric conceptions. While it maps connections, circulations, and translations of printed material, this working paper also problematizes the dynamics and imbalances that characterized those publications, related both to intellectual displacement and to the consequences of colonial rule on the conceptual and socio-political systems.

Keywords: Decolonization; African literatures; anticolonial networks; *Mensagem*; *Présence Africaine*; *Black Orpheus*

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Circulations, decolonizations, unbalances.

Anticolonial networks and links between the literary reviews *Mensagem*, *Présence Africaine* and *Black Orpheus*¹

Noemi Alfieri

1 Preliminary considerations and critical reflections on “decolonizing”

In *The Darker Nations* (2007), Vijay Prashad wonders, citing Aimé Césaire, “Why did the French forget *liberté, égalité, fraternité* when they went into the tropics?” In the post-Bandung context, those interrogations spread widely amongst anticolonial activists, freedom fighters, writers, and intellectuals. This reflection wants, therefore, to dwell on the dissemination of non-western epistemologies, as well as on the deconstruction of colonial narrations that were carried out in the 1960s and 1970s through relevant editorial projects. This working paper focuses on

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transnational anticolonial connections and on how they were manifested in renowned editorial projects such as *Mensagem. Boletim da Casa dos Estudantes do Império* (CEI) edited in Lisbon (1948 – 1965), *Présence Africaine* (Paris, France and Dakar, Senegal, from 1947) and *Black Orpheus* (Ibadan, Nigeria, 1957 - 1975). Particular attention will be given to the mobility of objects and ideas through the networks established within Africa and Europe by negritudists, Pan-African, anticolonial writers and intellectuals reflected in those reviews.

Besides the relevance of those topics for an understanding of the history of publications in the continent and its Diasporas, with a focus on the period corresponding to the Cold War and its entanglements - most of the history of those publications still needs to be written and rewritten under critical lenses - those dynamics have much to teach us about our present(s). This task of reflection has been led, from an academic point of view, by the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth, an institution which is currently reflecting on the need for “reconfiguration” of so-called “African Studies”. In this sense, my Fellowship for the 2022-2023 academic year – with the encounters it made possible - was an opportunity to think, experience critically, and undo assumptions about the forms of knowledge productions and their dynamics. It was an opportunity, through discussions and social relationships, to think deeply about the complexity of different layers of oppression and the consequences of coloniality, both in the dynamics of the life of the three publications examined here and in contemporary knowledge production.

The initial project of extensive comparison of the texts published in *Mensagem*, *Présence Africaine*, and *Black Orpheus* quickly shifted into a deep methodological and theoretical reflection. The theoretical reflection focused on the differences in three editorial project’s way of production, the matter of authority in those publications, and the role of translation and critics. European colonization, with its ideological apparatus, propaganda, and narrations produced to justify domination over people perceived as “non-western,” fabricated a wide series of cultural myths. The idea of a civilizing mission and the alleged existence of “universal” values to be disseminated outside the West were part of this ideological machine, whose consequences still affect cultural production and the relations between - and inside - continental spaces.

The attempt, led in this in-progress contribution, of problematization of the unbalances that characterized those publications is, nevertheless, a reflection on the present. It is well known that strong dynamics of power, resulting in the hierarchization of knowledges and their producers, rule cultural, artistic, and academic production in the contemporary world. If this has roots in the capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal culture, people who experience these kinds of oppressions (Black people, women, neurodiverse and disabled people, religious and political minorities, etc.) often struggle to find effective solutions to counteract the consequences of those oppressions on a practical, concrete level. Intellectual speculations on inequalities often lack links to less abstract issues related to everyday life, such as the consequences that colonial cultures have had on the mobility of humans towards western spaces. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres puts it:

“Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that

define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breath coloniality all the time and everyday.” (MALDONADO-TORRES, 2007)

How do we produce knowledge? How do we make art? How do we see ourselves when we do not belong to a place? Which platforms are open, and to whom, and, moreover, what are the consequences of these dynamics in daily life? If neutral knowledge does not exist, categorizations of knowledge production still haunt the literary and artistic fields.

For this reason, the example of the literary and artistic work of Angolan, Brazilian, and Mozambican artists, published in translation in *Présence Africaine* and *Black Orpheus* was chosen as the main core of this contribution. Most of those writers and artists had contact with – and their work was disseminated through – the environment of *Mensagem*.

This methodological choice was tied to logistical and time limitations, and not to a supposed “unity” of those productions. While the Portuguese language was often a common ground, those artists – coming from different regions - revealed heterogeneity and aesthetic, thematic, and autonomous networks of sociability. Far from attempting to reproduce a category of unity based on Portuguese as a colonial language, this contribution is a first effort to map connections, contradictions, and networks. If this task needs an in-depth critical reflection that is impossible to be accomplished in a few months, it was set up on critical thinking, starting from the assumption that thoughts on epistemologies and methods are urgent. As Françoise Vergès recently stated in her contribution about un-learning and learning, published in *The Politics of Time: Imagining African Becomings* (2023):

“Transformation takes place through the revision of the curriculum, through an attention to forgotten narratives, to methods and knowledge that encourage the transformation of the self. Transformation means taking an interest in the way in which the humanities were written, in how they have excluded certain groups and peoples from their understanding of the human.” (VERGÈS in MBEMBE, SARR, 2023)

This attempt is, therefore, also an exercise in methods and, as any exercise in committed academic research should be, it is subject to criticism, miscalculations, and route shifts. The critical readings, the approach to the publications, as well as the occasion to rethink forms in which I had previously approached conceptions of gender in my research, helped me in considering intersections and complexities featuring gender representations and different conceptions of gender. Sylvia Tamale’s work – with references to María Lugones’s reflections on decolonial feminism – was a key point in seeing how gender constructions were made considering white women as the opposite, as an inversion of the white bourgeois men, which resulted, consequently, in the de-humanization and exercise of power on non-white and indigenous people (TAMALE, 2020). Concerning this last point, and as I will argue throughout the text, those editorial projects ended (with some remarkable exceptions) in reproducing western logics of gender exclusions or

underrepresentation, despite the prominent role of non-male actors and intellectuals who gave substantial contributions both to the networks and circulations of literary and artistic pieces, and to the anticolonial cause.

