

## Négritude—Literature and Ideology

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PAN-AFRICANISM has been described as 'essentially a movement of emotions and ideas',<sup>1</sup> and this description is equally applicable to *négritude*, which is its cultural parallel. Indeed, no better phrase could be found to sum up its double nature, first as a psychological response to the social and cultural conditions of the 'colonial situation',<sup>2</sup> and secondly as a fervent quest for a new and original orientation.

In the former respect, the imaginative writings of the French-speaking Negro intellectuals offer a precious testimony to the human problems and inner conflicts of the colonial situation; in the latter respect, their propaganda writing and other activities represent an effort to transcend the immediate conditions of this situation by a process of reflection. *Négritude* is thus at the same time a literary and an ideological movement.

### I. THE LITERATURE

The literature of *négritude* is dominated by the collective consciousness of the black writer as member of a minority group which is subordinated to another and more powerful group within the total political and social order. The literary preoccupations of the movement revolve around this central problem, the Negro predicament of having been forced by historical circumstances into a state of dependence upon the west, considered the master society and the dominating culture. The literary themes of *négritude* can be seen as a counter-movement away from this state: they constitute a symbolic progression from subordination to independence, from alienation, through revolt, to self-affirmation.

#### 1. Alienation

The theme of exile is the point of departure of the whole literary expression of *négritude*, and in it is involved the most pathetic aspect of the French-speaking Negro intellectuals' specific situation, which derives

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<sup>1</sup> Colin Legum, *Pan-Africanism* (London, 1962), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'colonial situation' will be used here to denote the global situation of black people as it affected the writings of French-speaking Negro intellectuals. The first part of this study has already spelt out how the position of the Negro in the United States was readily assimilated to the domination of other Negro peoples by the west.

from the political and cultural uprooting of black people in general by colonial conquest. The overwhelming sentiment that dominates in this connection is the black man's sense of separation from his own world and of being thrown into a social system with whose cultural values he can strike no personal relation. The black man recognises himself as belonging to an 'out-group', an alien in relation to the west, which controls the total universe in which he moves. For the French-speaking Negro writer, this situation is signified by his physical exile in Europe.

Bless you, Mother,  
I hear your voice when I am given up to the  
insidious silence of this European night  
Prisoner under the white cold sheets tightly drawn,  
prisoner of all the inextricable anxieties that  
encumber me.<sup>1</sup>

This sentiment of belonging no longer to oneself but to another goes together with an awareness of inferiority, which becomes translated in social terms into a caste and class consciousness. The association between race and servitude is a constant theme in Negro literature, and occupies a prominent place in *négritude*:

I am a docker in Brooklyn  
Bunker-hand on all the oceans  
Labourer in Cuba,  
Soldier in Algeria.<sup>2</sup>

The economic exploitation of the race which defines it as a community and give its members a group consciousness is a consequence of its original humiliation by conquest and slavery. The memory of slavery thus has a particular significance for Negro writers, especially for those of the Caribbean.

And they sold us like beasts and counted our teeth . . . and they examined our genitals, felt the gloss and the roughness of our skin, pawed us, weighed us, and put around our neck like tamed animals the strap of servitude and of nickname.<sup>3</sup>

The black man's principal role in western history has thus been as an economic tool.<sup>4</sup> This is what Césaire, echoing Marx, has called 'the reduction of the Negro into an object' (*la chosification du nègre*).<sup>5</sup> But although the Negro experience forms, in this light, part of the general Marxist conception of the 'class struggle', the prevailing preoccupation

<sup>1</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, 'On the Appeal from the Race of Sheba', translated by John Reed and Clive Wake in *Selected Poems* (London, 1964), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Roussan Camille, *Assaut à la nuit* (Paris, 1956), p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Et les chiens se taisaient* (Paris, 1956), pp. 93-3.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London, 2nd edn. 1964).

<sup>5</sup> Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris, 1955), p. 22.

of these writers was with the black people as a race, and not as a class.<sup>1</sup> They were concerned with the collective image of the black man in the west and with his human status in the world.

The colonial system was based on a social division determined by 'the colour line',<sup>2</sup> and it was maintained by a racial ideology which defined the black man as inferior. The social relationship between coloniser and colonised was thus converted, as far as the black man was concerned, into an opposition between *white* and *black*, which acquired the moral values summarised by the South African, Bloke Modisane, in these words:

White is right, and to be black is to be despised, dehumanised . . . classed among the beasts, hounded and persecuted, discriminated against, segregated and oppressed by government and by man's greed. *White is the positive standard, black the negative.*<sup>3</sup> [Italics mine]

The cultural and political ascendancy of the white man over the black man, combined with the active denigration of the black man, has thus had the effect of vitiating the latter's self-esteem, with profound psychological consequences, which involve shame and self-hatred.<sup>4</sup> The demoralising effect of the caste system on the black man has been expressed by Léon Damas:

My todays have each one for my yesterdays  
Wide eyes that roll with rancour and with shame.<sup>5</sup>

The black man in the world suffered his negation as a human being. This was the external reality with which the literature of *négritude* was concerned. But there is a more personal and intimate side to this theme of alienation, which has to do with the cultural situation of the assimilated Negro intellectual.

<sup>1</sup> Gunnar Myrdal has observed that racial solidarity is more marked among U.S. Negroes than class consciousness. He speaks therefore of a 'caste struggle', thus making the economic status of the American Negro secondary to the ethnic classification, in his analysis of the Negroes' place in U.S. society. *An American Dilemma* (New York, 9th edn. 1944), ch. 31, pp. 667 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Raymond Kennedy: 'The colour line, indeed, is the foundation of the entire colonial system, for on it is built the whole social, economic, and political structure'. 'The Colonial Crisis and the Future', in Ralph Linton (ed.), *The Science of Man in the World Crisis* (New York, 1945), p. 308.

<sup>3</sup> Bloke Modisane, 'Why I ran away', in J. Langston Hughes (ed.), *An African Treasury* (New York, 1960), p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> The psychological implications of racial discrimination for the black man in white society have produced numerous studies. This question seems to have been best summarised by John Dollard: 'The upshot of the matter seems to be that recognizing one's own Negro traits is bound to be a process wounding to the basic sense of integrity of the individual who comes into life with no such negative views of his own characteristics.' *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New York, 2nd edn. 1949), p. 184. The genesis of Negro 'self-hatred' is discussed at length by Roger Bastide in his chapter on 'Le Heurt des races, des civilisations et la psychanalyse', in *Sociologie et psychanalyse* (Paris, 1950), ch. xi, pp. 235 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Léon Damas, 'La Complainte du nègre', in *Pigments* (Paris, 1963), p. 45.

