

**Frank Gerits**

## **An International Approach to The Cultural Cold War**

French Public Diplomacy towards Africa (1945-1965).<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

This article analyzes how the tactics behind French public diplomacy in West-Africa and Congo-Leopoldville/Kinshasa evolved between 1945 and 1965. To overcome the low appeal that French propaganda had for Africans, the French gradually integrated the successful methods that their competitors in Africa employed into their own strategy. It shows that the battle for African hearts and minds was global, that Ghana and Egypt were active, and that intercultural, propaganda agencies adopted and adapted each other's successful strategies. In doing so, it hopes to emphasize the explanatory potential of a genuine international approach to diplomatic history.

### **Introduction**

<1>

International history is booming. Imaginative historians are substituting a focus on American geopolitics for a history that aspires to be international. The history of public diplomacy, however, is a field that has remained narrowly focused on the American Cold War and has had a difficult time integrating the new 'internationalist' waves that have washed ashore. Public diplomacy can be broadly defined as "an international actor's attempt to conduct its foreign policy by engaging with foreign publics (traditionally government – to people)".<sup>2</sup> During the Cold War this interaction was primarily organized by governmental propaganda institutions, most famously the United States Information Agency (USIA).

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<sup>2</sup> Nicholas J. Cull: *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*, Cambridge / New York, 2009, X; Nicholas J. Cull: "Public Diplomacy before Gullion. The Evolution of a Phrase", 18 April 2006, ([http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/newsroom/pdblog\\_detail/060418\\_public\\_diplomacy\\_before\\_gullion\\_the\\_evolution\\_of\\_a\\_phrase/](http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/newsroom/pdblog_detail/060418_public_diplomacy_before_gullion_the_evolution_of_a_phrase/)), <14.02.2013>: "The earliest use of the phrase "public diplomacy" to surface is actually not American at all but in a leader piece from The Times in January 1856. It is used merely as a synonym for civility in a piece criticizing the posturing of President Franklin Pierce. The modern meaning of the term "public diplomacy" was coined in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and a distinguished retired Foreign Service officer, when he established an Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy. A further distinction can be made with cultural diplomacy. Public diplomacy also incorporates cultural diplomacy, an interaction with the public using cultural tools such as exhibits, art, and theatre. See: Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht: "What Are We Searching For? Culture, Diplomacy, Agents and the State", in: Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht / Mark C. Donfried (Eds.): *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy*, New York / Oxford 2010, 3-12, here: 4-5.

<2>

Three theoretical problems which are intimately linked to three main developments of diplomatic history stand out. First, public diplomacy was a tool that a lot of different interacting actors used. Nonetheless, historians tend to ignore non-American efforts in the field. The focus on national programs is due to the interest in domestic, cultural, ideological and personal factors generated by the cultural turn of the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> A second issue that requires more scholarly attention is public diplomacy towards the Third World. While historians such as Odd Arne Westad and Matthew Connelly<sup>4</sup> have written compelling works that crack open the bipolar model and attempt to unearth the roots of the present-day international system. Research on public diplomacy towards the Third World is only just emerging and insufficiently explains the uniqueness of propaganda towards the developing nations.<sup>5</sup> The third and most fundamental problem is that concepts associated with the goals, strategies, and methodologies of public diplomacy have been under-theorized. The latter observation contains an echo of the most recent direction in international history which uses Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' to explain how ordinary things such as demographics or calories are power constructs used on the international stage by state and non-state actors alike.<sup>6</sup>

<3>

To grapple with these challenges and gain a better understanding of public diplomacy as a foreign policy tool, I make the case for the employment of an international lens. By comparing different approaches to public diplomacy, we can better understand what is unique about these methods. By analyzing how the meetings between public diplomats from diverse countries changed the way in which propaganda was spread, we can study public relations strategies in a more complex way. Nonetheless, the explanatory potential of international history has been questioned.

<4>

In a rejoinder to Thomas W. Zeiler's essay on the current state of the field and, during a workshop at the European University Institute, the gap between ambitions and reality was highlighted. The first question that was raised was: is an emphasis on international aspects of a phenomenon always the most appropriate perspective? Fredrik Logevall warns: "to privilege the foreign as much as the United States [...] is to risk being ahistorical, by

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth A. Osgood / Brian C. Etheridge: Introduction: The New International History Meets The New Cultural History: Public Diplomacy and US Foreign Relations, in: Kenneth A. Osgood / Brian C. Etheridge (Eds.): *The United States and Public Diplomacy: New Directions in Cultural and International History* (= *Diplomatic Studies* 5), Leiden 2010, 1-25, here: 5-6. See: "Despite the fact that countries around the world are practicing public diplomacy in one form or another, the American experience has dominated the analytical landscape".

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Connelly: *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era*, Oxford 2003, 246, 275; Odd Arne Westad: *The Global Cold War*, Cambridge / New York 2007, 408; The problematic nature of the term 'Third World' is reflected in the French debate over *Tiermondisme* (Third-Worldism) in France in the late 1980s and 1990s. See: Claude Liauzu: *L'enjeu tiersmondiste: débats et combats*, Paris 1987.

<sup>5</sup> James R. Vaughan: *The failure of American and British propaganda in the Arab Middle East, 1945-57: unconquerable minds* (= *Cold War History Series* 19), New York 2005; Jennifer M. Dueck: *The Claims of Culture at Empire's End: Syria and Lebanon under French Rule*, Oxford / New York, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Connelly: *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*, Cambridge / London 2010; Nick Cullather: *The Foreign Policy of the Calorie*, in: *The American Historical Review* 112 (2007), 337-364, here: 337-338; Nick Cullather: *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia*, Cambridge / London 2010; This research is a plea for the use of theory instead of source fetishism.

assigning greater influence to some actors than they may in fact deserve. The United States is not merely one power among many."<sup>7</sup> Another question was: is an international history always attainable? Mario del Pero points out: "US (and British) [...] sources are most of the time more available than those in any other country. This renders almost impossible a balanced, multinational approach."<sup>8</sup>

<5>

By reflecting on my own research – public diplomacy towards Africa in the 1950s and 1960s – I hope to demonstrate that the limits of the 'internationalist turn' do not discredit its potential for innovative research. Rather than presenting a dense narrative, this article wants to advocate an internationalist way of seeing by looking at the international connections of a particular problem, this being the simultaneous presence of cultural superiority and cultural pessimism in the French public diplomacy strategy. The internationalization of public diplomacy, also known as the agenda to de-center America, has most powerfully been set forth by Jessica Gienow-Hecht. She calls on researchers to study how other countries spread propaganda in the US. She furthermore advises them to study other time periods beyond the Cold War.<sup>9</sup>

<6>

Historians should however reframe the debate in a more fundamental way by integrating the USIA into a world where other propaganda agencies are also active, the topic of the first and second section of this article. Governmental propaganda agents should be viewed as transnational actors who competed with each other's for the public's hearts and minds but also kept a close eye on each other's activities and adopted each others' methods, the topic of parts three and four. By substituting the government-to-people focus with an interest in interstate competition, the essential step is made towards a genuine international history.