2 Archival component of the paper and short introduction to the topic

This paper will include a brief overview of the publications *Mensagem*, *Présence Africaine*, and *Black Orpheus*, considering their points of convergence and differences, as well as a reflection on the circulations and links between these three literary reviews and the ways in which those circulations were possible. As consistent bibliographical work has already been done on the journals themselves, I will complement previous scholarship with some archival research I have been doing in the last few years in local archives, such as the National Historical Archive of Angola (AHNA), the National Library of Angola (BNA), the Library of Governo-Provincial of Luanda (BGPL), the French National Library (BNF), the Parisian Archive of the Prefecture of Police (APP), the National Library of Portugal (BNP) and National Archive of Torre do Tombo (ANTT-PIDE) and the Portuguese Historic-Diplomatic Archive (AHD), as well as the Archive of the Mário Soares Foundation (FMS). That information was complemented during my Fellowship with research in the library of the University of Bayreuth, which holds, amongst other relevant bibliography, most of the *Black Orpheus* issues. While further research in local German archives, such as the Iwalewaha archive at the University of Bayreuth, would have been desirable, this was not possible because of matters of access. In a further step of this project, research at the Iwalewaha archive and interviews with contemporaries of Ulli Beier, the founder of *Black Orpheus*, would be desirable. In a further phase of this research, which will be mainly developed in a six-year project undertaken as a CEEC Researcher at the New University of Lisbon (Portugal), it would also be relevant to complement the research I have been leading so far with archival research to be held at the Secret State Archives Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (GStA PK), the Federal Archives in Berlin, the German Central Archives in Potsdam (DZA, Deutsches Zentralarchiv), and the German National Library (DNB). The information held in the archives will also provide relevant material on the perception of colonial and state power on those very networks and publications. The revolutionary power and potential of the literary review went further than strictly political action, and involved cultural and social aspects of anticolonialism: the archival information will illuminate this further.

These will be followed by case studies regarding the publication, in translation, of poems and works of art by, among others, Agostinho Neto and Malangatana Valente Ngwenya (known by his first name, Malangatana) in both *Présence Africaine* and *Black Orpheus*, as well as the volume *Nouvelle somme de poésie du monde noir* (New Sum of Poetry of the Negro World, *Présence Africaine* Éditions, 1964). An additional interesting aspect that brought me to reflections that should be deepened, is the matter of critics, especially, but not exclusively, in the context of *Black Orpheus*, in which Beier's agency ended up being, under several aspects, and despite the undoubtable merit of this publication, problematic and multifarious.

Those three literary journals, *Mensagem*, *Présence Africaine* and *Black Orpheus*, were possible thanks to transcontinental connections and international networks and, in addition, they contributed to establishing and consolidating them. The journals made a substantial contribution to the renovation of the literary environment and episteme in Africa and Europe, as well as

reconfiguring the idea of center. While literature often tends to be considered in the European tradition as an individual practice, I will here focus on the collective editorial works that generations of young African intellectuals, strongly committed to the anticolonial movements and/or to Pan-African ideals, built through transnational connections in the 1960s. As I have already argued, the circulations of texts, authors, and translations between those three reviews was deeply connected to a conception of art committed to the dislocation of the idea of center. Furthermore, those projects addressed oral tradition and visual arts and claimed the dignity of forms of knowledge other than the western. This was evident in some poetry and the arts published in the journals: the use of local languages, cultures, and communications codes challenged existing hierarchies of knowledge, as well as forms of understanding “valuable” knowledges, as well as cultural and artistic practices. Colonial metropolises were often used by the groups of people involved in those networks as intellectual hubs. Nevertheless, African epistemes and their diffusion in and outside Africa were central to the reflections of the above-mentioned editorial projects.

Mensagem had an unconventional path: the bulletin, initially tied to governmental policies, quickly became a stage for anticolonial writers and artists. In 1944, when the *Casa dos Estudantes do Império*, or House of the Students of the Empire (CEI), was founded, the association received formal support from the Salazar regime. Its main aim would be to promote an awareness of belonging among students from occupied territories in Africa, India, and China to the “multicontinental and multiracial Portuguese country.”² The Salazar regime, struggling with the effects of WWII – and later, with the new international configurations after it and the effects of the Cold War – did not allow universities to be located outside continental Portugal. Despite censorship and political persecutions, a group of young students, artists, intellectuals, and militants of the anticolonial movements managed, from 1948 on, to publish their poetry, essays, and visual art in this small scale, handcrafted bulletin. The repression of Portugal’s political police (PIDE) would lead to the interruption of CEI’s activities in 1965: *Mensagem* then also stopped publication. The most relevant figures in anticolonial movements and independence movements published in the bulletin, from Agostinho Neto to Alda Lara, from Alda Espírito Santo to Noémia de Sousa, Amílcar Cabral, Mário Pinto de Andrade, José Craveirinha, etc.

The context of *Présence Africaine* was dissimilar in terms of editorial conditions, circumstances, and methods of production: First of all, it was a formally established editorial project since 1947. Despite political pressures from the French government, tied namely to its possible connections with Algerian independence movements, the journal soon became an international reference for Pan-Africanist and negritudinists discussions. Under the direction of its founders Alioune Diop and Christiane Yandé Diop (who were married), *Présence Africaine* was conceived, edited, and discussed in tight collaboration with, amongst others, Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor. The First International Congress of Negro Writers and Artists organized in 1956 by the publishing house at Sorbonne was, as we will inquire further in this reflection, a landmark in transcontinental connections. It was there that Beier was inspired to found *Black Orpheus*, whose editorial direction would pass, in later stages, to Abiola Irele and J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, opening a new phase for the

² This was a motto of the official colonial propaganda that was spread in both the European and African continent, in order to justify the permanence of the Portuguese regime’s colonial occupations.

review (BENSON, 2020, 69).³ As I have stated elsewhere, *Black Orpheus* aimed to mediate between different cultures, cross-cutting imperial spaces, and strong ties with *Présence Africaine* are evident both thanks to personal connections between editors, writers, and artists, and their circulations in and outside the continent, as was for the case of Irele (ALFIERI, 2023).