The colonial enterprise was presented as a 'civilising mission', aimed at transforming the black man by his progressive approximation to the ideals of western civilisation through education. This implied in most cases his dissociation from the basic personality pattern imprinted in him by his original culture. Western education was thus an instrument of imposed acculturation, aimed at replacing the black man's original modes of thought and feeling, which were attuned to his native norms, by another personality structure corresponding to western norms.<sup>1</sup> The French policy of *assimilation* probably went furthest in this cultural policy, which was to some extent common to all the colonising powers, of attempting to fashion the black man—or at least a black *élite*—in a foreign image.

This problem is at the heart of the cultural and spiritual dilemma of the French-speaking Negro intellectual. For in order to be acceptable socially in the western world, it was necessary for him to deny a part of himself. Conformity to white ideals was only possible at the cost of a repression of his original self.<sup>2</sup>

I must hide in the depths of my veins  
The Ancestor storm-dark skinned, shot with  
lightning and thunder  
And my guardian animal, I must hide him  
Lest I smash through the boom of scandal.  
He is my faithful blood and demands fidelity  
Protecting my naked pride against  
Myself and all the insolence of lucky races.<sup>3</sup>

The result was a division in his personality. The Haitian poet Léon Laleau has expressed this sentiment of the divided self in remarkable poetic terms:

This beleaguered heart  
Alien to my language and dress  
On which I bite like a brace  
The borrowed sentiments and customs of Europe.  
Mine is the agony  
The unutterable despair  
In breaking with the cold words of France  
The pulsing heart of Senegal.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the theoretical basis of these remarks, see A. Kardiner, *The Psychological Frontiers of Society* (New York, 2nd edn. 1946), and M. Dufrenne, *La Personnalité de base* (Paris, 1953).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. O. Mannoni, *Psychologie de la colonisation* (Paris, 1950), pp. 10–30.

<sup>3</sup> Senghor, 'Totem', in *Selected Poems*, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Léon Laleau, 'Trahison', translated by Samuel Allen, in Jacob Drachler (ed.), *African Heritage* (New York, 1963), p. 195; French original in Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* (Paris, 1948).

We touch here upon what Roger Bastide has called the 'pathology of the uprooted man', and which R. E. Park has observed in the 'cultural hybrid' as part of the psychological results of culture contact and the acculturative process: 'spiritual instability, intensified self consciousness, restlessness and malaise'.<sup>1</sup> Damas has put this sentiment of *malaise* into verse:

I feel ridiculous  
in their shoes  
in their evening suits,  
in their starched shirts,  
in their hard collars  
in their monocles  
in their bowler hats.<sup>2</sup>

This is a problem that was even more accentuated in the case of the Caribbean writers, whose non-western cultural background was marginal, and whose racial stock, because of the total orientation of their society towards western values, symbolised by whiteness, was more a source of shame and frustration than for the Africans. The pressure upon them to deny their racial connections and to identify with Europe was even greater, though they were subject to the same discrimination as the Africans.<sup>3</sup> The West Indians' sentiment of exile is thus intensified by a feeling of rootlessness, which Césaire expresses with the symbol of the island itself.

Island of the blood of Sargassoes  
island, nibbled remains of remora,  
island, backfiring laughter of whales,  
island, specious word of mounted proclamations,  
island, large heart spread out

island ill-jointed, island disjointed,  
all islands beckon  
all islands are widows.<sup>4</sup>

The black man, and especially the intellectual, found himself a man no longer in his own right, but with reference to another, thus estranged

<sup>1</sup> Roger Bastide, 'Problèmes de l'entrecroisement des civilisations et de leurs oeuvres', in G. Gurvitch (ed.), *Traité de sociologie* (Paris, 1963), II, p. 319; and R. E. Park, *Race and Culture* (New York, 1950), p. 356.

<sup>2</sup> Damas, 'Solde', in *Pigments*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. F. Henriques, 'Colour Values in Jamaica' in *British Journal of Sociology* (London), II, 2, 1951; and Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris, *Minorities in the New World* (New York, 1958). Edgar Mittelholzer, *A Morning at the Office* (London, 1950), and George Lamming, *The Emigrants* (London, 1955), offer sensitive inside views of this Caribbean problem.

<sup>4</sup> Césaire, 'Dit d'errance', in *Cadastre* (Paris, 1961), p. 90.

from himself; in exile, not only in a political and social sense, but also spiritually. The whole colonial existence appears as one long pining of the black self, an 'Ambiguous Adventure' as C. H. Kane has put it. A man divided between two worlds, his over-riding aspiration thus became, in the words of Kane's tragic hero, Diallobé, 'nothing but harmony'.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. *Revolt*

A situation of oppression offers to the victim a range of reactions limited by two opposite poles—total submission, or total refusal—but the exact nature and degree of this reaction will depend upon the experience and the disposition of the individual. The colonial situation as a whole was a collective political and cultural oppression of black people yet it cannot be said that it was felt uniformly as such. The black intellectuals were in fact privileged in comparison with the masses, as far as the more external conditions of life were concerned, and it is quite conceivable that their consciousness of the fundamental injustice of the system in which they lived was limited, if it existed at all.

But the mental conflict into which the French-speaking Negro intellectuals were plunged as individuals probably made them aware that their dilemma was inherent in the whole colonial situation. Thus they were forced, despite assimilation, into an identification with the colonised rather than with the coloniser:

But if I must choose at the hour of testing,  
I have chosen the verset of streams and of forests,  
The assonance of plains and rivers, chosen the  
rhythm of blood in my naked body,  
Chosen the trembling of balafongs, the harmony  
of strings and brass that seem to clash,  
chosen the  
Swing swing yes chosen the swing

I have chosen my toiling black people, my  
peasant people, the peasant race through  
all the world.  
'And thy brothers are wroth against thee, they,  
have set thee to till the earth.'  
To be your trumpet!<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Kane, *L'Aventure ambiguë* (Paris, 1961), p. 88. Cf. John Reed, 'Between Two Worlds', in *Makerere Journal* (Kampala), 7, 1963, for an analysis of the theme of cultural conflict in the African novel.

<sup>2</sup> Senghor, 'For Koras and Balafongs', in *Selected Poems*, pp. 13-14.