### **The Psychological Scramble For Africa In An Intercultural Cold War**

<7>

Nowhere on the globe did this rivalry play out more than in the rapidly changing Africa of the 1950s and 60s. The cultural Cold War was global. Not only did Western countries harness the 'soft power' of modern communication but the non-aligned Global South also counted talented propagandists among its ranks such as Gamal Abdel Nasser and Kwame Nkrumah. They were arguably more successful than others in promoting an ideology in Africa and around the globe. Pan-Islamism and Pan-Africanism were maneuvered between capitalism and communism. The efforts of Ghana's Bureau of African Affairs dwarfed USIA's hesitant response to Africa's emerging nations. When USIA researchers asked African students to name their favorite world leader, they found that Nkrumah ranked second only to Kennedy.

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<sup>7</sup> Fredrik Logevall: Politics and Foreign Relations, in: The Journal of American History 95 (2009), 1074-1078, hier: 1076; EUI Workshop 'Global America', ongoing research, 03-06-2011.

<sup>8</sup> Mario Del Pero: On the Limits of Thomas Zeiler's Historiographical Triumphalism, in: The Journal of American History 95 (2009), 1079-1082, here: 1082.

<sup>9</sup> Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht: Introduction: On the Division of Knowledge and the Community of Thought: Culture and International History, in: Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht / Frank Schumacher (Eds.): Culture and International History, Explorations in Culture and International History Series, Oxford / New York 2003, 3-26, here: 3-5; Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht: Sound diplomacy: music and emotions in transatlantic relations, 1850-1920, Chicago 2009, 1-12; Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht: What Bandwagon? Diplomatic History Today, in: The Journal of American History 95 (2009), 1083-1086, here: 1083; Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht: Decentering American History, in: Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht (Ed.): Decentering America, New York 2007, 1-22, hier: 2.

Moreover, they noted that JFK's position was due to his recent murder.<sup>10</sup> Kennedy was told by Don Wilson, the USIA deputy director who would become more important as director Edward Murrow's health deteriorated, how Ghana created youth, labor and student organizations how 'African Freedom Fighters' were trained and how radio stations and newspapers, such as The Spark, were created.<sup>11</sup> In the battle for African hearts and minds, Western countries thus also confronted African contenders.

<8>

An international history counters the argument that public diplomacy was conceptually and analytically a national enterprise. Existing research, as Mario del Pero has pointed out, has put a lot of "emphasis [...] on several *inner* determinants of US foreign policy (race, culture, gender, ideology)", which paradoxically enough complicates the writing of international history, given its external focus.<sup>12</sup> Yet this tension does not make it impossible to employ an internationalist perspective. Different public diplomats kept a close eye on each other which created a scramble for Africa's minds, a process that could result in competition or cooperation – for instance between Great Britain and the US – but was almost always accompanied by cultural exchange. Propaganda agencies adopted and adapted each other's successful strategies, producing in effect hybrid and intercultural propaganda products. Competition shaped the way the French responded to the failure of their own cultural program in British Africa and the Congo.

### **An International French Strategy of Culture and Power**

<9>

Like the Americans, the French cultural officers struggled with the word 'propaganda' in their understanding of public diplomacy. The term evokes moral judgments, particularly in West-Africa where the Vichy propaganda machine had targeted inhabitants of the French colonies. As Jennifer Dueck points out, this is a complicated issue in the French case because the conventional distinction that is made between propaganda, as "causing people to leap to conclusions without adequate examination of the evidence," and information or education, "which invites inquiry," does not apply. The French conception of public diplomacy was based precisely on knowledge and education, with an extensive network of French schools and the spread of high culture. Older historians have furthered explanations that range from idealistic, seeing it as a way to bring about cross-cultural understanding, to cultural policy as a strategic tool that could be used to further national interests.<sup>13</sup> More recent authors, such

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph S. Nye: *Soft power: the means to success in world politics*, New York 2004; The notion of soft power or co-optive power was launched in 1990. He sees soft power as the ability to shape the preferences of others, to attract through American cultural values. See Kenneth A. Osgood: *Words and Deeds: Race, Colonialism, and Eisenhower's Propaganda War in the Third World*, in: Kathryn C. Statler / Andrew L. Johns (Eds.): *The Eisenhower administration, the Third World, and the globalization of the Cold War*, Lanham 2006, 3-26; Scott W. Thompson: *Ghana's Foreign Policy 1957-1966: Diplomacy, Ideology and the New State*, Princeton 1969, 103; NARA, RG. 306, P142, Box 20, f: R-71-64, "Attitudes and Aspirations of African Students in Britain", 27 May 1964, 26.

<sup>11</sup> NARA, RG. 306, P142, Box 16, f: R-155-63, "The Ghanaian Propaganda Campaign against the US: Motives and Implications", 12 August 1963, 18-19; JFKL, Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. White House Staff Files of Pierre Salinger, Box 133, f: USIA 1/62-12/62, USIA to the President, "Memorandum: Weekly Report", 16 January 1962, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Emphasis mine; Del Pero: *On the Limits* (see FN 8), 1080.

<sup>13</sup> Ruth Ginio: *Marshal Petain Spoke to School Children: Vichy Propaganda in French West Africa, 1940-1943*, in: *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33 (2000), 291-312, here: 291; Jennifer M. Dueck: *International Rivalry and Culture in Syria and Lebanon under the French Mandate*, in: Gienow-Hecht / Donfried (Eds.): *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy* (see FN 2), 137-162, here: 140-141; American historians distinguish between education and propaganda, see: Kenneth A.

as Alain Dubosclard and Jennifer Dueck, see France's cultural goals abroad as "schizophrenic" and deeply "rooted [in] contradictions".<sup>14</sup>

<10>

This assessment is not surprising when we look at the organizational structure of French public diplomacy. The French 'action culturelle' in British Africa consisted of a confusing set of organizations that all had a stake in the spread of French culture. While the cultural sections of embassies were the main coordinators, the Direction Générale des Relations Culturelles (DGRC) gained weight during the 1950s and the Service de Coopération Technique Internationale became more important during the 1960s. Both institutions had relations with a semi-private organization, the Alliance Française which had been founded in 1883 to spread French culture around the globe. While this gave the 'action culturelle' a non-political colour, it also hindered the use of the alliance as an effective diplomatic tool. As the post-war era progressed, ambassadors grew more and more dissatisfied with the confusing and overlapping responsibilities.<sup>15</sup> At the same time the Americans admired the breadth of "the French external cultural and informational services" which "rank first in scope and expenditures among West European countries".<sup>16</sup>

<11>

This created a situation in which local posts had a lot of freedom to craft their own strategy. In the words of Jean M. Desparmet, consul in Salisbury : "The information material that is being send to the different posts comes from the Direction Générale des Affaires Culturelles et Techniques, the Direction des Services d'Information et de Presse, the Direction des Archives diplomatiques et de la Documentation. It is difficult for the posts to know where the material came from. They opt for a pragmatic approach, they only use the material that is immediately usable".<sup>17</sup> Local posts crafted their own method in response to challenges and based on their own ideas of culture and power that were, in their turn, influenced by the propaganda activities of other countries in Africa.