Black Orpheus was, we could say, an historical and cultural product of Nigerian Independence. Its content, publications, orientation, and even the institutional support the journal received from the University of Ibadan, were, without a doubt, reflective of a new period of hope, the valorization of Afro-centered arts and practices, and discussions around the continent and its Diasporas. The internal tensions and contradictions of the review are worth, as we will argue, further inquiries and reflections, especially if we tie the local production with the complex, entangled dynamics linked to deep unbalances inherited by colonization.

3 Anticolonial literatures in the 1960s: counteracting radical colonial exclusions

When dwelling on the anticolonial literary environment of the 1960s, one is confronted with a compelling linguistic demarcation, directly associated with the former areas of influence of the European colonial powers that ruled African territories either at the time or in the preceding decades. The habit of approaching those productions in “slots” such as African English-speaking, Francophone, or Lusophone literatures is controversial (ALFIERI, 2023). Although it is undeniable that one of the consequences of colonial domination was the establishment of cultural connections through a common language, the choice to look at literary production only within language groups has the limit of not enlightening properly the transnational cultural, political, and literary ties that took place beyond the colonial spaces. Significant connections that gathered around ideas such as *négritude*, Black literature, or literature of the African and Black Diaspora, as well as around the Pan-Africanist movement, are relevant to the comprehension of the contexts of the reviews themselves.

This article therefore aims to be a preliminary study of the connections that were built, strengthened, and signified both around international conferences and around influential literary reviews such as *Mensagem*, *Présence Africaine* and *Black Orpheus*. Those literary reviews, by addressing oral tradition and the visual arts, aimed to dignify forms of knowledge other than the European and to spread African epistemes, in and outside Africa. Those collective projects aimed at deconstructing and decolonizing the empire(s) from their core, valorizing and enhancing subordinated cultures. Those three literary projects counteracted the logics of radical exclusion of the colonies, aimed at imposing an arbitrary distinction and organization of humankind. The categories produced by western colonialism resulted in a series of concepts, representations, and beliefs that served as a theoretical, interiorized library of what Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni defines as a “metaphysical empire” (NDLOVU-GATSHENI, 2018). As the latter is based on epistemicide, a serious decolonization task implies epistemic freedom. In the next pages we will, therefore, think

³ Irele and Clark-Bekederemo initially considered transforming *Black Orpheus* into a poetry section of a new journal, with the potential name of *Mbari Review*. The shift in the editorial direction happened, always according to Benson, as Beier was planning, in 1966, to interrupt the publication of *Black Orpheus*.

about the ways in which those collective editorial projects made fundamental steps in contributing to a certain epistemic freedom. We will focus on their contradictions, imbalances, and constraints – often caused either by colonial rule, or by privileges and ways of thinking and imagining society and the collective inherited from the colonial intellectual machine. We will also set the basis for mapping the intellectual networks established since the early 1950s and consolidated through political, cultural, and editorial projects, focusing on the three literary journals we have just mentioned. This is an uneasy task, complicated by the fact that literary history still tends to consider, in its analysis, the spheres of influence of the colonial languages. We will underline how, despite being deeply influenced by political repression, neo-colonial, or colonial situations that impacted the circulation of texts, people, and ideas, those networks revolutionized the understanding of not only literature and politics, but also representations of Africa and Europe.

4 Three editorial projects and their convergence: the role of the 1956 First International Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris

The First International Congress of Negro Writers and Artists took place at the Sorbonne, Paris, in September 1956 under the organization of the review *Présence Africaine* and its director and founder Diop, and it is considered a turning point in the literary environment of the post-war period. The Congress consolidated connections between African intellectuals in the Diaspora, already established at the beginning of the decade. It enhanced tensions, differences, and, obviously, an extensive Black awareness. In the opinion of some of its participants (SWAIM, 2006), however, the Congress also enhanced a certain astonishment and disenchantment: some writers, artists and intellectuals started recognizing that the colonial borders had led to a feeling of strangeness between distinct spheres of linguistic and cultural colonial influence in the very continent.

Discussing this event is not the purpose of our reflection: regardless, we cannot avoid mentioning that the Congress was an initiative that, reuniting writers and artists of Africa and the Black Diaspora and taking place in the core of Europe, was a strong symbolic statement. Challenging ideas of assimilation that, with different nuances, were the leitmotif used by colonial propagandas to justify slavery in the past and, more recently, brutal repression and inhumane treatment to colonized people, those intellectuals, starting from the assumption that the latter was “*moralement, spirituellement indéfendable*” (lit: “morally, spiritually indefensible”, CÉSAIRE, 1950, 8), were leading the task of dislocating the idea of a central, provincializing Europe (CHAKRABARTY, 2000). The emergence and consolidation of Pan-Africanist and negritudist ideals that had taken place since the end of the nineteenth century, from W.E.B. Du Bois to Sédar Senghor, now founded a point of conversion, in which contrasts were enhanced thanks to the interference of state intelligences, as the fact that Du Bois himself was prevented from joining the Congress demonstrates. After the event, even Diop started being watched by the *Préfecture de Police de Paris* for his participation in literary events such as the 1962 Afro-Asian Writers Conference in Cairo (ANPP- 77 W - 4047/ 413099) and the creation, together with Jean Price-Mars, Césaire, and Cheikh Anta Diop (among others), of the Society of African Culture (*Société Africaine de la Culture*) in December 1956 (ANPP- 77 W - 4047/ 413099, 13 and following).

The Congress was also a spark that led to the creation of the youngest of the editorial projects we will consider: the literary review *Black Orpheus*. This review, founded in 1957 by the German, Nigerian-based Beier, was directly inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre's *Orphée Noir*, preface to 1948's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, (Anthology of the new Negro and Malagasy Poetry in French) edited by Senghor. Beier initially aimed to publish translations of African literary works originally written in other languages into English (BENSON, 1986; OKEKE-AGULU, 2014). The first issue, printed in Lagos, Nigeria by the *Times* press, underlined the role of the linguistic obstacles:

“One difficulty, of course, has been the one of language; because a great deal of the best African writing is in French or Portuguese or Spanish. *Black Orpheus* tries to break down some of these language barriers by introducing writers from all territories in translation.” (BEIER, *Black Orpheus* n° 1, September 1957, p. 4. In: BENSON 2020, 24)

It became evident that divisions imposed by colonial domination kept fragmenting possibilities of dialogue, hindering a deep reinforcement of a Pan-African awareness. *Black Orpheus* was, in this sense, a review born about a decade after *Présence Africaine* (1947) and *Mensagem* (1948). Those editorial projects were deeply connected and opened to the publications of Black poetry from Africa and its Diasporas, with special attention on the productions coming from Latin America and the US.

