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**A TERM PAPER ON POL 409: AFRICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT.**

**SUBMITTED BY**

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TOPIC: **The essence of Leopold Senghor’s political Thought is for the African’s to find pride in his cultural values….**

**Critically examine this view**

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**1.0 Background of Information:**

**Introduction:**

The life of Léopold Sédar Senghor spanned a century of change in Africa, a century during which the colonial occupation of the continent reached its zenith, began to topple and ultimately fell. An award winning poet, decorated scholar, pioneer of negro cultural autonomy and liberation icon, Senghor was, as he remains, one of the towering figures of the African liberation struggle. His voice, and the very phases of his life, marked the key navigation points of the black journey towards self-determination. His influence embraced not only the political kingdoms of Africa, but perhaps more importantly the intellectual, artistic and spiritual kingdoms so long submerged under the weight of foreign cultures.Source; (Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Life of a French African: Retrived 11:50 from http://peterbaxterafrica.com/index.php/2012/11/19/leopold-sedar-senghor-the-life-of-a-french-african/)

Although Senghor was not at his core a political animal, he lead independent Senegal for twenty years, doing so less as a technocrat than as a figurehead – perhaps even as a monarch, or a prince, as many historians have suggested. He was shrewd and ambitious, and although aloof and unsullied by the blood of the political trenches, he was sufficiently Machiavellian to ensure his own long term survival in the turbulent political waters of Africa, and ultimately to name his own successor. His death in 2001 punctuated the end of a century that had seen Africa evolve from utter foreign domination to full majority rule. In this context he was among the first black Africans to rule a nation state, a transition from metropolitan rule that was undertaken in Senegal without overt internal violence and with the fundamentals of democracy and rational government remaining intact throughout.

Senegal and the French Imperial System

To understand Senghor is necessary first to understand the stage upon which the main acts of his drama unfold. Senegal is not a naturally gifted country, which, some would say, was its main developmental asset. No great and easily accessible mineral wealth has been unearthed to fuel civil war, leaving an agriculture and commercial fishing dependent economy no choice but to build and retain sufficient stability for the erratic seasons to yield. Geographically the northern reaches of the nation, the immediate hinterland of the Senegal River, offers some fertility, in particular in relation to the ebb and flow of floods and alluvial deposits, but for the remainder the country is composed of semi arid savannah, with a verdant fringe touching the south as the region tilts towards the tropical reaches of the Gulf of Guinea.

Much of the long term stability of Senegal can be attributed to the importance of the territory within the structure of French colonialism in the region, and the length of time that the internal political systems enjoyed to evolve away from traditional government and towards the more standardized and democratic systems employed in Europe. The individuals who inherited power in Senegal at the point of independence, Senghor himself being key among them,  were heirs to an extraordinarily generous system of education and assimilation offered by the French to a select few. This was a philosophy not commonly applied elsewhere in Africa, and certainly not something that the British, the other major colonial power in Africa, attempted on any meaningful level at all.

The modern nation state of Senegal occupies a point at the westernmost extremity of Africa. Historically it was ideally situated to serve as a strategic staging point for early Portuguese mariners as they began to probe down the west coast of Africa during the 15th century. The mouth of the Senegal River marks one of the earliest points of European landfall in West Africa. For centuries it remained a staging point for rest and resupply before the journey south into the less hospitable expanses of Gulf of Guinea. Later, in the 17th Century, the region fell under substantive French control, and also, briefly, under British control. The first permanent settlement to be established was the Port of Saint-Louis at the mouth of the Senegal River itself. Saint-Louis in due course became the most developed and most climatically suitable French settlement in the region, a platform from which much of the onward march of French territorial expansion in Africa took place. French sub-Saharan African eventually expanded to include two vast federated blocks, these being *French West Africa* (Est. 1895), which comprised the territories of Senegal, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, French Sudan (later Mali), Mauritania, Niger, Upper Volta (later Burkina Faso) and Benin, and *French Equatorial Africa* (Est. 1910), comprising French Congo (Congo Brazzaville) and Gabon, Oubangui-Chari (Later Central African Republic), Chad and French Cameroon (after World War I). Each was governed from Paris through two Governors General, one based in Dakar and another in Brazzaville, with deputies, or Lieutenants Governor located in each territorial capital. Source; ( **Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Life of a French African: Retrived 11:50 from http://peterbaxterafrica.com/index.php/2012/11/19/leopold-sedar-senghor-the-life-of-a-french-african/)**

By the turn of the 19th century, and in the years prior to the outbreak of WWI, European domination of Africa had grown to be almost absolute. A system of ports ringed the continent, falling under the territorial control of the key European nations, with road and rail transport infrastructure, working telegraphic communications and established territorial administrations and judiciaries in place. Territorial legislatures, and executives in many cases oversaw local government, frequently yielding only matters of foreign and defense policy to their metropolitan governments. Africa had for all intents an purposes entered the modern world under the guidance of an ostensibly responsible and caring imperial structure.