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Osgood: Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad, Lawrence 2006, 7. In 1964, Louis Dollot argued that creating more understanding abroad would create economic and political gains for France. See Louis Dollot: Les Relations culturelles internationales, Paris 1964, 127. In response, Suzanne Balous's official history of 1968 considers the French cultural diplomacy as an attempt to safeguard the position of the French language. Economic and commercial interest are important, but negligible. See Suzanne Balous: L'action culturelle de la France dans le monde: Préf. de Maurice Genevoix, Paris 1970, 175-177; Alain Dubosclard: L'action artistique de la France aux États-Unis, 1915-1969, Paris 2003, 13-16.

<sup>14</sup> Dubosclard: L'action artistique (see FN 13), 350-351; Dueck: The Claims (see FN 5), 138. A historiographic overview can be found in: Dominique Trimbur / Laurent Jeanpierre / Alain Dubosclard: "Introduction", in: Entre Rayonnement et Réciprocité: Contributions à l'histoire de la diplomatie culturelle, Paris 2002, 15-24.

<sup>15</sup> Alain Dubosclard: Histoire de la Fédération des Alliances Françaises Aux Etats-Unis, Culture et diplomatie française, Paris 1998, 155; AMAE, DAL, Généralités 1952-1959, n° 66, Senghor to Présidence du Conseil, "Voyage officiel en Afrique occidentale britannique, du secrétaire d'Etat à la Présidence du Conseil 22 Septembre – 7 Octobre 1955", October 1955, 21.

<sup>16</sup> NARA, RG. 306, P142, "Research and Reference Service: French External Cultural and Informational Services", 7 May 1963, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Translations from French to English are all my own. AMAE, DAL, Nord-Est Africain Britannique 1960-1965, n° 8, Jean Desparmet to S.E. Monsieur Le ministre des Affaires étrangères, "Rapport de M.J. DESPARMET, Consul Général de France à Salisbury, Chef de mission", 6 May 1964, 13; AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n 72, Louis de Guiringaud Amb de France au Ghana to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Information politique", 14 May 1960, 4; AMAE, DAL, Louis de Guiringaud Amb de France au Ghana to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Action culturelle" 3 Février 1961, 2.

<12>

Historians have not given enough weight to this local dynamic because it is assumed that the tactics were static, unsystematically defined and in accordance with a national, almost unchangeable, basic goal: the spread of French culture had to create favorable dispositions towards France. This has grown from scholarship that understands French public diplomacy in relation to the national traditions and cultural values that would confirm influence foreign policy. While this assertion is undeniably correct, during the 1950s and 60s, policymakers in Africa were confronted with a constantly changing and uncertain reality. For instance, the French empire was renamed the French Union and the African colonies became territories d'outre-mer.<sup>18</sup> In devising a strategy that could ascertain their own cultural presence on the African continent, the French were confronted with the competition of, Ghana, Great Britain and the US among others. French thinking on power and culture in Africa is therefore at its core a story of Frenchmen trying to understand the success of their cultural competitors.

### **Reasons behind the Operation in Africa**

<13>

Why did France feel the need to intervene culturally in British West Africa and the Congo? A straightforward answer is that the spread of French culture had to create favorable dispositions towards France. Nonetheless, this had a different meaning for everyone involved. The confrontation with Islam in the Algerian conflict and the intensifying competition with other public diplomacy institutions made the French cultural activities in Africa gain speed at the end of 1955. Impressed by the anti-French sentiment that Afro-Asian delegations had been able to mobilize in the United Nations of 1955 through their public relations efforts and strikes in Algeria, the French Foreign Affairs Minister Antoine Pinay lashed out at his Soviet colleague Vyachslav Molotov during a dinner party in New York.<sup>19</sup>

<14>

Mindful of their waning public image, Leopold Senghor was sent to Africa to study the situation on the ground. This deputy of Senegal, leader of the Négritude movement and minister responsible for the French policy in international cultural matters was passionate about the necessity to confront anti-French propaganda, especially coming from Egypt: "We can no longer avoid the confrontation. If we refuse to confront this challenge then the situation will become worse. We are already experiencing a deterioration of our position".<sup>20</sup>

<15>

France had to participate in the ongoing competition. Senghor feared that if France turned its back on the cultural challenge, it would be overtaken by pan-Islamic propaganda, spread by Radio Damascus and Radio Cairo. However, the need for more political muscle did not exclude other goals. According to Senghor, French public policy was the expression of a more general policy. The prestige of France would be served by the distribution of literature and works of art: this would introduce French knowledge, culture and technique which would also serve France's economic expansion.

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<sup>18</sup> Frederick Cooper: *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*, New York / Cambridge 1996, 200.

<sup>19</sup> Connelly: *A Diplomatic Revolution* (see FN 4), 92.

<sup>20</sup> AMAE, DAL, Généralités 1952-1959, n° 66, Senghor to Présidence du Conseil, "Voyage officiel en Afrique occidentale britannique, du secrétaire d'Etat à la Présidence du Conseil 22 Septembre – 7 Octobre 1955", October 1955, 21.

Every actor in the French operation put another aim at the forefront. For Senghor it was the spread of the French language; Pinay emphasized the need for economic posts to complement the cultural effort; the *Direction des Relations Culturelles* was excited that they could spread documentation about France to the posts. Thus, what everybody actually agreed upon was that a better organization would further their own goals.<sup>21</sup> How Senghor's plea for French counter propaganda was translated into concrete approaches is an intriguing question with international dimensions.

### **Fine Tuning the Cultural Product, Disregarding the Audience (1945-1960)**

<17>

At the beginning of the fifties, presenting the marvels of high French culture was considered to be a good approach. Cultural resources only gradually became counter-propaganda tools because, in French eyes, manipulative methods had lessened the impact of the well-funded and attractive American propaganda. With a hint of *jalousie*, American glossy publications such as *Time Magazine* and their sensational exhibition methods were seen as highly attractive for young students, which the French targeted through education precisely because of their mental malleability. M.C. Renner, the consul in Ghana, saw the United States Information Service (USIS) move into the biggest and most modern building of Accra and furnish a vast reading room and cinema in 1949.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, American efforts were still summarized as "mediocre but luxurious propaganda". Mediocrity sprang from the manipulative and explicit political nature of American propaganda.