The literature of *négritude* became, as a result, a testimony to the injustices of colonial rule and an expression of the black man's resentment:

An immense fire which my continuous suffering  
and your sneers  
and your inhumanity,  
and your scorn  
and your disdain  
have lighted in the depths of my heart  
will swallow you all.<sup>1</sup>

The tone changes often from this kind of menace to one of accusation. The poetry of David Diop illustrates best this indictment of colonial rule:

In those days  
When civilisation kicked us in the face  
When holy water slapped our tamed foreheads,  
The vultures built in the shadow of their talons  
The blood-stained monument of tutelage  
In those days  
There was painful laughter on the  
metallic hell of the roads  
And the monotonous rhythm of the  
*pater noster*  
Drowned the howling on the plantations.<sup>2</sup>

Accusation in turn becomes a criticism of western society as a whole, and in this respect the contradiction of 'war and civilisation' became a powerful weapon. Senghor's *Hosties Noires*, for example, are a collection of war poems in the tradition of Wilfrid Owen, but he reveals a particular view of European war when he speaks with sarcasm of having been 'delivered up to the savagery of civilised men'.<sup>3</sup>

The shortcomings of western society, both within and without, furnished that element of disenchantment which made it possible for *négritude* to develop an attitude of refusal towards the colonial system:

I shout no  
no to class  
no to the taint of soot  
no to the humid floor

<sup>1</sup> Regnor C. Bernard, *Nigre*, quoted and translated by G. R. Courthault, *Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature* (London, 1962), p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> David Diop, 'Les Vautours', in *Coups de pylon* (Paris, 1960), p. 8; translated by Ulli Beier in J. Langston Hughes (ed.), *Poems from Black Africa* (Bloomington, 1963), p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Senghor, *Hosties Noires* (Paris, 1948), p. 115.

no to the glass furnace  
no to damped lights  
no to love paid for in bank notes.<sup>1</sup>

Protest, accusation, and refusal lead inevitably to a call to arms:

But when, O my people,  
winters in flames dispersing a host  
of birds and ash,  
shall I see the revolt of your hands?<sup>2</sup>

Protest and threats of revolt are in themselves an indirect form of defence, a verbal means of projecting violent reaction which cannot be realised physically. Although the militancy of *négritude* was an explicit response to a real situation (and the agitated character of a good deal of this writing indicates that the situation was often felt as real personal experience), it has no more than a symbolic value. Its real significance, however, lies elsewhere, for it does reveal in fact the hidden mechanism of response to oppression. The resentment of the black man against domination tends towards retaliation and, as Fanon has shown, his consciousness as a colonised man is suffused with violence.<sup>3</sup> In the work of Césaire, this element is translated in poetic terms into an apocalyptic vision:

And the sea lice-ridden with islands  
breaking under rose fingers  
flame shafts and my body  
thrown up whole from the thunderbolt.<sup>4</sup>

The surrealist technique is here employed in a manner appropriate to the alienated condition of the black man. It offers the black poet a means of projecting his dream of violence, and becomes in fact a symbolism of aggression. A corresponding side to this aggressiveness is the way in which the black poet responds by wilfully identifying himself with western symbols of evil:

I seek the thousand folds of the oceans  
witnesses of savageness

<sup>1</sup> René Depestre, 'Quand je crie non', in *Gerbes de sang*; quoted by Naomi Garret, *The Renaissance of Haitian Poetry* (Paris, 1963), p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Roumain, 'Prelude' to *Bois d'ébène* (Port-au-Prince, 1945). The titles of the collections of poems by French Negro writers speak manifestly of this mood: *Les Armes miraculeuses* (Césaire), *Coups de pilon* (D. Diop), *Feu de brousse* (Tchikaya U. Tarn'isi), *Balles noires* (Guy Tirolien), and so on.

<sup>3</sup> F. Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris, 1961), ch. 1. Georges Balandier and Roger Bastide have both drawn attention to this phenomenon, highlighted by the influence of the Apocalypse on 'messianic' movements. See G. Balandier, *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire*, and Bastide, *Sociologie et psychanalyse*, p. 262.

<sup>4</sup> Césaire, 'Soleil Serpent', in *Les Armes miraculeuses* (Paris, 1946), p. 25.

and rivers where beasts go to drink  
to make for myself a face  
that would scatter vultures.<sup>1</sup>

*Négritude* here borders on nihilism. Yet nihilism is not characteristic of the movement as a whole; more often than not, it represents a defiant truculence, as in this passage where Damas operates a literary reversal of situations in a way reminiscent of Nietzsche:

The White will never be negro  
for beauty is negro  
and negro is wisdom  
for endurance is negro  
and negro is courage  
for patience is negro  
and negro is irony  
for charm is negro  
and negro is magic

for joy is negro  
for peace is negro  
for life is negro.<sup>2</sup>

In this respect, one of the most striking technical innovations of *négritude* has to do with the reversal of colour associations in the western language which was the only tongue accessible to most of them, namely French, as in this example from Césaire's *Cahier*:

a solitary man imprisoned in white  
a solitary man who defies the white cries of  
white death  
TOUSSAINT TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE  
He is a man who bewitches the white hawk of  
white death  
He is a man alone in the sterile sea of white sand.<sup>3</sup>

A reversal of western symbols implies as well a reversal of the concepts associated with them. The revolt of *négritude* appears also as a refusal of western values, regarded as oppressive constraints. The Christian

<sup>1</sup> René Bélance, 'Moi nègre', in *Survivances*; quoted by Naomi Garret, *op. cit.* p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> Translated by Gerald Moore in *Seven African Writers* (London, 1962), introduction, p. xx, from Damas, *Black Label* (Paris, 1956), p. 52. The same reversal of situations occurs in Camara Leye's *The Radiance of the King* (London, 1959), where Clarence the white man goes through a succession of adventures in supplication of the attention of a black king.

<sup>3</sup> Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris, 1958 edn.), p. 46. Sartre observed, in connection with the problem posed to the black poet by his use of a European language: 'Let him open his mouth and he condemns himself, except in so far as he sets himself to destroy the hierarchy' (that is, of the 'coupled terms black-white'); *Black Orpheus*, p. 27.

religion in particular comes in for continual attack, and this theme has had an original and refreshing treatment, though mainly in strident notes, in the comic novels of Mongo Beti, in particular *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*.<sup>1</sup> Western morality is also set in contrast to the African's unbridled sensuality.<sup>2</sup>

It can be remarked that, in general, the theme of revolt in the literature of *négritude* represents a reinforcement of the antagonism created by the colonial situation, between the white master and the black subordinate. It is a way of underlining an opposition that was implicit in the colonial human context. It is not, however, an end in itself, as Sartre has observed, but rather part of a movement towards a more constructive vision.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. *Rediscovery*

The refusal of western political and cultural domination in the literature of *négritude* represents also a severing of the bonds that tie the black man to western civilisation. The corollary to this claim for freedom from the west is a search for new values. Revolt becomes not only a self-affirmation but also an instrument of self-differentiation:

For myself I have nothing to fear I am before  
Adam I belong neither to the same lion  
nor to the same tree I am of another  
warmth and of another cold.<sup>4</sup>

The quest for new values thus leads the black writer to self-definition in terms that are non-western, and the association between the black race and Africa acquires a new meaning: instead of being a source of shame, it becomes a source of pride. This is the ultimate end of *négritude*, and much of the literature is dedicated to a rehabilitation of Africa, a way of refurbishing the image of the black man. The psychological function of this, as well as being a counter to the Negro's inferiority complex, is to

<sup>1</sup> This theme is also a favourite one with English-speaking African writers. C. Okigbo calls the Angelus 'the bells of exile'; *Heavensgate* (Ibadan, 1962), p. 35. J. P. Clark writes in 'Ivbie', almost a poem of *négritude*:

Is it ruse or truce  
That peace which passeth all understanding?