5 From Lisbon to Paris: *Mensagem* and *Présence Africaine* dislocating the center through African epistemes

The presence of Angolan writers and students in Paris concerned the French police, especially because of the political networks they could establish with the Algerian liberation movement and because of their connections with the Soviet Union (USSR) and its position in the direction of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), fighting against Portuguese rule.⁴ Pinto de Andrade's presence in Paris had been tracked since 1954, both because of his collaboration with Diop's publishing house *Présence Africaine* between 1955 and 1958, and because of his relationship with the young anticolonial filmmaker Sarah Ducados, known as Sarah Maldoror.⁵ De Andrade's cultural agency in the Parisian environment was not limited to *Présence Africaine*: as the police indicated, he was a reader of literary works in Portuguese for the publishing houses

⁴ We shall also consider that, according to the police reports, the *PCP – Partido Comunista Português* (the Portuguese Communist Party, which was clandestine and had direct connections with the liberation movements) was banned and declared illegal in France on 18 December 1957. Marcelino dos Santos - Mozambican poet and founder of the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO)-, was considered to be the main leader of the party in France (ANPP- 77 W - 4959/640898). Pan-Africanism, and Diop's role as one of its vectors in France and worldwide also happened to be a great concern for the police.

⁵ Sarah Maldoror, Guadeloupean and French filmmaker, who became the wife of Mario Pinto de Andrade, was strongly committed to the anticolonial cause and directed films such as *Sambizanga* (1972). The movie was filmed with militant and non-professional actors and based on José Luandino Vieira's novel *A vida verdadeira de Domingos Xavier*, denouncing the repression of the political police in the settlements, or *musseques*, of Luanda, Angola. It was filmed in the People's Republic of the Congo (now Republic of the Congo).

Éditions du Seuil and *Éditions Robert Laffont*, in addition to leading a collaboration with François Maspero's publishing house (ANPP- 77 W - 5482/660159)⁶. De Andrade's texts on Lusotropicalism were published from the fourth edition of *Présence Africaine* under the pseudonym of Buanga Fele, as well as his interviews with the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén, reviews on Basil Davidson's work, etc.⁷ The Angolan intellectual played a significant role in the circulation of texts from Lisbon to Paris and back again: the *Antologia da Poesia Negra de Expressão Portuguesa* (Anthology of Black Poetry in Portuguese), published in 1958 by Pierre Jean Oswald, represented a landmark in the literary debates on black and anticolonial literature at the time. Poems by Espírito Santo, Neto, António Jacinto, Francisco José Tenreiro, De Sousa, and Viriato da Cruz were published in the volume, opened by the poem *Son número 6* by Guillén.⁸

Mensagem, the bulletin of the association CEI, was the main vehicle in the metropolis of the Portuguese empire for the cultural debate around Blackness and the idea of a Black literature and consciousness. Inspired by the homonymous Angolan literary review whose short life (1950 – 53) was interrupted by the repressive action of the Salazarist regime, its continuity between the two other journals and another relevant literary review, *Cultura*⁹, was assured thanks to the circulation of the work of a group of writers committed to the anticolonial cause in the effort for decolonization. At that time – and differently from most of other European capitals – Lisbon, despite having “evolved from a parochial small town into a more cosmopolitan city in the early 1950s,” [...] “still felt stifling due to censorship and the omnipresence of state security” (BURTON, 2019, p. 25). What was truly revolutionary in *Mensagem* was that this homemade, student-led bulletin was born thanks to the initiative of the Portuguese regime and became one of the main vehicles for anticolonial, independentist, and negritudinist ideas.

As mentioned earlier, CEI was an academic association that initially aimed at reuniting students coming from all the different corners of the Portuguese “empire,” reinforcing their feeling of belonging to a supposed unique, pluricontinental, and multiracial Portuguese nation. Since the 1950s, and thanks to the renewed international context, most of the renowned anticolonial activists and intellectuals joined the CEI (CASTELO, 1994; MARTINS, 2017). The political police of the regime, PIDE, was soon concerned with the circulations of opponents, activists, and intellectuals between CEI and the *Clube Marítimo Africano* (CMA, African Maritime Club), the latter mainly frequented by workers. The apprehension of handwritten material by the police is historical evidence of the international circulation, both in the original language and in translation,

⁶ Through the police reports it is noticeable how deeply the Cold War's logics of the two blocs were rooted in countries like Portugal and France, both facing either armed conflicts or increasing claims for decolonization. In this sense, the concern with the politization of literature, international networks, and the influence of Marxist, communist ideals and contacts with the USSR was a leitmotif in the reports.

⁷ Those texts are searchable through the review *Présence Africaine* and Mario Pinto de Andrade's personal archive, available in the online archive of Mário Soares Foundation: http://casacomum.org/cc/arquivos?set=e_3991

⁸ It's worth mentioning that poetry from Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau was excluded on purpose from a 1953 anthology organized by the same authors, as the country and its cultural products were considered the expression of a creole and not of an African culture (TENREIRO, ANDRADE, 1953).

⁹ Printed by the *Sociedade Cultural de Angola* (Cultural Society of Angola) from November 1957 to Nov. 1960, in 12 volumes.

of the texts written by Black poets such as the Cuban Regino Pedroso or Guillén himself (ANTT/PT/PIDE/ D-A/003/266854-1). The activities of CEI, increasingly understood by the regime as a concrete threat to the survival of “national unity,” were abruptly interrupted in 1965, after a scandal related to the attribution of the *Grande Prémio de Novelística* of the Portuguese Society of Writers to *Luuanda: Short Stories of Angola*, a collection written by MPLA activist and writer Luandino Vieira, at the time imprisoned in the Tarrafal concentration camp of Chão Bom, Cape Verde (ALFIERI, 2021).