<18>

For instance, in the analysis of the consul in Ghana, the US only wanted to fight communism, which the French considered to be an inflated danger. Their overt and pompous style irritated the British and the French alike. The USIS had orchestrated – so the consul believed – Nkrumah's visit to the United States, which was officially an invitation by the Lincoln University.<sup>23</sup> A conflict with the American public affairs officer in Dakar, only referred to as Jester, further fed into this perception of American public diplomacy and highlights the anxious competition in Africa. Jester was, according to the French, direct and confrontational. Moreover, he had overwhelmed Ibrahim Diop, a religious leader, with questions about problems between Catholics and Muslims, anticommunism, Arab propaganda brochures and he had made offers behind the back of the French authorities in West Africa. Diop seemed to exploit the scramble for hearts and minds by informing the French about Jester's move. Jane Ellis took Jester's place and assured the French Ambassador to Washington, Henri Bonnet, that the goal of her mission was to improve French-American understanding. In that spirit she would temporarily halt the efforts to promote university studies in the US for African students

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<sup>21</sup> AMAE, DAL, Généralités 1952-1959, n°66, Pinay to Senghor "Voyage officiel de M. SENGHOR en Afrique Occidentale Britannique", 23 Decembre 1955; AMAE, DAL, Généralités 1944-1952, n° 66, DGRC to DAL, "Récente mission de M. SENGHOR en Afrique Occidentale Britannique", 26 November 1955, 1.

<sup>22</sup> AMAE, DAL, Nord-Est Afrique 1960-1965, n° 17, Renner to Affaires Étrangères, "Représentation consulaire américaine" 13 May 1949, 4.

<sup>23</sup> The French ambassador in Washington, Henri Bonnet, emphasized that it was not in the nation's interest to downplay the communist threat in Sub-Sahara Africa towards the American ally, see: AMAE, DAL, Généralités 1944-1952, n° 65, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères to Henri Bonnet, "communisme en Afrique Noire", 7 June 1950; AMAE, DAL, Généralités 1944-1952, n° 96, Monod to Direction du Personnel, "Représentation française en Afrique Noire", 20 April 1945, 27; AMAE, DAL, Possession Britannique 1948-1955, n° 17, Renner to Affaires Etrangères, "Propagande Américain" 31 August 1948; Nkrumah started studying at Lincoln University, Pennsylvania in 1953, see: David Birmingham: Kwame Nkrumah The Father of African Nationalism, Athens 1990, 4.

from French Africa.<sup>24</sup> Despite this competitive environment, the French rejected manipulative methods.

### The Power of the Cultural Artifact

<19>

In contrast with the Americans who wanted to attract and convince people, basing their policy on the ideas of public relations thinkers such as Edward Bernays, the target population was almost completely absent in French thinking about public diplomacy. Instead, attention was given to the quality of the cultural product. It was not questioned if target populations liked the culture that was offered, which went against US psychological tactics. For the USIA specialists and Bernays, the 'father of spin', particular target audiences had to be segmented into specific groups. These were: youth, intellectuals, leaders and, lastly, workers and farmers.<sup>25</sup> The French on the other hand were inward looking. Senghor pleaded for a political use of French culture, emphasizing self-confidence as a key element. After all: "France has nothing to lose by showing its work, its 'oeuvre'. It is this oeuvre that has a superior quality compared to the work of the British." There was nothing in British Africa that could compare to superior French ports, airports, urbanization projects and artworks. Cultural officers kept on emphasizing high cultural achievements in the conviction that Third World peoples were waiting to become more modern and that French high culture would impress.<sup>26</sup>

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Consequently, the offensive counter-propaganda goals that Senghor had set in 1955 were not translated in more persuasive methods. It seemed as if the French believed that their culture was impressive enough. This manifested itself on France's principle battle ground: education. Language instruction in particular was considered to be a propaganda tool in and of itself because it constituted the basis of rational thought and understanding, something Senghor sympathized with in his own views on cultural diplomacy and *Négritude*. Despite the call for a more assertive cultural action, it was not discussed which ideological messages could be transmitted in classrooms or which material would plant the most favorable ideas. Instead, the French wanted to constantly improve their didactic system. The French teachers were, according to Senghor' and other people in the field, not qualified enough to give the Africans an adequate linguistic background because it was studied as a 'dead language'.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> AMAE, DAL, AOF, n° 4, Haut Commissaire to Ministre d'outre-mer, 6 septembre 1950; AMAE, DAL, AOF, n°4, Le Gouverneur Secrétaire general to Monsieur le Haut commissaire de la republique ex A.O.F., 4 septembre 1950; AMAE, DAL, AOF, n° 4, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères to Ministre de la France d'outre-mer, "Attitude du Consul Général à Dakar", 27 April 1950; AMAE, DAL, AOF, n°4, Ministre de la France d'outre-mer to Direction Afrique-Levant "activité Consul des USA. JESTER à Dakar", 15 September 1950; AMAE, DAL, AOF, n° 4, Henri Bonnet to Robert Schuman, "Chef du Service d'Information américain à Dakar", 20 April 1950.

<sup>25</sup> Osgood: Total Cold War (see FN 13), 5; Reinhold Wagnleitner: Coca-colonization and the Cold War: the cultural mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War, Chapel Hill 1994, 73; Brian Angus McKenzie: Remaking France: Americanization, Public Diplomacy, and the Marshall Plan, New York / San Leandro / Ottawa 2007, 32, 35-38; Stuart Ewen: PR! - A Social History of Spin, New York 1996, 216-217.

<sup>26</sup> AMAE, DAL, Généralités 1952-1959, n° 66, Senghor to Présidence du Conseil, "Voyage officiel en Afrique occidentale britannique, du secrétaire d'Etat à la Présidence du Conseil 22 Septembre – 7 Octobre 1955", October 1955, 21; Connelly: A Diplomatic Revolution (see FN 4), 11-12; Michael E. Latham: The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present, Ithaca 2011, 1-10.

<sup>27</sup> Dueck: International Rivalry (see FN 13), 144, 146; Mary Niles Maack: Books and Libraries as Instruments of Cultural Diplomacy in Francophone Africa during the Cold War, in: Libraries & Culture 36 (2001), 61; AMAE, DAL, Généralités 1952-1959, n° 66, Senghor to Présidence du Conseil,



This emphasis on quality is reminiscent of the doctrine of Albert Charton, inspector general of education in *Afrique Occidentale Française* during the interwar period, who in 1936 saw France's educational role as one of "moral alliance" instead of "moral conquest".<sup>28</sup>

<21>

This quality improvement policy was even more crucial in the creation of an information center which was not primarily meant to spread information about France but to develop French studies in local education. For the US public diplomatic enterprise, this must have been beyond understanding. Leopoldville bluntly stated the short-term objectives of USIS: "To convince Congolese through such Information Center activities as basic English classes for Africans that close ties with West are to their advantage". This was accompanied by schoolbooks that conveyed the benefits of Western society. A USIA study on Africa stated in 1957: "We know that if we can train the teachers, write some of the textbooks, and exchange university students and professors our principles and beliefs will be deeply impressed upon the future leaders of any country".<sup>29</sup> In the French logic, however, the advanced level of their high culture would give them a cutting edge in the cultural competition. It would show the African the prestigious French intellect and create respect.