*Poems* (Ibadan, 1962), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (Ibadan, 1963) for a parallel treatment of this theme by an African writing in English.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre speaks of *négritude* as 'the weak stage of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis; the position of *Négritude* as antithetical value is the moment of Negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself and the blacks who use it well know this; they know that it serves to prepare the way for the synthesis or the realisation of the human society without racism'. *Black Orpheus* (Paris, 1963), p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> Césaire, 'Visitation', in *Les Armes miraculeuses*, p. 32.

permit an open and unashamed identification with the continent, a poetic sublimation of those associations in the Negro's mind which constitute for him a source of mental conflict in his relationship with western culture: a process of self-avowal and self-recognition. This view of the movement is best justified by the writings of the West Indians, whose collective repression of Africa, as has been pointed out, has been the more painful:

Africa, I have preserved your memory, Africa  
you are in me  
like the splinter in a wound  
like a totem in the heart of a village.<sup>1</sup>

A myth of Africa developed in consequence out of the literature of *négritude*, which involved a glorification of the African past and a nostalgia for the imaginary beauty and harmony of traditional African society, as in Camara Laye's evocation of his African childhood.<sup>2</sup>

This strain in *négritude* is probably charged with the greatest emotional force. Senghor for instance infuses into his well-known love poem, *Black Woman*, a feeling that is more filial than erotic, due to his identification of the continent with the idea of woman, in a way that lends to the image of Africa the force of a mother figure:

Naked woman, black woman,  
Clothed with the colour which is life, with  
your form which is beauty,  
In your shadow I have grown up; the gentleness of  
your hands was laid over my eyes  
And now, high up on the sun-baked pass, at the heart  
of summer, at the heart of noon, I come upon you,  
my Promised Land,  
And your beauty strikes me to the heart like the  
flash of an eagle.

Naked woman, black woman,  
I sing your beauty that passes, the form that I  
fix in the Eternal,  
Before jealous Fate turns you to ashes to feed the  
roots of life.<sup>3</sup>

In a poem by another writer, Bernard Dadié, despite the use of conventional western imagery, Africa is celebrated in cosmic terms:

I shall weave you a crown  
of the softest gleam  
bright as the Venus of the Tropics

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Roumain, *Bois d'ébène*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> C. Laye, *The African Child* (London, 1954).

<sup>3</sup> Senghor, *Selected Poems*, p. 6.

And in the feverish scintillation  
of the milky sphere  
I shall write  
in letters of fire  
your name  
O, Africa.<sup>1</sup>

The romanticism of the African theme in *négritude* illustrates certain of the functions and characteristics of 'nativistic movements' as analysed by Ralph Linton,<sup>2</sup> but in literary rather than ritualistic form, that is, at a sophisticated level. Yet a purely sociological and 'realistic' view would miss the profound significance of this aspect of *négritude*. In any case, realism is a purely relative term applied to literature, and has little relevance to poetry;<sup>3</sup> but apart from this, the African theme went far beyond a purely compensatory mechanism in that it was also a genuine rediscovery of Africa, a rebirth of the African idea of the black self. This opening up of the African mind to certain dimensions of its own world which western influence had obscured appears to be in fact the most essential and the most significant element in the literature of *négritude* as the principal channel of the African Renaissance. For the way in which the best of these poets came to root their vision in African modes of thought has given a new meaning to the traditional African world-view.<sup>4</sup>

Césaire's poetic formulation of *négritude* is in fact taken from a Bambara symbol of man in a telluric union with the universe:

My *négritude* is not a stone, its deafness hurled  
against the clamour of the day,  
my *négritude* is not a speck of dead water on the  
dead eye of the earth,  
my *négritude* is neither a tower nor a cathedral  
it thrusts into the red flesh of the earth  
it thrusts into the livid flesh of the sky.<sup>5</sup>

The West Indian is of course at one remove from the living centre of traditional African humanism, which is essential to the poetry of the

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Dadié, 'Couronne à l'Afrique', in *La Ronde des jours* (Paris, 1956).

<sup>2</sup> R. Linton, 'Nativistic Movements', in *American Journal of Sociology* (Chicago). See also his chapter on 'The Distinctive Aspects of Acculturation', in *Acculturation in Seven American Indian Types* (New York, 1940), ch. 10.

<sup>3</sup> It is not suggested by these remarks that the romanticism of *négritude* was without its abuses. But this is a question for literary criticism, which must content itself with judging the aesthetic value of the finished product rather than legislating for the writer about his raw material. Besides, *négritude*, like any other literary school, has produced its uninspired writers, and like any other movement its lunatic fringe.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu* (London, 1961), especially chs. 5 and 7, and John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision* (London, 1963), for an extensive discussion of this question.

<sup>5</sup> Césaire, *Cahier*, p. 71.

African writers of *négritude*, as in Senghor's works;<sup>1</sup> and it has perhaps been expressed in its purest and most authentic form by Birago Diop in his famous poem, *Souffles*:

Listen more often  
To things than to beings;  
The fire's voice is heard,  
Hear the voice of water,  
Hear in the wind  
The bush sob  
It is the ancestors' breath.

Those who died have never left,  
They are in the woman's breast,  
They are in the wailing child  
And in the kindling firebrand  
The dead are not under earth.

They are in the forest, they are in the home  
The dead are not dead.<sup>2</sup>

The literature of *négritude* tends towards a point where it can coincide with the traditional mythical system of thought in Africa. This does not imply that the coincidence is perfect nor that it is always genuine; what is significant about it is the 'backward movement' towards an end from which western culture had originally pulled the African. *Négritude*, as literature, retraces a collective drama as well as a spiritual adventure, involving a quest for the self, with the conquest of a lost identity as the prize.

From a social angle, its importance is mainly symbolic and functional. In the historical context in which it developed, the black writer incarnating his despised and oppressed race is the mediator of a new self-awareness. The racial exaltation of the movement is mainly a defence;<sup>3</sup> the use of an African myth represents black ethnocentrism, an attempt to recreate an emotional as well as an original bond beneath the contingencies of a particularly difficult historical experience.

The alliance of the imaginative and the political in *négritude* relates the movement to African nationalism. Nationalism hardly ever corresponds to an objective reality; but is, none the less, a powerful emotional attitude, and literature has always been an outstanding vehicle for

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ulli Beier, 'The Theme of the Ancestors in Senghor's Poetry', in *Black Orphans* (Ibadan), 5, May 1959. Beier concludes his study with the following observation: 'Senghor is not merely a Frenchified African who tries to give exotic interest to his French poems; he is an African who uses the French language to express his African soul'.