It is important to note here that this philanthropic overtone of empire was the philosophy that tended to underscore much of the credo of modern imperialism – Cecil Rhodes coined the memorable term ‘*philanthropy plus five percent*‘. This was, however, in reality, very selectively applied, and this for many reasons. Perhaps the most obvious reason was the fact that imperial policy often did not translate into territorial practice. Theorizing politicians in the *Métropole*seldom saw eye to eye with colonial administrators sweating in fly blown outposts, attempting to interpret European civilization among naked savages emerging slowly from the cataclysm of the Slave Trade [*…a stereotype for its descriptive value please take note*]. And while governors and cabinet members might have rotated among the colonies, bureaucratic staff tended to remain in position, and it was they that most often configured the practical application of metropolitan colonial policy. It also tended to be*in-situ* European bureaucrats who where the most racist in mindset, and therefore most resistant to black advancement through the system

The most fertile  ground for individual black African advancement during this period tended to be found in those territories with large European expatriate populations.  These were usually key administrative centers. The principal French West African administrative center at the turn of the 20th century was Dakar, capital of Senegal, where a significant European expatriate community and developed, with all the associated infrastructure of schools and churches for native education, and of course well established local bureaucracies, police forces and military formations which all tended to absorb large numbers of literate African functionaries and service/militiamen at the lower and middle level.

This was the case throughout Africa. One of few avenues of advancement open to blacks at that time were military and bureaucratic, both of which tended to limit black promotion to a blue collar or senior NCO level, which, of course, required a specifically tailored system of native education. Notwithstanding the limitations implicit in this, this was the first avenue of personal advancement open to blacks, and many took it. The result was the emergence of a fragile but growing black middle class in the main cities and towns of imperial Africa. Some colonial powers were more sympathetic and encouraging of this than others. It is also important to note that during this early phase of black/white cohabitation in Africa, European attitudes on the whole tended to be far more liberal towards native development than they would later become.*Assimilation* was a word used across the board in Africa to describe the ideal future relationship between black and white . This, it must be born in mind, was before the vast majority of native Africans were in any position at all to challenge white rule on the continent, which, of course, tended to render white policy planners and administrators more nurturing of the seeds of black development, before blacks became organized, educated and militant.

The French on whole approached the concept of empire with a more focused policy of Assimilation than any other imperial power on the continent. In practice it was the Portuguese that were most socially restrictive on a policy level in the colonies, but in practice far more assimilationist than any other foreign power. The British remained highly paternal and always very aloof from the native, while the French genuinely embraced the Romanesque view that metropolitan citizenship be afforded to those most deserving, through whom a genuine cross-pollination of cultures would take place that would one day fuse France and her colonies together as an unbreakable whole.

Senegal, by dint of seniority, position and climate, was the most focused area of French Africa for moral and material investment, and there were many unique aspects to the French/Senegalese relationship that were not replicated anywhere else. Th *Communes* for example, was one of these.

The four *communes* of Senegal were the main urban settlements. These centers of culture and industry enjoyed a higher emphasis on racial assimilation and integration than any other French possession in the region, possibly with the exception of Côte d’Ivoire, which also happened to be home to a large European population, but which at the same time tended to be climatically more rigorous than Senegal, and so was not a universally favored posting for French expatriates at the time.

Another interesting feature of French colonial race policy at this time was the division of rights between those blacks born in the communes, who in theory, and very often in practice, enjoyed full French citizenship, while those born outside the communes were regarded as French subjects, or French protected persons, but not qualifying for the rights associated with French citizenship. Within the communes, however, there were also divisions, but not specifically race divisions.*Originaires* were blacks who had been born into the communes, but who also retained substantive links to traditional life, or to animist/Islamic religious ideals, and who were severely limited access to the franchise, and certainly to French citizenship. These privileges were reserved for a very small number of high achievers in the communes who were regarded as the *Évolués*, or advanced, from which caste, although rarely easily, a black man could advance to very high position under the French sys.tem