<22>

The rejection of manipulative tactics to reach the more assertive propaganda goals was nowhere more obvious than on the radio. The audience of Radio Brazzaville (which was founded in 1944), was not African: "Everybody knows the importance of this station in the field of global information".<sup>30</sup> Only in 1958 did the radio become more important because of the referendum on independence. The PR conscious ambassador Louis de Guiringaud used the French national holiday to give a presentation about the evolution of the French territories on Radio-Ghana. It was a story of progress that linked the representatives of present day Senegal, whose predecessors had once had a seat in the French Revolutionary Constituent Assembly, and Réunion with the Brazzaville conference in 1944 and, implicitly, with the referendum of 1958 on independence. "In more recent times, in 1944, Brazzaville, in French Equatorial Africa, was the place where Général de Gaulle formulated the principle of the French Union which was embodied in the constitution of 1946." He assured the listeners that: "General de Gaulle has indeed very much at heart the fate and happiness of the French overseas populations." Nevertheless, this did not seem to fit Senghor's demand of 1956 for an aggressive radio offensive.<sup>31</sup>

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"Voyage officiel en Afrique occidentale britannique, du secrétaire d'Etat à la Présidence du Conseil 22 Septembre – 7 Octobre 1955", October 1955, 21.

<sup>28</sup> AMAE, DAL, Généralités 1944-1952, n° 96, DGRC to DAL, "Récente mission de M. SENGHOR en Afrique Occidentale Britannique", 26 November 1955, 1; Maack: Books and Libraries (see FN 27), 76. French West-Africa, officially known as *Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF) grouped eight French colonies together between 1895 and 1958 in the West of Africa. These were: Mauritanie, Sénégal, Soudan français (present day Mali), Guinée, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Haute-Volta (present day Burkina Faso) and Dahomey (present day Bénin).

<sup>29</sup> NARA, RG. 306, UD-WW 285, FRC 1, USIS-Leopoldville to USIA, "Country Objectives", 6 October 1955; NARA, RG. 306, FRC 2, f: Regional, "A study of the Cultural Program in Africa With a Special Reference to Education", October-September 1957, 3.

<sup>30</sup> AMAE, DAL, Généralités, 1944-1955, n° 94, "exposé relative de la situation actuelle du poste national de Radio Brazzaville", 7 June 1950, 3.

<sup>31</sup> AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1953-1959, n° 10, Louis de Guiringaud Ambassadeur de France au Ghana to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Célébration de la Fête nationale" 19 juillet 1958, 2; All French colonies voted to remain within the Union, only Guinee voted for full independence. See: Elizabeth Schmidt: *Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946-1958*, Ohio 2007.

<23>

The persistent inward focus was not only conveyed by the fact that audiences were ignored but also expressed in the way that ideology – as the historian Lucas phrased it – functioned in bringing some coherence to the ad hoc decisions, tensions, contradictions and doubts of every day practice.<sup>32</sup> In France, Senghor employed – without explicitly mentioning it – the idea of *Négritude* to reconcile the different priorities that members of government had set and to come to terms with cultural competition. *Négritude* defined a hybrid of Black African values and French cultural achievements.<sup>33</sup> Senghor argued that a French presence in British Africa was necessary to help advance the Africans. The use and teaching of indigenous languages in the British territories delayed the advancement of the African people. Moreover, the lower classes became separated from the elites who familiarized themselves with French culture.<sup>34</sup> Because these ideas were akin to modernization theory – an economic and social theory which stated that every nation had to follow stages to become modern – they provided coherence and created support among very different actors such as Pinay and the *Direction des Relations Culturelles*.<sup>35</sup>

<24>

By contrast, the Americans in the Congo used references to modernization externally to reconcile two opposing aspects of their public relations effort. It was a unifying propaganda theme that had to assure the allegiance of European colonial powers in NATO and at the same time offer sympathy for the independence movements. A USIS-country plan stated: "the effective approach to both [...] will lie in the theme that: What is good for the African helps all". USIS-Congo emphasized that "good" meant that the African had to accept "responsible guidance," because even the more evolved Congolese – *évolué* – were slow, lazy, emotional and did not understand democracy. USIS also planned to employ informational materials that were specifically designed to "influence the African away from half-baked attitudes and toward maturity".<sup>36</sup> The local USIS operatives, who were squeezed between their NATO allies and the Africans, did not limit their activities to "damage control" but skillfully worked their way out of the conundrum that the combination of decolonization, Cold War and racism had created. On the level of the media that were used to deliver French

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<sup>32</sup> Ninkovich made a similar point in his book: Frank A. Ninkovich: *The diplomacy of ideas: US foreign policy and cultural relations, 1938-1950*, Cambridge 1981, 25; Scott Lucas / Mistry Kaeten: "Illusions of Coherence: George F. Kennan, U.S. Strategy and Political Warfare in the Early Cold War, 1946–1950", in: *Diplomatic History* 33 (2009), 39-66, here: 39.

<sup>33</sup> AMAE, DAL, *Généralités 1952-1959*, n° 66, Director of Extra-Mural studies, University College Ibadam to M.P. Goumain French Consul in Lagos, "Interview with M. Senghor at the Accra Broadcasting Station", 1955, 4; David Murphy: *Léopold Sédar Senghor: Race, Language, Empire*, in: Charles Forsdick / David Murphy (Eds.): *Postcolonial Thought in the French-speaking World*, Liverpool 2009, 157-170, here: 157.

<sup>34</sup> AMAE, DAL, *Généralités 1952-1959*, n° 66, Senghor to Présidence du Conseil, "Voyage officiel en Afrique occidentale britannique, du secrétaire d'Etat à la Présidence du Conseil 22 Septembre – 7 Octobre 1955", October 1955, 14.

<sup>35</sup> David C. Engerman / Corinna R. Unger: Introduction: *Towards a Global History of Modernization*, in: *Diplomatic History* 33 (2009), 375-385, here: 375; AMAE, DAL, *Généralités 1952-1959*, n° 66, Pinay to Senghor "Voyage officiel de M. SENGHOR en Afrique Occidentale Britannique", 23 December 1955; AMAE, DAL, *Généralités 1944-1952*, n° 66, DGRC to DAL, "Récente mission de M. SENGHOR en Afrique Occidentale Britannique", 26 November 1955, 1.