<sup>2</sup> Translated by Anne Atik in Drachler (ed.), *African Heritage*, p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé* (Paris, 1957), p. 174.

dominated people to give voice to their group feelings.<sup>1</sup> But imaginative writing, even with an explicit political content, implies a group mind rather than group action; it is essentially inactive. At the literary level, *négritude* remains largely subjective, and it was the ideology that attempted to establish objective standards of thought and action for the black man in general, and for the African in particular.

## II. THE IDEOLOGY

The non-imaginative writings of French-speaking Negro intellectuals to a great extent run parallel to the literature. They are determined by the same sentiments, and are consequently, in the main, a formulation in direct language of the attitudes expressed in symbolic terms in the imaginative writings. The distinction lies in the fact that, whereas the literary works simply express these attitudes, the non-literary writings formulate and define them.

The majority of the books, essays, articles, and speeches that constitute what may be called the ideological writings of *négritude* are straightforward polemics: protest writing, testimonies, and direct attacks on colonialism. A typical example is Albert Tevoedjre's essay, *L'Afrique révoltée*, which is a violent denunciation of colonial rule, with particular reference to Dahomey, the author's place of origin. Even here, the main source of grievance appears to be cultural rather than economic or social:

I shall always regret the fact of having been obliged to learn French first; to think in French while being ignorant in my own mother tongue. I shall always deplore the fact that anyone should have wanted to make me a foreigner in my own country.<sup>2</sup>

An even more forceful attack on colonialism is Césaire's famous pamphlet, *Discours sur le Colonialisme*, which takes up the question in original terms by demonstrating the evil effects on both coloniser and colonised of a system which limits the idea of man, as promoter of values, to the west:

Never was the west, even at the time when it shouted the word loudest, further removed from being able to assume the responsibilities of real humanism—humanism of a world-wide scope.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York, 1946). The analogy between *négritude* and other nationalist literatures has been drawn, principally by two writers: Bernard Fonlon, who compares *négritude* to similar movements in Irish nationalism in *La Pologne et le réveil de l'homme noir* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, National University of Ireland, Cork); and Thomas Melone, *De la négritude dans la littérature négro-africaine* (Paris, 1962), in which *négritude* is compared to the literature of the German revival in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

<sup>2</sup> A Tevoedjre, *L'Afrique révoltée* (Paris, 1958), pp. 114–15.

<sup>3</sup> Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris, 1955), p. 65.

It was not enough, however, to denounce colonialism; it was also considered necessary to contest its foundations, and especially the racial and cultural ideas by which it was rationalised.

### 1. Society, History, and Culture

The subordinate role of the Negro in western society had been justified mainly by the allegation that Africa had made no contribution to world history, had no achievements to offer. The logical conclusion drawn from this idea was put by Alioune Diop in this way:

Nothing in their past is of any value. Neither customs nor culture. Like living matter, these natives are asked to take on the customs, the logic, the language of the coloniser, from whom they even have to borrow their ancestors.

The western thesis that the African had no history implied for the black man that he had no future of his own to look forward to. A good deal of the propaganda effort of French-speaking intellectuals was as a consequence devoted to a refutation of this unacceptable proposition. Cheikh-Anta Diop's writings stand out in this respect. His book, *Nations nègres et culture*, for example, is an impassioned, heavily documented attempt to show that ancient Egyptian civilisation was in fact a Negro-African achievement, and thus to prove that the west owed its enlightenment to Africa. The conclusion to the principal section of his thesis is worth quoting in full, as it illustrates the tenor of the whole book:

The Egyptian origin of civilisation, and the Greeks' heavy borrowing from it are historical evidence. One wonders therefore why, in the face of these facts, the emphasis is laid on the role played by Greece, while that of Egypt is more and more passed over in silence. The foundation for this attitude can only be understood by recalling the heart of the question.

Egypt being a Negro country, and the civilisation which developed there being the product of black people, any thesis to the contrary would have been of no avail; the protagonists of these ideas are certainly by no means unaware of this fact. Consequently, it is wiser and surer purely and simply to strip Egypt of all her achievements for the benefit of a people of genuine white origin.

This false attribution of the values of an Egypt conveniently labelled white to a Greece equally white reveals a profound contradiction, which is not negligible as a proof of the Negro origin of Egyptian civilisation.

As can be seen, the black man, far from being incapable of developing a technical civilisation, is in fact the one who developed it first, in the person of the Negro, at a time when all the white races, wallowing in barbarism, were only just fit for civilisation.

in saying that it was the ancestors of Negroes, who today inhabit principally black Africa, who first invented mathematics, astronomy, the calendar, science in general, the arts, religion, social organisation, medicine, writing, engineering, architecture . . . in saying all this, one is simply stating the modest but strict truth, which nobody at the present moment can refute with arguments worthy of the name.<sup>1</sup>

The whole thesis is based on an implied correlation between history and culture which determines the nature of society, and of the individual: its intention was to prove that the African was essentially a technical man—*homo faber*. However, by summarily ascribing all civilisation to the black man in this way, Diop proceeds in the field of scholarship in the same fashion as Léon Damas in the poem already cited—by reversing the hierarchy established by the coloniser, without contesting the basis which it was founded. It is, in a way, a total acceptance of the western measure of evaluation, namely technical achievement.

*Négritude* may be distinguished from other efforts to rehabilitate Africa by what can be termed its 'ethnological' aspect, which attempted to redefine its terms, and to re-evaluate Africa within a non-western framework. Here the concept of cultural relativity was to help in sustaining a campaign whose purpose was to establish the validity of African cultural forms *in their own right*.

This explains the preoccupation of the French-speaking Negro intellectuals with anthropology, a preoccupation which reveals itself in the series of special numbers published by *Présence africaine*, especially the two remarkable volumes *Le Monde noir* (1951) and *L'Art nègre* (1952). The former, edited by Theodore Monod, brought together a number of articles by eminent scholars, both European and African, on various aspects of African cultural expression as well as their ramifications in the New World, in such a way as to suggest not only their originality but their world-wide permanence.