The Parisian context and the context of the literary journal *Présence Africaine* were very distinct from the ones of Lisbon and *Mensagem*: while French Black writers based in Paris actually belonged to that place (MOURALIS in MUDIMBE, 1992, p. 5), the condition of the students and writers collaborating with *Mensagem*, often based in Portugal, was far more complex. Young students, activists, and intellectuals passing through Lisbon suffered both because of the colonial rule and the fascist dictatorship, with the political repression and persecutions it entailed. Colonial propaganda, representing Portugal as a pluricontinental and multiracial country, was based on the alleged inferiority of African cultures, as well as on the idea of a civilizing mission and assimilation. As the liberation movements were getting stronger, the political and cultural repression was intensified: for this reason, exile - to Paris, Algiers, Dar-Es-Salaam, etc. - was often the solution. Publishing in a review such as *Présence Africaine*, whose main goal was to enhance the comprehension of Africa and of the condition of Africans in Europe, represented an opportunity for the internationalization of the fight for freedom of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé e Príncipe. Furthermore, it was a concrete contribution to the fight to dignify African cultures and Afro-centered knowledge(s) in a wider sense.

What gave a strong symbolic meaning to the literary pieces were aesthetic innovations, as well as their collectiveness: a whole generation was challenging colonial rule, the subalternation of Black people and, moreover, a series of representations and cultural assumptions about which cultural and aesthetic manifestation were worth being considered as such. It is relevant, I think, to underline that the colonial spaces themselves were challenged by those projects: not just *Black Orpheus* would, since 1957, translate African poetry from one language to another, mediating between different cultures and cross-cutting imperial spaces. After Paris’ First International Congress of Negro Writers and Artists and the Afro-Asian Writers’ Conference in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in October 1958, the international and transcontinental networks consolidated, despite political and cultural mis-encounters and disagreements. *Présence Africaine*’s n^o 57 (First Semester of 1966) was dedicated to a “New sum of poetry from the negro world,” an English translation of the French expression “monde noir.” The anthology was organized by negritudinist poet Léon-Gontran Damas, who was married to Marietta Campos Damas: this also granted him discrete knowledge and contacts of the environment of the Brazilian Black activism,¹⁰ a fact that influenced the choice, for the Southern America section of the literature written in Portuguese and Spanish, of including just Brazilian writers, namely members of the *Associação Cultural do Negro*

¹⁰ I thank Mário Medeiros for enlightening me on this issue. References to Damas’ agency in the elaboration of n^o 57 of *Présence Africaine*, as well as the fact that the poets were all members of the ACN, can be found in his article: Fazer história, fazer sentido: Associação Cultural do Negro (1954- 1964). *Lua Nova*. São Paulo, 85: 227-273, 2012.

(ACN, standing for Black Cultural Association).¹¹ While Mozambican poet Virgílio de Lemos was in charge of the introduction to the poetry written in Portuguese, Irele - who would, in the same year, go back from Paris to Nigeria and become co-editor of *Black Orpheus* together with Clark-Bekederemo, opening a new phase for the review (BENSON, 2020, p. 69)¹² - wrote his considerations about the heterogeneity and diversity of the poetical production coming from English-speaking Africa (*Présence Africaine* n° 57, pp. 263 – 265). In 1963, the Antillean historian and writer Léonard Sainville organized, still with *Présence Africaine*, two volumes of an anthology of “Romanciers et conteurs négro-africains” (SAINVILLE, 1963) in which, once again, the presence of texts authored by Brazilian writers such as Carolina Maria de Jesus, Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, and Jorge Amado was quite visible.¹³ If *Black Orpheus* was the youngest of the three editorial projects, it had the specificity of being printed in Africa exclusively; it was sold, but also stolen, redistributed informally, and read in South Africa and other African countries. Beier himself got to know that by chatting with a staff member of the *Drum* magazine.¹⁴ The study of its circulation and editorial history, in the connections with other African literatures, is worth being studied further.

6 Nouvelle somme de Poésie du monde noir : a special issue of *Présence Africaine*

Printed in the first half of 1966, the volume *Nouvelle somme de poésie du monde noir*, a special issue of *Présence Africaine* had two forewords: *Liminaire* by Césaire and an *Introduction générale* by Damas. Those were followed by a volume divided in four main sections: “Monde noir d’expression française” with an introduction by Senegalese poet Lamine Diakhaté, “Monde noir d’expression anglaise” with an introduction by Irele, “Monde noir d’expression portugaise et espagnole” with an introduction by De Lemos and, finally “Monde noir d’expression néerlandaise,” published without any preface or foreword. All those sections had a subdivision organized by

¹¹ Those were: Nataniel Dantas, Eduardo de Oliveira, Carlos de Assumpção, Luiz Paiva de Castro, Oswaldo de Camargo, and Marta Botelho. The *Associação Cultural do Negro* hasn’t been accurately studied, despite its relevance and the influence and contacts members of the association had with both sociologists like Florestan Fernandes and cultural movements such as the *Teatro Experimental do Negro*, led by Abdias do Nascimento (MEDEIROS, 2012).

¹² In 1966 Beier was, always according to Benson, planning to interrupt the review, considering it was no longer needed to “defend” African literature – and Black literature in the Diaspora – because of the general attention it had caught. Irele and Clark-Bekederemo considered transforming *Black Orpheus* into a poetry section of a new review, with the potential name of *Mbari Review*.

¹³ The relative absence of texts written by African writers in Portuguese (we must mention the publication of two texts by the Angolan writers Óscar Ribas and Castro Soromenho) is even more interesting if we consider that, always in 1963, João Alves das Neves organized the volume *Poetas e contistas africanos de expressão portuguesa*, issued by Brasiliense. This might have been due to the lack of available translations from Portuguese to French, but the issue should be studied further.