<sup>36</sup> NARA, RG. 306, UD-WW 285, FRC 1, USIS-Leopoldville to USIA, "Covering Despatch for USIA Classified Despatch N° 30", 30 June 1954, 4. The Belgian colonial government had set up a system in which Africans received a degree which 'proved' that they were more 'evolved' (*évolué*).

culture to Africa, modernization theory did play its part as a reconciler of opposing tendencies.<sup>37</sup>

<25>

While both the Americans and the French were subtly influenced by modernization theory and vaguely racist views, their methods reflect a fundamentally different conviction on how culture worked to create influence. French operatives expected to find Africans who were eagerly awaiting civilization. Americans, however, knew that adjustment to the target population's taste was crucial to success. The French disregard for the public exemplifies a crucial element in France's theory of public diplomacy. The power to create positive dispositions could solely be found in the cultural artifact or activity: neither the way it was presented nor the message it conveyed nor the mere of France mattered. Only the intrinsic quality of the cultural artefact or activity was important.<sup>38</sup>

<26>

The inability of French public diplomats to think about culture in more aggressive and methodological terms prompts us to rethink the nature of post-war French cultural actions. The year 1945 has been seen as a historical rupture because France's cultural reputation had received a blow due to the fast capitulation. However, French cultural policy did not remain stable throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup> At any rate, the claim that France was the first country to understand 'soft power' is imprecise. The creation of the *Alliance Française* at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did not mean that the political implications behind culture – inherent in the concept of soft power<sup>40</sup> – were immediately understood. The nineteenth century French tradition in which cultural diplomacy was a private initiative remained dominant until serious problems forced a change. In the US, by contrast, public diplomacy surfaced later on in an age that was marked by a change in the nature of international relations. The communications revolution, mass politics and the improbable nature of nuclear war heightened the importance of symbolic modes of combat.<sup>41</sup>

<27>

The incompatibility of the competitive goals that Senghor had set and the belief in the intrinsic power of French culture with disregard for the audience would inevitably lead to

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<sup>37</sup> For the 'damage controle' argument, see: Osgood: *Total Cold War* (see FN 13), 165; Osgood: *Words and Deeds* (see FN 10), 3-5; While public diplomacy contained no inherent convictions about mastery, the civilization mission and modernization theory were not absent in public diplomacy. For the argument that modernization theory was not a real part of public diplomacy, see: Dueck: *International Rivalry* (see FN 13), 140; Alice Conklin: *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*, Stanford 2000, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Despite the rather diffuse approach, the French strategy in Africa was not based on a political economy of cultural diplomacy. See: Nicholas Garnham: *Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass-Communication*, in: Meenakshi Gigi Durham / Douglas Kellner (Eds.): *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, Malden / Oxford / Carlton 2006, 201-229.

<sup>39</sup> For this argument see: Dubosclard: *L'action artistique* (see FN 13), 14; Robert J. Young: *Marketing Marianne: French propaganda in America, 1900-1940*, Piscataway 2004, XIII, 173.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph S. Nye: *Soft power: the means to success in world politics*, New York 2004, 1-10. For the argument that France was the first to realize the power of culture see Saint-Gilles: *La présence culturelle de la France aux Etats-Unis pendant la guerre froide: 1944-1963*, Paris 2007, 21; Laurence Saint-Gilles: "La culture comme levier de la puissance: le cas de la politique culturelle de la France aux États-Unis pendant de la guerre froide", in: *Relations Internationales* 28 (2009), 97-109, here: 99; Dubosclard: *L'action artistique* (FN 13), 21.

<sup>41</sup> John Lewis Gaddis: *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War*, Oxford / New York 1989; Osgood: *Total Cold War* (see FN 13), 2; Saint-Gilles: *La culture comme levier* (see FN 40), 98.

changes when the results disappointed and the problems on the African continent became more pressing. A closer look at Africa suggests that, from the perspective of tactics, the pivotal year was 1960. When the winds of change blew throughout Africa, France started using culture in a more strategic way.

### **Fine Tuning the Medium and the Emergence of the Audience (1960-1965)**

<28>

Louis de Guiringaud ambassador to Ghana was frustrated. The Americans can attract more than a thousand people in their cinema in Accra, while there is little interest for the culture that has been produced in 'civilized' countries, he remarked. At the same time, the wave of independence created an anti-French climate among the new African nations. The official Pan-Africanist propaganda of Ghana depicted the French as "the enemies of Africa". Consequently students went on exchange to the USA or Germany instead of France.<sup>42</sup> To cope with this twofold crisis of anti-French sentiment and ineffective pro-French cultural activities, the French operation began to think about the reaction of the audience.

<29>

For the French, the rejection of their culture could not possibly lie in the product itself, which had been carefully perfected over the course of the decade. Language teachers had received better training and theatre productions had been better planned.<sup>43</sup> The problem had to therefore lie in the way this high quality product had been delivered. To address this situation the methods that the most successful propaganda agencies in Africa used were analyzed and integrated into the French cultural strategy. The final goals of this operation remained the same: the methods were adjusted to fit the ambitious counter-propaganda program that Senghor had envisioned.

### **Inspiring Examples, Changing Methodologies and Customer Satisfaction**

<30>

Operations by USIA, Nkrumah and Great Britain were sources of inspiration. The USIA activities were studied not only because they were successful but also because the French had traditionally focused on the US as the most important threat to their colonial claims. The American operation was seen as a success when it came to mass multimedia events and was admired for the amount of financial resources that were mobilized. Their cultural diplomacy was considered to be less successful.<sup>44</sup>

<31>

Nkrumah's cultural operation effectively disseminated – in the eyes of the French – a vast quantity of literature in English about Ghana throughout Africa. These texts were considered

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<sup>42</sup> AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 72, Louis de Guiringaud Amb de France au Ghana to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Information politique", 14 May 1960, 2; AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 72, Louis de Guiringaud Ambassadeur de France au Ghana to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Enseignement du français au Ghana", 21 April 1960, 7.

<sup>43</sup> AMAE, DAL, Congo belge 1953-1959, n° 41, Louis de Guiringaud Ambassade Leopoldville to DGRC, "Copie de ma lettre de ce jour RC/ 86, adressée au Département (Direction des Relations Culturelles) A.S Passage de la troupe de l'Union française", 17 février 1954; AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 72, Louis de Guiringaud Ambassadeur de France au Ghana to Monsieur le ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Enseignement du français au Ghana", 21 April 1960, 1; Connelly: A Diplomatic Revolution (see FN 4), 10.

<sup>44</sup> AMAE, DAL, Généralités, Point IV, n° 55, Henri Bonnet to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Effort culturel des États-Unis en Afrique. Création d'une section africaine à l'institute of International Education", 19 October 1950, 1.

to be of high quality and – what was stressed – adapted to local audiences which made them into a huge success. The French were interested in the post cards that depicted Africans as being at the bedrock of every major intellectual achievement in world history such as mathematics and philosophy. The postcards stated that the Africans had taught the ancient Greeks the alphabet and architecture had originated with "African mothers laying foundations for building construction". The Ghana propagandists had however themselves borrowed from the Americans. The scenes had been painted by Earl Sweeting, an American artist, and the post cards had been printed in New York.<sup>45</sup> The lay out was qualitatively superior and had therefore attracted the attention of the French, who were looking for ways to improve the appeal of their own operation and produce publications of a high quality.