The accent was almost invariably placed on the non-material aspects, on those intangible elements which could distinguish the African's approach to the world from the western, and which might seem to underlie his conscious existence as well as his material productions. Thus African traditional beliefs and, in particular, the native forms of religion received strong emphasis. African 'animism' tended in general to be placed on an equal footing with Christianity, though curiously enough in an effort of reconciliation in most cases. The most noteworthy example of this kind of procedure is perhaps a paper by Paul Hazoumé,

in which the Dahomean conception of God is likened to that of John the Evangelist.<sup>1</sup>

The anthropological interests of *négritude* came to the fore at the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists, whose express purpose was to make a total inventory of the Negro's cultural heritage, in an effort to define a Pan-Negro cultural universe. This was at best a very delicate, if not an impossible, undertaking, as the discomfort and reserve of the American participants at the conference was to make clear. It would be tedious to go into the details, but two main lines of thought emerged from the deliberations of this conference. Foremost in the minds of the organisers was the will to demonstrate the specific character of traditional African institutions and beliefs as well as of African survivals in America, in a way that refuted the western thesis of inferiority. The purpose of this was made clear by the Haitian, Emmanuel Paul:

It was from this [African] past that colonial authors undertook to make the black man inferior . . . But what we look for from these studies is precisely the awakening of a historical consciousness embracing the millennial past of the race. These black people scattered all over the world who, even under the pressure of the west, still hesitate to deny themselves, have need of this source of pride, this reason for clinging to life.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, and as a consequence, the concern with the past implied a process of self-appraisal and self-definition, as a solid basis. The Malagasy writer, Jacques Rabemananjara, declared:

The deliberations [of this Congress] have no other purpose than to assemble and to select material for the dialogue. First among ourselves, with the aim of knowing ourselves more, of grasping, through our diverse mentalities, customs, and countries of origin, the essential human note, the ineffable human warmth that unites us.<sup>3</sup>

These efforts cannot be said to have produced a common cultural denominator, but their significance lay rather in the attitude that inspired them. In direct response to the intolerance that characterised the cultural policy of the coloniser, *négritude* developed into a vindication and an exaltation of cultural institutions which were different from those of the west; it was thus a conscious attitude of pluralism. The corollary was a rejection of *assimilation* and a claim to cultural autonomy and initiative.

<sup>1</sup> P. Hazoumé, 'L'âme du Dahoméen, animiste révélée par sa religion', in *Contributions au 1er congrès des écrivains et artistes noirs*, pp. 233-51. See also the collected volume, *Des Prêtres noirs s'interrogent* (Paris, 1957), for a similar approach to African religious beliefs.

<sup>2</sup> E. Paul, 'L'Ethnologie et les cultures noires', in *Contributions au 1er congrès des écrivains et artistes noirs*, p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> J. Rabemananjara, 'L'Europe et nous', *ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>1</sup> Cheikh-Anta Diop, *Nations nègres et culture* (Paris, 1954), p. 253.

Alioune Diop expressed this aspect of the movement in the following terms:

Unable to assimilate to the English, the Belgian, the French, the Portuguese—  
to allow the elimination of certain original dimensions of our genius for the  
benefit of a bloated mission of the west—we shall endeavour to forge for this  
genius those means of expression best suited to its vocation in the twentieth  
century.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. *Politics and Race*

These efforts to rehabilitate African history and to re-evaluate African culture were a conscious reaction to the ideology that sustained colonial rule. But the central pole of the colonial situation was political domination rather than cultural supremacy. The next step after a demand for cultural autonomy was logically a corresponding demand for political independence. The arguments for an explicit political stand came mainly from the Marxist elements in the movement, especially at the second congress in Rome. Frantz Fanon's address to this meeting contained an unequivocal summary of their point of view:

In the colonial situation, culture, denied the twin support of nation and state, withers away in a slow death. The condition for the existence of culture is therefore national liberation, the rebirth of the state.<sup>2</sup>

However, if a certain political awareness was an implicit part of the cultural offensive of the French-speaking black intellectual, which placed *négritude* in close relationship with African nationalism and Pan-Africanism, it is none the less quite clear that *négritude* remained essentially a cultural and intellectual movement, albeit with political implications. The French-speaking Negro élite tended more towards an elaboration of ideas concerning the black man's place in the world than towards the actual mobilisation of the masses for an immediate and definite political goal.<sup>3</sup> *Négritude* was thus at the most an ideological movement with remote political purposes.

Its link with nationalism is all the same certain in that a special *rationale* was developed along with it; it furnished the most important *mystique* of African nationalism.

<sup>1</sup> Alioune Diop, *Deuxième congrès des écrivains et artistes noirs*, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> F. Fanon, 'Fondements réciproques de la culture nationale et des luttes de libération', *ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> G. Balandier observes that, in the development of African political myth, 'the accent was placed more on . . . cultural liberation . . . than on political liberation'. 'Les Mythes politiques de colonisation et de décolonisation en Afrique', in *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* (Paris), xxxiii, 1962, p. 93.

In so far then as it is an answer to a certain combination of circumstances, the product of a historical situation, *négritude* is another cultural and political myth: the expression of a justified self-assertion swelling into an exaggerated self-consciousness.<sup>1</sup> *Négritude* has also meant to a considerable extent an assiduous cultivation of the black race.

That Negro nationalism on both sides of the Atlantic should have been based on a vehement racial consciousness can be imputed to the racialism that grew out of and which often came to underlie white domination: black nationalism can in the final analysis be reduced to a challenge to white supremacy. *Négritude*, by confronting white domination with its own racial protest and zealous partisanship of the Negro race, did more than draw together the sentiments and attitudes that went with black reaction and embody them in a heightened form: it moved in fact very distinctly towards a racial ideology.

Even here, most of the ideas expressed by French Negro intellectuals are limited to a refutation of the racial ideology of colonialism. For if, in the literary works, the exaltation of the black race rises to dizzy heights, it has not been reproduced in the non-literary writings with anything like the same abandon. In the single case of Senghor, this aspect of *négritude* acquires a certain intellectual dimension. So pre-eminently do his ideas emerge on this question that his conception of *négritude* demands separate consideration.<sup>2</sup>

## 3. *Senghor and the Theory of Négritude*

Senghor's *négritude* starts out as, and essentially remains, a defence of African cultural expression.<sup>3</sup> It presents itself first as an elaborate apology before it becomes an exposition and a personal view of Africa: it is a passion that is later rationalised. None the less, his ideas over the last quarter-century present a coherent and even a consistent pattern.

On several occasions, Senghor has defined *négritude* as 'the sum total of African cultural values', something perhaps more than the simple relation of the African's personality to his social and cultural background. For although Senghor never speaks of an 'essence', he speaks of a 'negro

<sup>1</sup> The following observation by Louis Wirth about minorities' reaction to their situation should be kept in mind when considering *négritude*: 'One cannot long discriminate against a people without generating in them a sense of isolation and of persecution, and without giving them a conception of themselves as more different from others than in fact they are'. R. Linton (ed.), *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*, p. 348.

<sup>2</sup> No other member of the movement has elaborated *négritude* so fully as Senghor. As a matter of fact, Césaire himself prefers to regard *négritude* as a historical stand, as an attitude, rather than as a comprehensive system (private interview with the author).