1.1 SENGHOR AND THE CONCEPT OF NEGRITUDE:

Towards the end of his life, Aimé Césaire, a friend to Senghor has declared that the question he and his friend Léopold Sédar Senghor came to raise after they first met was: “Who am I? Who are we? What are we in this white world?” And he commented: “That's quite a problem” (Césaire 2005, 23). “Who am I?” is a question Descartes posed, and a reader of the French philosopher naturally understands such a question to be universal, and the subject who says “I” here to stand for any human being. But when “who am I?” has to be translated as “who are *we*?” everything changes especially when the “we” have to define themselves against a world which leaves no room for who and what they are because they are black folks in a world where “universal” seems to naturally mean “white”.

1.2 CONCEPTUALISING NEGRITUDE

Leopold Sedar Senghor believes that every African shares certain distinctive and innate characteristics, values and aesthetics. In the poem ‘New York’, Senghor argues that the black community of Harlem should ‘Listen to the far beating of your nocturnal heart, rhythm/ and blood of the drum’ and ‘let the black blood flow into/ your blood’.The word nocturnal is interesting because it refers to the image of night. By using the imagery of night, Senghor is asserting that one’s African heritage (one’s Blackness) is both ineapable and natural (like night-time). Negritude is the active rooting of an Black identity in this inescapable and natural African essence. The major premise of Negritude is therefore that one’s biological make-up (race) defines one’s outer (skin colour) as well as inner (spirit/essence) traits. Negritude is a concept which holds that there is a ‘shared culture and subjectivity and spiritual essence’ among members of the same racial group Duckworth (2010). As Irele explains, there is a ‘parallel between this conception and the racial doctrines propounded in Europe, presenting the Negro as an inherently inferior being to the white man, and which provided the ultimate ideological *rationale* for Western imperialism’. Instead of rejecting the (colonialist) theory that race defines one’s being; Negritude rejects the assumption that the African is inherently inferior to the “white man”. To Senghor, this makes Negritude a weapon against colonialism and an ‘instrument of liberation’.

To Senghor, the African essence is externalized in a distinctive culture and philosophy. This claim is supported by Senghor’s assertion that Negritude – the rooting of identity in one’s natural essence – is ‘diametrically opposed to the traditional philosophy of Europe’ (the colonizer). To Senghor, European philosophy is ‘essentially static, objective… It is founded on separation and opposition: on analysis and conflict’. In contrast, African philosophy is based on ‘unity’, ‘balance’ negotiation and an appreciation of ‘movement and rhythm’.As Loomia notes, Senghor describes African culture ‘in terms of precisely those supposed markers of African life that had been for so long reviled in colonialist thought – sensuality, rhythm, earthiness and a primeval past’. The traditional stereotypes of African culture are not directly challenged by Negritude – Africans *are*essentially spiritual according to Senghor – they are modified. Negritude is a process of negotiation which proposes a counter-myth or counter-reading of those traditional stereotypes with the aim of valorizing and celebrating the African personality. Duckworth (2010)

Senghor’s conception of Negritude holds that one’s inner and outer essence is informed, defined by one’s race. This position – that race is biological and informs one’s character – has encountered criticism because it relies on an incorrect conception of race. Senghor’s conception of race asserts that a person from Ghana, Senegal and Liberia are all biologically African – and therefore share the same African essence. However, as Michael Jones notes ‘there is no biological or genetic foundation for the grouping of individual humans into a racial group’. There is no such thing as a race biologically speaking; race is a social construction. If there is no biological foundation for Senghor’s assertion that the African race shares certain essential features then the concept of Negritude appears to be invalidated. It therefore appears that rooting Black identity in an inescapable and natural African essence becomes problematic.

The attempt to produce an African personality ensures the “native” uses the same logic of the colonizer. As Ran Greenstein notes ‘no pre-colonial discourses of Africa are known and it is highly doubtful that indigenous conceptualizations of African… ever existed’.“Africa” is a colonial concept that reduces a multitude of cultures, tribes, sects, religions and peoples into a simply defined and. Negritude doesn’t appear to challenge colonisaNtion.