¹⁴ According to BENSON 2020, 23: “Beier never quite knew with any confidence where *Black Orpheus* was available. Years later, on a trip to South Africa, Beier would ask a black staff member of the Johannesburg magazine *Drum* how much *Black Orpheus* was selling from there. His would-be informant replied: I don’t know. I always buy a stolen copy.” The fact that *Black Orpheus* was stolen could be tied to the journal’s profitability. Even if we do not have sufficient information at our disposal at this regard, informal distribution and commercialization of printed matters is a clue to the fact that the review was read and considered as a profitable, valuable product to be sold outside the legal, official network of circulation.

geographical areas and, in some cases, according to African nations that had recently become independent, or were fighting for their independence, as was the case of Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique.

The introductory note by Césaire contextualized the relevance poetry had, in his perception and understanding, for the liberation from colonialism:

“But why poetry? You might ask.

Do we have to look far away?

As a victim of colonial trauma and in search for a new balance, the Black person is not free yet. All the dreams, desires, accumulated grudges, all unspoken and somewhat repressed hopes during a century of colonial domination, all this needed to come out. And when it comes out, and it is expressed, and it spurs out, indiscriminately carrying the individual and the collective, the conscious and the unconscious, the lived and the prophetic, it is called poetry. This is to say that, here, we naturally appeal to this essential language, to this language of the essential which is Poetry. And that poetry here plays her role of liberating act in full. That the themes have changed, that the methods have varied, that here the French or English mark is more perceptible, and that there, on the contrary, the traditionalist aspect prevails. This is well and good. This evolution and variety only prove one thing: that *négritude* extends itself as it renews itself. It is a sign that *Négritude* continues.¹⁵ (CÉSAIRE, 1967, 1. My translation)

Poetry was, therefore, intended as a tool to overcome colonial traumatism, as it appealed to an “essential language” that would help to break some barriers and dichotomies that feature in western logic, such as the dichotomies between the individual and the collective, the conscious and unconscious, the lived experience and the prophetic. Another interesting point recalls the fact that Césaire here referred to Anglophone and Francophone Africa (“Afrique francophone” and “Afrique anglophone”), but then named the Africas of Portuguese and Dutch “expression”, instead of using the term “Lusophone,” for example. Césaire also recalls the idea of an “Afrique au sens large,” which would include different Diasporic contexts. The general introduction by Damas was explicitly committed to establishing a sort of genealogy of Black poetry, from Victor Hugo to W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Guillén, Jorge de Lima, Jacques Roumain, Césaire and Senghor.

¹⁵ Original version : “Mais pourquoi la poésie? dira-t-on. Faut-il chercher bien loin? Victime du traumatisme colonial et à la recherche d’un nouvel équilibre, le nègre n’en a pas fini de se libérer. Tous les rêves, tous les désirs, toutes les rancunes accumulées, toutes les espérances informulées et comme refoulées pendant un siècle de domination colonialiste, tout cela avait besoin de sortir, et quand cela sort et que cela s’exprime et que cela gicle, charriant indistinctement l’individuel et le collectif, le conscient et l’inconscient, le vécu et le prophétique, cela s’appelle la poésie. C’est dire que le recours est fait ici naturellement à ce langage essentiel, à ce langage de l’essentiel qu’est la Poésie, et que la poésie joue ici à plein son rôle d’acte libérateur. Que les thèmes aient changé, que les moyens aient varié, qu’ici la marque française ou anglaise soit plus sensible, que là au contraire l’aspect traditionaliste prévale, cela est bien. Cette évolution et cette variété ne prouvent qu’une chose : c’est que la négritude s’étend, comme elle se renouvelle. Signe que la Négritude continue.”

According to Damas, this poetry featured a combative attitude, also reflective in specific formal and stylistic choices applied to the colonial languages.

It is also interesting to see the differences between Diakhaté's and Irele's presentation of the anthology and the one made by De Lemos. While the first two referred to a new generation of poets, De Lemos mainly focused on colonial repression, underlining the colonizer's opposition to literary projects that were born in Angola and Mozambique, such as the cultural movement *Vamos Descobrir Angola* (lit: Let's Discover Angola) or the initiative of João Albasini and his brother, José Albasini, in the Mozambican periodical press. It is still relevant to notice that both Irele and De Lemos mentioned significant women poets such as Christina Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana) and De Sousa (Mozambique). De Sousa is described by De Lemos as "the first poet who sang the problems of the African majority of her country and the whole continent" (De Lemos, 433). Another strong allusion in the text is the one to exiles and prisons of poets from Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique, while there is an explicit reference to the fact that there were no African poets writing in Portuguese in Guinea-Bissau. The introduction to this section has extensive literary references to Italian neo-realism, barely mentioning relevant works of Brazilian neo-realism that had a strong influence, at least on the Atlantic side and on the Angolan novels of that decade. This habit of interpreting African literatures under a Eurocentric lens was a common habit in the Portuguese-speaking context of the time: it was both related to structural education (lack of local universities and education books) and to deep unbalances tied to institutionalized hierarchies of knowledge (what was worth citing or mentioning).

7 Portuguese-speaking African writers and artists in *Black Orpheus*: Agostinho Neto, Luís Bernardo Honwana, Malangatana

When looking at the literary and artistic production coming from countries speaking Portuguese in *Black Orpheus*, one notices a big difference related to *Présence Africaine*. According to the general orientation of the review, prominence was given either to traditional poetry or to visual arts. As we stated before, one of the objectives of the reviews was the one of publishing African literatures in English translation and to make these literatures circulate on the continent and beyond. When we get to the texts written in Portuguese, however, we see a substantial underrepresentation. Considering the first series, we find authors from Angola, Brazil, and Mozambique in only seven out of the 22 issues (see Table 1).