<sup>3</sup> The title of one of his early articles is significant: 'Défense de l'Afrique noire', in *Esprit* (Paris), 1945.

soul', of a special spiritual endowment of the African which is, in some respects, shared by the Negro in the New World, and is therefore a racial mark.<sup>1</sup>

Senghor describes and defines the African's distinctive qualities mainly by opposition to the western, often by setting a positive value on what the west derided in the African, sometimes proceeding by grounding his own thinking in modern currents of western thought, which he then turns against the west for the benefit of his arguments. He has written, for example:

Discursive reason merely stops at the surface of things, it does not penetrate their hidden resorts, which escape the lucid consciousness. Intuitive reason is alone capable of an understanding that goes beyond appearances, of taking in total reality.<sup>2</sup>

It is this line of thought that forms the basis for his justification of the African's non-rational approach to the world. He has boldly annexed Lévy-Bruhl's studies on 'primitive mentality' to argue the validity of the African's ways of thinking. He seizes in particular upon the French anthropologists' 'law of participation';<sup>3</sup> and he uses this in his own formulation of the African's mode of experience, which he presents as essentially one of feeling—of a mystical sympathy with the universe: 'The African cannot imagine an object as different from him in its essence. He endows it with a sensibility, a will, a human soul.'<sup>4</sup>

For Senghor, this African mode of apprehending reality through the senses rather than through the intellect is at the root of his direct experience of the world, of his spontaneity. The African's psychology helps to determine a different form of mental operation from the western, a different kind of logic:

The life-surge of the African, his self-abandonment to the other, is thus actuated by reason. But here, reason is not the eye-reason of the European, it is the *reason-by-embrace* which shares more the nature of the *logos* than *ratio*.

He goes on to say, 'Classical European reason is analytical and makes use of the object. African reason is intuitive and participates in the object'.<sup>5</sup> Senghor has made this distinction a constant theme in his writings.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 'Ce que l'homme noir apporte', in *Liberté, 1: négritude et humanisme* (Paris, 1964), pp. 22-39.

<sup>2</sup> Senghor, Preface to Birago Diop, *Les Nouveaux Contes d'Amadou Khoumba*, in *Liberté*, 1, p. 246.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Morceaux Choisis* (Paris, 1936), pp. 23-7. Although Lévy-Bruhl's ideas have been demolished, and he himself renounced them later in his life, this does not seem to have affected Senghor's own ideas.

<sup>4</sup> Senghor, 'Ce que l'homme noir apporte', in *Liberté*, 1, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Senghor, 'Psychologie du Nègro-Africain', in *Diogenes*, 37, 1962; translated by John Reed and Clive Wake, in *Senghor: Prose and Poetry* (London, 1965), p. 33.

The 'law of participation' governs the African's sensibility, which to Senghor is basically emotive. He has pushed this conception of the African mind to a point where emotion has become its cardinal principle. 'Emotion is African, as Reason is Hellenic', he has exclaimed, and though this statement has been given careful nuances by him (for the benefit of his critics) he still leaves no doubt about this aspect of his theory of *négritude*: 'It is this gift of emotion which explains *négritude* . . . For it is their *emotive attitude* towards the world which explains the cultural values of Africans.'<sup>1</sup>

Senghor points to creative works to demonstrate the presence of a unique African sensibility which animates them, and insists above all on the privileged position of rhythm in African artistic expression—rhythm is for him the expression of the essential vitality of the African:

[Rhythm] is the architecture of being, the internal dynamism which shapes it, the system of waves which it sends out towards others, the pure expression of vital force . . . For the Negro-African, it is in the same measure that rhythm is embodied in the senses that it illuminates the Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

In his exposition of the African mind, Senghor lays emphasis on its intensely religious disposition, on the African's 'sense of the divine', on 'his faculty of perceiving the supernatural in the natural'.<sup>3</sup> The African's mystical conception of the world is for Senghor his principal gift, and derives from his close links with the natural world. Because the African 'identifies *being* with life, or rather with the *life-force*', the world represents for him the manifestation in diverse forms of the same vital principle: 'For the universe is a closed system of forces, individual and distinct; it is true, yet also interdependent.'<sup>4</sup> Lévy-Bruhl's law of participation is here allied to Fr. Temple's 'Bantu Philosophy' to produce a conception of the African world-view as a system of participating forces, a kind of great chain of vital responses in which Man, the personification of the 'life-force', occupies a central position: 'From God through man, down to the grain of sand, it is a seamless whole. Man, in his role as person, is the centre of this universe'.<sup>5</sup>

For Senghor, this is not an abstract system but an existential philosophy, a practical view of life; *négritude* is for him not only a way of being, but also a way of living. He therefore extends his theory of the African personality to explain African social organisation. Senghor believes that the African society is an extension of the clan, which is a kind of mystical

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> 'L'Esthétique négro-africaine', in *Liberté*, 1, pp. 212-3.

<sup>3</sup> 'Ce que l'homme noir apporte', in *Liberté*, 1, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Translations by John Reed and Clive Wake, op. cit. p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 43.

family, 'the sum of all persons, living and dead, who acknowledge a common ancestor'.<sup>1</sup> Thus African society has a religious character—it is not so much a community of persons as 'a communion of souls'. Where, therefore, western culture insists on the individual, African culture lays emphasis on the group, though without the loss of a sense of the person.<sup>2</sup>

Senghor's theory of *négritude* is not really a factual and scientific demonstration of African personality and social organisation, but rather a personal interpretation. An element of speculation enters into his ideas, which lays them wide open to criticism. His more subtle formulations often have a specious character; besides, the most sympathetic reader of his theories cannot fail to be disturbed by his frequent confusion of race and culture, especially in his early writings.

On the other hand, these weaknesses are due to the circumstances in which his ideas developed. In assessing the objective differences that put off the African from western man, his concern is to make a positive re-evaluation of realities which the west considered negative.

Furthermore, Senghor's political career has given his theory of *négritude* a practical significance—from polemics, it has evolved into an ideology. His social and political thought are set within the general framework of his cultural philosophy. It is in the name of the innate spiritual sense of the African that he rejects the atheistic materialism of Marxism as unfitted for and irrelevant to the African situation.<sup>3</sup>

In a certain sense, therefore, Senghor may be justified in designating his theory of *négritude* as a cultural and not as a racial philosophy. At any rate, it is not an exclusive racism. Senghor's views on the African, and even on the whole Negro race, open out towards the larger perspectives of a broader humanism. Here he has been influenced by Teilhard de Chardin's philosophy of the convergence of all forms of life and experience towards the evolution of a superior human consciousness, which has given Senghor a pole around which he has developed his idea of 'a civilisation of the Universal'.<sup>4</sup> His defence of cultural and racial mingling is founded on this key concept, which is summed up in the following passage:

The only 'pan-ism' which can meet the demands of the 20th century is—let us proclaim it boldly—pan-humanism, I mean a humanism which embraces all men at the double level of their contributions and their comprehension.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Nation et voie africaine du socialisme* (Paris, 1961), pp. 71 and 123-4.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Senghor, *Nation et voie africaine du socialisme*, pp. 41-66, and *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin et la politique africaine* (Paris, 1962), pp. 17-31. Senghor does not reject so much the philosophy of Marx as his social ideology.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 33 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Nation et voie africaine du socialisme*, p. 108.