<32>

The British were a third source of influence through the Anglo-French talks on information, which began in January 1960 and dealt with the ways in which information could be utilized to combat communist influence in Africa. Information was being exchanged and cooperation in broadcasting systems was established. It was agreed that Radio Brazzaville would maintain and develop its activities towards Africa and would directly depend upon the *Radiodiffusion Télévision Française*. The countries outside Africa would not be served any more. Although the sources are incomplete, the Anglo-French conversations do seem to indicate that the second rank position that radio had had at the beginning of the 1950s was over by 1960..<sup>46</sup>

<33>

The French were eager students who borrowed methods from all actors in Africa, sometimes being impressed more by one player than another. An example of this was Guiringaud's attempts to reform the distribution of French publications. He read *Les Nouvelles de Moscou*, *American Outlook*, *London Press Service*, *Indian News*, *News of the Week*, *News from Israel*, *London Illustrated* and *Commonwealth Today*. The latter had impressed him and he wanted a similar magazine. Probably meant as a starting point for his own *Commonwealth Today*, he asked for more copies of a book that had been sent to the embassy, called 'Communauté'. He wished for a print magazine that contained political information about the 'Communauté Française' and the travels of general De Gaulle or Khrushchev visit to France. Moreover, these stories had to be accompanied by large photographs. The reference to modern and attractive printing techniques pointed to the new importance of target audiences and was clearly based on issue 73 of *British Commonwealth Today* to which the embassy dispatch had been stapled. It featured the opening of the Commonwealth Exhibition by Princess Margaret and large photos of the exhibit.<sup>47</sup>

### **Fusion of Old and New**

<34>

While the informational media, such as images, magazines and radio gained ground because of the transnational influence of others in Africa, their adoption was not an issue of

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<sup>45</sup> AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 72, Louis de Guiringaud Amb de France au Ghana to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Information politique", 14 May 1960, 2; AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 34, "Histoire de l'Afrique racontée aux Ghanéens", 22 February 1960.

<sup>46</sup> AMAE, DAL, Généralités 1960-1965, n° 94, Foreign Office to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, "Anglo-French Talks on Information: Outline Record and Conclusions The Foreign Office – July 4/5, 1960", 1960, 2.

<sup>47</sup> AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 72, Louis de Guiringaud Amb de France au Ghana to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Information politique", 14 May 1960, 4; AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 72, "Commonwealth Today", 2.

plain emulation. Informational strategies were adjusted to the French operation and received a very specific role after 1960. From the failure to reach African audiences, they had learned that "every effort on our part is bound to fail if it is not accompanied by an effort to spread news about France and its political situation". Culture had failed, not because it was of bad quality, but because Africans were insufficiently prepared for the culture that had been devised in so called "highly civilized" countries.<sup>48</sup> What interested the Ghanaians, the French embassy noticed, were the African people in the French territories. Information had to help Africans understand French high culture, the major bearer of French prestige. In Guiringaud's words: "to psychologically prepare the terrain and get people acquainted with certain aspects of life in France".<sup>49</sup>

<35>

As the decade progressed, the star of information would rise even higher. Jean Desparmat, who traveled to the newly opened embassies in Central and East Africa to study their informational strategy, summarized this new belief: "information is a technique but above all it is a mind-set".<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, even after 1960 the emphasis on information and the priority of high culture coexisted: information had to prepare the African mind for genuine French culture, "used as a means not an end".<sup>51</sup> By 1965 it was established that multimedia exhibitions worked best to familiarize Africans with France: "The material that was specially recommended for them has been installed and will begin to have an impact: French Radio and Television (RTF), information Centers, documents, films, etc."<sup>52</sup>

<36>

Even education, the core of traditional French public diplomacy, set up an attempt to offer educational programming on the radio. When this multimedia strategy failed however, the low level of sophistication was blamed. Subsequently, it was emphasized that in order to receive a scholarship individuals were required to have a certain intellectual baggage, because these were the students that returned with a favorable impression of France. Modern media were thus considered, but ultimately the disapproval of the French culture was due to misunderstanding. The PR scramble also came into play when, in response to the success of American and German exchange programs, the scholarships were multiplied.<sup>53</sup>

<37>

The way the French handled film was a combination of old and new approaches too. Louis de Guiringaud had complained that the majority of the foreign posts in Africa had set up an information center with a film section. The ambassador in Ghana was frustrated by the ability of the Americans to show a very nice movie – "un très beau film" – about Eisenhower's travel through Europe. He wanted it too since everybody used movies: "The most important missions are the Russian, American, English, German, Indian and Pakistani, who from time

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<sup>48</sup> AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 72, Louis de Guiringaud Amb de France au Ghana to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Information politique", 14 May 1960, 2.

<sup>49</sup> AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 72, Louis de Guiringaud Amb de France au Ghana to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Information politique", 14 May 1960, 2.

<sup>50</sup> AMAE, DAL, Nord Est Afrique 1960-1965, n° 8, Desparmet to DAL, "Mission d'étude des moyens d'information français en Afrique centrale et orientale", 6 May 1964, 15.

<sup>51</sup> AMAE, DAL, Nord Est Afrique 1960-1965, n° 8, "Mission pour l'information de l'Afrique orientale & centrale", 5 June 1964, 8.

<sup>52</sup> AMAE, DAL, Nord Est Afrique 1960-1965, n° 8, Desparmet to DAL, "Mission d'étude des moyens d'information français en Afrique centrale et orientale", 6 May 1964, 36.

<sup>53</sup> AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 72, Louis de Guiringaud Amb de France au Ghana to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Enseignement du français au Ghana", 21 April 1960, 7.

to time show movies with a potentially high propaganda value." By 1964 60% of the inhabitants of Accra went to the movies from time to time.<sup>54</sup>

<38>

At the same time however, the film project was very much based on a program in which internships were offered to African film students. They received the opportunity to study "the French working methods in the field of film production, photography, sound mixing and scenario writing". The idea that there was something as a French way of making films and that the teaching of it would be beneficial for the French image is intriguing. It shows how much confidence the French had in their core strategy of education, even though competition made them implement other more media oriented tactics.<sup>55</sup> Paul Tate, the cinema coordinator, succeeded in writing an evaluation report of fifteen pages without mentioning one movie or story line. USIS-Leopoldville, by contrast, like others in the USIA believed in the enchanting quality of film. They offered a very wide selection of films in the Congo. *The Ancient Curse* and Disney cartoons were screened with more politically inspired films such as *Eisenhower's talk to the American people*.<sup>56</sup> The foreign competition did not crush the French way of dealing with film, even though, in the middle of the sixties, the French in Africa agreed that cinema, along with radio and TV, were the best means of informational preparation.<sup>57</sup>

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The most important strategic change that flowed from this transnational borrowing process was the close attention to the taste of African audiences. The idea of 'customer satisfaction' became anchored in the minds of the French organizers. Jean Desparmet spoke of "creating a 'clientele' for the post; a constant 'public relations' effort".<sup>58</sup> Paul Tate, cultural attaché in the French Embassy of Accra, even deliberately stayed in a hotel that was frequented by Africans in order to get in contact with them.<sup>59</sup> In 1965 the embassy ordered a study about the media Ghanaians used, similar research was also ordered by the USIA and the British

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<sup>54</sup> AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 72, Louis de Guiringaud Amb de France au Ghana to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Information politique", 14 May 1960, 2; AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960 – 1965, n° 72, "Rapport de Mission Effectuée Par Monsieur Stephane Golmann Pour le Compte de La Direction Generale Des Affaires Culturelles et Techniques du Ministre des Affaires Étrangères Du Ministre des Affaires Étrangères Francaises au Ghana", 31 December 1960, 6: "Il faut dire que la présence à Accra d'Ambassades étrangères faisant un gros effort dans le domaine audio-visuel"; AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 34, "Les Moyens d'Information en Afrique Etude Au Ghana Tome I & II", March-December 1964, 22.