Volume	Editorial Project / Printed by	Year	Organizer / Editor	Authors
<i>Nouvelle Somme de Poésie du Monde Noir</i>	Présence Africaine (n° 57, special edition)	1967	Léon-Gontran Damas	Nataniel Dantas, Eduardo de Oliveira, Carlos de Assumpção, Luiz Paiva de Castro, Oswaldo de Camargo and Marta Botelho. Members of <i>ACN – Associação Cultural do Negro</i> (see Mario Medeiros's research)

--	--	--	Virgílio de Lemos	<p>António Cardoso, António Jacinto, Luandino Vieira, Mário Pinto de Andrade, Mário António, Viriato Da Cruz (Angola)</p> <p>Gabriel Mariano, Mário Fonseca, Onésimo Silveira, Terêncio Anahory (Cape Verde)</p> <p>Malangatana, Marcelino dos Santos, Noémia de Sousa, José Craveirinha, Rui Nogar, Virgílio de Lemos (Mozambique)</p> <p>Alda Espírito Santo (São Tomé and Príncipe)</p>
<i>Romanciers et Conteurs Négro-Africains</i>	Présence Africaine	1963	Léonard Sainville	<p>Óscar Bento Ribas, Castro Soromenho (Angola)</p> <p>Machado de Assis, Carolina Maria de Jesus, Jorge Amado (Brazil)</p>
<i>Black Orpheus</i>	Black Orpheus / University of Ibadan	Various numbers	Ulli Beier	<p>Omidiji Aragbabalu on Goan-born artist Francisco Newton Souza (n° 7, June 1960)</p> <p>Gerald Moore on Wilson Tibério (n° 9, June 1961, Julian Beinart on Malangatana (n° 10, 1962)</p> <p>Ulli Beier on Agnaldo dos Santos (n° 16, November 1963)</p> <p>Malangatana: translation of a short autobiographical text of his authorship, translated by Dorothy Guedes and Philippa Rumsey. Poems: "Woman" and "To the anxious mother" associated to some of the paintings included on his first solo exhibition (1961)</p> <p>Agostinho Neto: poems "African poem," "Friend Mussunda," "Kinaxixi" (<i>Black Orpheus</i>, n° 15, August 1964)</p> <p>Luís Bernardo Honwana, "The hands of the Blacks," (<i>Black Orpheus</i>, n° 17, June 1965)</p> <p>Pedro Guedes (eight-year-old's son of Pancho Guedes) drawings, (<i>Black Orpheus</i> n° 16 October 1964)</p>

Table 1 - List of Angolan, Brazilian, Mozambican and Goan writers and artists published in *Black Orpheus* and in special issues of *Présence Africaine*

In most of the cases, we notice that many of the works published were critical reviews on the work of visual artists: Omidiji Aragbabalu on Goan-born artist Francisco Newton Souza (n° 7, June 1960), Gerald Moore on Wilson Tibério (n° 9, June 1961, Julian Beinart on Malangatana (n° 10, 1962), Beier on Agnaldo dos Santos (n° 16, November 1963). In the case of Malangatana, a translation of a short autobiographical text of his authorship, translated by Dorothy Guedes (Pancho Guedes's wife) and Philippa Rumsey were included in the volume, as well as the poems *Woman* and *To the anxious mother* and some of the paintings that were included in his first solo exhibition (1961). Concerning poetry, three poems by Neto were published in *Black Orpheus* (n° 15, August 1964): *African poem*, *Friend Mussunda*, and *Kinaxixi*. Concerning prose, only *The hands of the Blacks* by Luís Bernardo Honwana was published (n° 17, June 1965). However, it is curious to note how some paintings created by Pancho Guedes's eight-year-old son, Pedro Guedes, were included in n° 16 (October 1964).

According to the *Index to Black Orpheus 1-21*, published in Volume 2, n^o 5 - 6 and compiled by Bernth Lindfors (pp. 77 - 89, see Figure 1), in which we find a deep categorization of the type of contribution to all those issues, we can also notice that Beier's output - and I am here just considering the articles published under his name and not the ones under a pseudonym - was impressive if we look at the number of articles he published. Even not being the scope of this communication, it is worth considering that, unlike publications like *Messenger* - which were self-produced as collaborative projects and that did not have a structure like the one of the University of Ibadan or the Mbari Club¹⁶ -, *Black Orpheus* seemed to be much more person-centered. Some of the links with other linguistic spheres, such as the ones involving the writers and artists from Angola, Brazil, and Mozambique, seemed to be tied to personal connections rather than to a network. Many of the articles published in the first phase of the review also refer to ideas of universality. This was the case, for example, of Julian Beinar's critiques on Malangatana's work, or Aragbaba's on Souza. When we relate to the idea of translations, especially about translations from indigenous languages to European languages, one of the questions I think we should address is to which extent are the translations appropriate, and to which extent might there be a sort of westernization of knowledges and cosmologies?