#### 4. *The African Presence and the Black Millennium*

An ideology, when it becomes explicit, is a kind of thinking aloud on the part of a society or of a group within it. It is a direct response to the actual conditions of life, and has a social function, either as a defensive system of beliefs and ideas which support and justify an established social structure, or as a rational project for the creation of a new order. The latter type of ideology, even when it includes a certain degree of idealism, also implies a reasoned programme of collective action; it becomes the intellectual channel of social life.

The literature and ideology of *négritude* were by their nature revolutionary, or at the very least radical. Because they spring from a need to reverse an intolerable situation, they are moved in the first instance by a negative principle. They are a challenge to the common lot which western expansion had imposed on non-western man, especially the Negro, whose experience—dispersal, subjugation, humiliation—illustrates the worst aspects of contact with the white man. For black people had in common an experience which, in the word of James Baldwin, placed in the same context their widely dissimilar experience. He continues:

What they held in common was their precarious, their unutterably painful reaction to the white world. What they held in common was the necessity to remake the world in their own image, to impose this image on the world, and no longer be controlled by the vision of the world, and of themselves, held by other people. What in sum black men held in common was their ache to come into the world as men.<sup>1</sup>

In the circumstances, it is not surprising that this 'ache' should have developed sometimes into an intense collective neurosis, which has reached a paroxysm in movements like those of the Black Muslims in the U.S., and the Ras Tafarians in Jamaica. The dilemma in which history placed the black man, and from which the intellectual movements could not escape, was that Negro nationalism of any kind was bound to be even more irrational than any other, for it was to a considerable degree a gesture of despair.

This negative aspect of black reaction to white rule has left a mark on *négritude*, even in its development of positive perspectives. A contradiction, purely emotional in origin, bedevils the movement, which, in its crusade for the total emancipation of black people, has sought to comprise within a single cultural vision the different historical experiences of Negro societies and nations.

<sup>1</sup> James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York, 1961), p. 29.

It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss the movement as a futile and sectarian obsession with self—a kind of black narcissism. In the larger context of Negro experience, it represents the ultimate and most stable point of self-awareness. For, although its expression has sometimes been exaggerated, it has always had an intellectual content. In the African political context, its role as the ideological spear-point of African nationalism has been sufficiently emphasised. Its profound significance in the cultural and social evolution of Africa has been perhaps less appreciated.

*Négritude* represents both an African *crise de conscience*, and its most significant modern expression; it is the watershed that marks the emergence of a modern African consciousness. African 'messianism' and *négritude* represent the ritualistic and the intellectual facet of the reaction to the same historical, social, and cultural stimulus. Their forms have varied. In African messianism, tradition remains the basis of social behaviour, despite borrowings from western religion, which are absorbed only so far as they will fit in. The reverse is true of *négritude*: despite its championship of a non-rational tradition, it remains rigorously rational. Senghor's *négritude*, for example, is an anti-intellectualism mediated by the intellect, and the whole movement is expressed through a western mould which absorbs African realities. In short, *négritude* is a break with tradition: although African in content, it is western in its formal expression.

The movement thus marks a transition in the nature of collective expression in Africa—from the myth of the millennium and from the religious undercurrent upon which traditional Africa had relied for human accomplishment, to the lay, intellectually-centred approach to the world which is a legacy of the European Renaissance. It marks a 'desacralisation' of African collective life, an attitude which is spontaneous and no longer imposed, and out of which have begun to flow new currents of ideas for tackling present-day African problems.

This is what Balandier has observed as 'the progression from myth to ideology' in Africa.<sup>1</sup> Although this progression has been continuous and although, as L.-V. Thomas has remarked, 'the originality of modern solutions is inspired by the specific character of former times',<sup>2</sup> none the less the transition is real. African messianism was an archaic reaction to a new situation; *négritude* was a far more appropriate response, adapted to the modern age.

<sup>1</sup> Balandier, *op. cit.* p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> L.-V. Thomas, *Les idéologies négro-africaines d'aujourd'hui* (Dakar, 1965), p. 19. Cf. also B. Ogot, 'From Chief to President', in *Transition* (Kampala), 10, 1963, for a study of the same progression in African political organisation and attitudes.

It thus forms an essential and significant part of an African revolution which is marked not only by the emotions it has liberated and the ideas it has thrown up, but also by the forms it has assimilated. The profound character of the transition can best be appreciated by comparing the respective visions of the Absolute in African messianism and in *négritude*. The former was supernatural and apocalyptic—essentially an eschatology. The idealism of *négritude* from the beginning tended towards an earthly utopia:

We Africans need to know the meaning of an ideal, to be able to choose it and believe in it freely, but out of a sense of personal necessity, to relate it to the life of the world. We should occupy ourselves with present questions of world importance, and, in common with others, ponder upon them, in order that we might one day find ourselves among the creators of a new order.<sup>1</sup>

In their search for identity, the adherents of *négritude* have had to accept and explore to the full their particular situation. But, although preoccupied with a sectional and limited interest, they were inspired by a universal human need for fulfilment. In this, they have never strayed from the central, enduring problem of the human condition.

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## Some Swahili Political Words

by CAROL M. M. SCOTTON\*

A STRONGLY charged Swahili political vocabulary has emerged in Tanzania, which sharply distinguishes persons and nations, in both domestic and foreign affairs, as being either for or against Tanzania's policies. The implications of the selection and usage of this vocabulary are considerable in any assessment of political trends in Tanzania, since language and culture are certainly related. Not only does language reflect cultural patterns, but language also imposes its patterns on culture.<sup>1</sup>

A word acquires meaning because it is commonly used in certain situations and commonly stimulates certain responses in listeners belonging to the same linguistic community. In other words, we can make reasonable judgements about meaning from past usage. And usage, which we have just invoked to define meaning, is correlated with the social situation. For example, we note in Swahili that people speak in the singular of going to 'our home' rather than 'my home', which suggests the communal society so much in evidence in Tanzania. Further, a Tanzanian politician and journalist was so sure that the clear correlation between vocabulary and politics extended beyond his own country that he stated in conversation: 'If you gave me a newspaper from anywhere in the world—assuming I could read the language—I could tell you where the newspaper came from on the basis of the types of words used.'

Rather than attempting to discuss systematically the relationships between the entire vocabulary of a language, and the society of its speakers, on a much more modest scale I shall deal only with a small number of political words. Few though they are, they are the key words in Swahili relating to the political situation. And, in general, their usage appears to show Tanzania as a nation (1) acutely preoccupied at home

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<sup>1</sup> Most writers have concentrated on demonstrating how culture appears to be reflected in language. But on the other side of the relationship, the fact that language not only communicates thought but helps to shape it, should also be emphasised. For an earlier study of some Swahili political words, see W. H. Whiteley, 'Political Concepts and Connotations', in *St. Antony's Papers* (London, 1960).