<sup>55</sup> AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960 – 1965, n° 72, "Rapport de Mission Effectuée Par Monsieur Stephane Golmann Pour le Compte de La Direction Generale Des Affaires Culturelles et Techniques du Ministre des Affaires Étrangères Du Ministre des Affaires Étrangères Francaises au Ghana", 31 December 1960.

<sup>56</sup> NARA, RG. 306, UD-WW 285, FRC 1, USIS-Leopoldville to USIA, "Summary of this dispatch", 28 June 1954, 13-14; NARA, RG. 59, Central Decimal, 511.55-511.552, f: 1, USIS-Leopoldville to USIA, "December Report on Information and Cultural Activities", 19 January 1950, 1; Wagnleitner: Coca-colonization (see FN 25), 227; McKenzie: Remaking (see FN 25), 52.

<sup>57</sup> AMAE, DAL, Nord Est Afrique 1960-1965, n° 8, "Mission pour l'information de l'Afrique orientale & centrale", 5 June 1964, 24.

<sup>58</sup> AMAE, DAL, Nord Est Afrique 1960-1965, n° 8, Desparmet to DAL "Mission d'étude des moyens d'information francais en afrique centrale et orientale", 6 May 1964, 33.

<sup>59</sup> AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960 – 1965, n° 72, "Rapport de Mission Effectuée Par Monsieur Stephane Golmann Pour le Compte de La Direction Generale Des Affaires Culturelles et Techniques du Ministre des Affaires Étrangères Du Ministre des Affaires Étrangères Francaises au Ghana", 31 December 1960, 8.

Council to get a better understanding of how to reach the target population. The French learned that 65% of the inhabitants of Accra, 52% of the people in other cities and 76% of the natives in the jungle considered radio to be their best means of information.<sup>60</sup> In the sixties the comfort of the audience suddenly became a concern. The French had noticed that the comfortable and spacious theaters in which the Americans offered high quality color film attracted a lot of costumers and therefore had a big propaganda value. The French in Kenya also decided to cancel the viewing of commercial French films because it was estimated that the African public would not be able to appreciate those movies. Knowledge of the French and Western context was required.<sup>61</sup>

<40>

the method, which used information as a preparation of the field so that cultural efforts could flourish, influenced the evaluation that was made of USIA's effectiveness. While the Americans were seen as successful in areas such as film, pamphlets and radio, efforts in the area of higher culture were consistently labeled as unsuccessful by 1960. The American book exhibit in Leopoldville in 1958 was not a great success according to consul Mazoyer, who at the same time – without any contradiction – argued that the creeping American influence in the Louvanium University<sup>62</sup> had to be countered by a discreet French presence.<sup>63</sup> Evaluating the US high cultural activities as a simultaneous success and failure was due to the French conviction that high culture ought to be presented in a very specific way. The French had learned that in Africa products of high culture could only be successfully presented when sufficient guidance was offered. Education gave people exactly that but the American book exhibitions were an attempt to impose high culture without any guidance. The French by contrast only offered their books by the end of the fifties to people whom they knew were able to correctly interpret the marvels of French knowledge and culture.<sup>64</sup> Methods were a mixture of old and new, tactics that competitors employed were integrated into own strategies and viewpoints in a calculated fashion.

### **Conclusion: International Public Diplomacy**

<41>

The French cultural effort showed signs of insecurity about the status of French culture as well as hints of cultural superiority. Understanding this contradiction requires an evaluation of its international dimensions: in Africa there were constant doubts about the way French culture was offered, while belief in French cultural superiority remained unshaken. Local officers were impressed by the propaganda achievements of other nations and adjusted their own outlook accordingly. Only in hindsight were these constant tactical changes perceived as a confusing element in an otherwise rigorous self-understanding of French culture.

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<sup>60</sup> AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 34, "Les Moyens d'Information en Afrique Etude Au Ghana Tome I & II", March-December 1964, 1-2.

<sup>61</sup> AMAE, DAL, Ghana 1960-1965, n° 72, Louis de Guiringaud Amb de France au Ghana to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, "Information politique", 14 May 1960, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Material aid to that institution had become a new priority in 1955 for USIS. See: NARA, RG. 306, UD-WW 285, FRC 1, USIS-Leopoldville to USIA, "Short Term objective", 11 September 1955.

<sup>63</sup> AMAE, DAL, Congo Belge 1953-1959, n° 41, Henri-Francis Mazoyer to Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, "Exposition du Livre Américain à Léopoldville", 6 November 1958, 1; AMAE, DAL, Congo Belge 1953-1959, n° 41, Henri-Francis Mazoyer to Minstre des Affaires Etrangères, "Diffusion du Livre Français. Et Contacts Universitaires", 6 May 1958, 1.

<sup>64</sup> AMAE, DAL, Nord Est Afrique 1960-1965, n° 8, "Mission pour l'information de l'Afrique orientale & centrale", 5 June 1964, 2.



As the above shows, the internationalist perspective uncovers historical aspects that would otherwise remain hidden. While it is true that sources from western archives are most commonly used, they do not inevitably lead to a history in which the dominant role is played by the conventional western players. It can also result in an appreciation for the multitude of connections, show that France – despite its decline after World War II – still felt confident enough to spread its culture and it can suggest that the US and France were not necessarily the most potent players in Africa. Pan-African propaganda was partially adopted. Matthew Connelly argued that the Algerians adopted so called Western and modern means of communication to further their cause. The French tribulations in Africa show that the reverse was also true. Third World people were also a source of inspiration for 'the West'. There was no binary opposition between a homogenous colonizer and a powerless mass of subjects, as Edward Saïd claims. 'Western' and 'Oriental' actors borrowed and re-invented methods to attain influence in a global and intercultural war for the soul of the new Africa.<sup>65</sup>

### **Abbreviations**

AMAE Archives de Ministère des Affaires étrangères, La Courneuve, France  
DAL Direction Afrique Levant  
DGRC Direction Générale des Relations Culturelles  
JFK John F. Kennedy  
NARA National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland

PR Public relations  
RTF Radiodiffusion Télévision Française  
US United States  
USIA United States Information Agency  
USIS United States Information Service

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### **Empfohlene Zitierweise:**

Frank Gerits: An International Approach to The Cultural Cold War, in: *zeitenblicke* 12, Nr. 1 [10.06.2013], URL: [http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2013/1/Gerits/index\\_html](http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2013/1/Gerits/index_html), URN: urn:nbn:de:0009-9-36129

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<sup>65</sup> Dueck: International Rivalry (see FN 13), 148; Connelly: A Diplomatic Revolution (FN 4), 4.