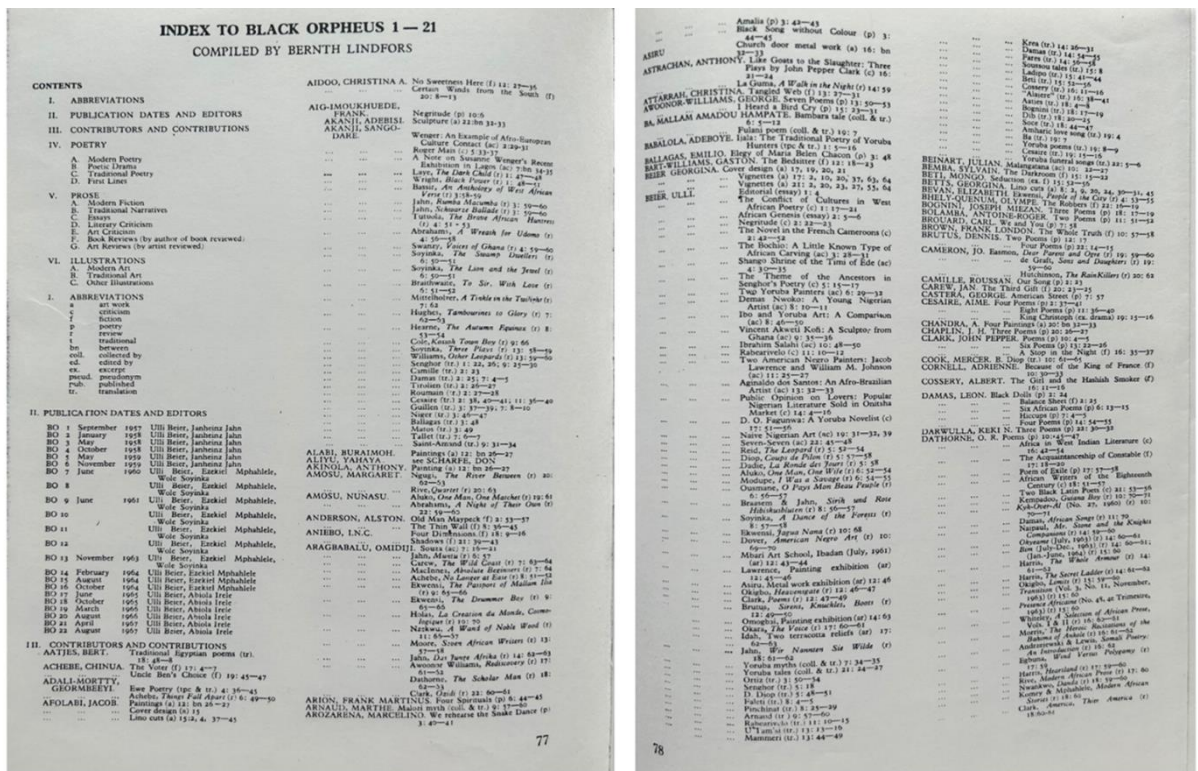


Figure 1 - Bernth Lindfors, "Index to Black Orpheus 1-21". *Black Orpheus*. Volume 2, n^o 5-6, page. 77 - 89.

¹⁶ Among recent works that explore the connections between the Mbari Club and *Black Orpheus*, it is worth mentioning: AAVV. *The Mbari Artists and Writers Club in Ibadan*. Bayreuth: Iwalewahaus books, 2018; and GANT, Kimberly; EZELUOMBA, Ndubuisi (org). *Black Orpheus, Jacob Lawrence and the Mbari Club*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022, edited in occasion of the exposition exploring connections between the African American artist Jacob Lawrence and contemporary artists of him based in West Africa through his presence on the publication.

Black Orpheus was a cultural mark in the fight for the dignification, spread, and valorization of Nigerian arts and, more widely, the arts of the continent and Black arts. In depth-analysis of *Black Orpheus* and, in general, of Beier's agency have been conducted since the foundation of the review (IRELE, 1965; BENSON, 1986; WON-GU KIM, 2007; OKEKE-AGULU, 2014; LONG, 2020; GREVEN, 2021¹⁷).

Nevertheless, some scholars have been, in the last two decades, underlining some imbalances, with a focus on the first editorial phase of the review. Critiques of the trajectories of both *Black Orpheus* and *Transition* have been addressed, for example, by Akin Adesokan (2000). More recently, Maebh Long has established a connection between Beier's agency in *Black Orpheus* and his cultural conduct in Papua New Guinea and his activity in local newspapers such as *Papua Pocket Poets* (1968 - 1970), *Kovave* (the country's first literary magazine) and *Gigibori: A Magazine of Papua New Guinea Cultures* (LONG, 2020). In her criticism, Maebh addressed the "permissibility" of white anticolonial men in non-European contexts, in which – even if actively committed and engaged in decolonizing causes – they were privileged. In different framings, both authors underline how problematic, in their opinion, the regular use Beier made of pseudonyms (Sangodare Akanji, Obotunde Ijimere, M. Lovori, amongst others) is. Beier's practice was complex, and the editor's practice was addressed critically, even in the pages of *Black Orpheus*. We could just highlight, as an example, the renowned Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo who, in an interview in 1963, criticized the literary project itself "for wanting to perpetuate the 'black' mystique" (ADESOKAN, 2000, 51), despite being one of its collaborators and published authors.

¹⁷ Greven's work, which extensively reflects on Beier's agency in the artistic field, is unfortunately only available in German, which I am unable to read in depth.

8 Conclusions

When mentioning the transits of editors and outlining individual interventions that granted the connections between those three projects, the main danger is, we consider, overexposing individual roles in those processes. In this sense, and considering interrogations about the concrete possibility of a decolonial conceptual history of literature (HELGESSION, 2022), our purpose was to demonstrate how individual agencies were linked to a common project, and a common effort for an epistemological shift towards the decolonization of knowledge. This did not imply the absence, in those contexts, of mechanisms of power reproducing disparities or marked by colonial unbalances: the complexity of the social, cultural, and symbolic systems was reproduced in artistic representations. In the 1960s we can see, however, and in the context of African literatures, an explicit commitment to a collective cause: If this was clearly marked by the political contexts and social demands, this phenomenon in the intellectual and editorial scene must be analyzed in their historical complexity, with special attention to the processes that involved the circulation of ideas and their transformation and adaptation to different contexts.

The practice of consolidating networks, carrying printed matters often clandestinely, as well as the relevance of women's active participation (in writing, drawing and designing covers, granting connections, organizing the editions, etc.) were, moreover, challenging the individualistic patterns and frames of a strictly western conception of literature. The main challenge in mapping women's agency in those processes lies in the fact that archival sources, police reports, and the history of the movements tend to suppress or minimize women's action. When we address the question, then, most of the sources lead us back to relevant male historical actors whose path has been reconstructed. Alda do Espírito Santo's role in antifascism and anticolonialism, and in *Mensagem's* environment, is known but not yet as deeply studied as, for example, Yandé Diop's role in the direction of *Présence Africaine* or of Susanne Wenger and Georgina Betts (Beier's first and second wives, respectively) in the elaboration of the graphic look of *Black Orpheus*. African women had an active role and, mainly through translation and correspondence, made a significant contribution (OYĒWÙMÍ, 2003) to the transnational – and transcontinental - circulation of printed material outside the colonial space, so that in a decolonial history of the intellectual backgrounds of the period we are dwelling on, one cannot dispense with the reconstruction of such experiences.

The role of *Présence Africaine* in this process of epistemological shift, towards what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o would later define as decolonization of the mind (THIONG' O, 1986), has widely been studied: *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947- 1987*, organized by V. Y. Mudimbe (1992), explored the connections, contradictions, and power unbalances caused by the cultural consequences of colonization and by the inequalities in the circulation of knowledge. In this sense, the call of the editorial projects *Présence Africaine*, *Mensagem*, and *Black Orpheus* for an "Africanization" of knowledge, for the pride in being Black, and the common acknowledgement of the specificity and value of African cultures, was but a first step in the process of radical change in the dismantling of the structures of coloniality. Those projects contributed both to the task of provincializing Europe and in taking Africa to the core of the discussion through to the spread of a Pan-African consciousness.

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