1.3 THE ORIGIN OF THE CONCEPT OF NEGRITUDE:

This concept of Négritude originated as the expression of a reaction or revolt against the historical situation of French colonialism and racism. The particular form taken by that revolt was the product of the encounter, in Paris, in the late 1920's, of three black students coming from different French colonies: Aimé Césaire (1913–2008) from Martinique, Léon Gontran Damas (1912–1978) from Guiana and Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906–2001) from Senegal. Being colonial subjects meant that they all belonged to people considered uncivilized, naturally in need of education and guidance from Europe, namely France. In addition, the memory of slavery was very vivid in Guiana and Martinique. Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas were already friends before they came to Paris in 1931. They were classmates in Fort-de-France, Martinique, where they both graduated from Victor Schoelcher High School. Damas came to Paris to study Law while Césaire had been accepted at Lycée Louis Le Grand to study for the highly selective test for admission to the prestigious École Normale Supérieure on rue d'Ulm. Upon his arrival at the Lycée on the first day of classes he met Senghor who had already been a student at Louis le Grand for three years.

Césaire has described his first encounter with Senghor as friendship at first sight which would last for the rest of their fairly long lives. He has also added that their personal friendship meant the encounter between Africa and the African Diaspora.Césaire, Damas and Senghor had individual lived experiences of their feeling of revolt against a world of racism and colonial domination. In the case of Césaire that feeling was expressed in his detestation of Martinique which, as he confessed in an interview with French author Françoise Vergès, he was happy to leave after high school: he hated the “colored petit-bourgeois” of the island because of their “fundamental tendency to ape Europe” (Césaire 2005, 19). As for Senghor, he has written that in his revolt against his teachers at College Libermann high school in Dakar, he had discovered “négritude” before having the concept: he refused to accept their claim that through their education they were building Christianity and civilization in his soul where there was nothing but paganism and barbarism before. Now their encounter as people of African descent regardless of where they were from would lead to the transformation of their individual feelings of revolt into a concept that would also unify all Black people and overcome the separation created by slavery but also by the prejudices born out of the different paths taken. Césaire has often evoked the embarrassment felt by people from the Caribbean at the idea of being associated with Africans as they shared Europe's ideas that they were now living in the lands of the civilized. He quotes as an example a “snobbish” young Antillean who came to him protesting that he talked too much about Africa, claiming that they had nothing in common with that continent and its peoples: “they are savages, we are different” (Césaire 2005, 28).

Beyond the encounter between Africa and the French Caribbean Césaire, Senghor and Damas also discovered together the American movement of Harlem Renaissance. At the “salon”, in Paris, hosted by sisters from Martinique, Jane, Paulette and Andrée Nardal, they met many Black American writers, such as Langston Hughes or Claude McKay. With the writers of the Harlem Renaissance movement they found an expression of black pride, a consciousness of a culture, an affirmation of a distinct identity that was in sharp contrast to French assimilationism. In a word they were ready to proclaim the négritude of the “new Negro” to quote the title of the anthology of Harlem writers by Alain Locke which very much impressed Senghor and his friends (Vaillant 1990, 93–94).

1.4 NEGRITUDE AS REVOLT / NEGRITUDE AS PHILOSOPHY

The proclamation of Negritude would be done when the three friends founded the journal*L'Etudiant noir*, in 1934–1935 where the word was coined by Aimé Césaire. It was meant to be (and, above all, to *sound* like) a provocation. *Nègre*, derived from the Latin “niger”, meaning “black”, is used in French only in relation to black people as in “art nègre”. Applied to a black person it had come to be charged with all the weight of racism to the point that the insult “*sale*nègre” (*dirty* nègre) would be almost redundant, “sale” being somehow usually understood in “nègre”. So to coin and claim the word “Négritude” (*Négrité*, using the French suffix –*ité* instead of -*itude* was considered and dropped) as the expression of the value of “blackness” was a way for Césaire, Senghor and Damas of defiantly turning “nègre” against the white supremacists who used it as a slur. In sum the word was and has continued to be an irritant. Indeed the “fathers” of the movement themselves would often confess how irritated they were too by the word. Thus, Césaire declared at the beginning of a lecture he gave on February 26, 1987, at the International University of Florida in Miami: “…I confess that I do not always like the word Négritude even if I am the one, with the complicity of a few others, who contributed to its invention and its launching” adding that, still, “it corresponds to an evident reality and, in any case to a need that appears to be a deep one” (Césaire 2004, 80). “What is that reality?” Césaire proceeded then asking. That is indeed the question: is there a content and a substance of the concept of Négritude beyond the revolt and the proclamation? In other words, is Négritude mainly a posture of revolt against oppression the manifestation of which is primarily the poetry it produced, or is it a particular philosophy characteristic of a black worldview? One of the most eloquent expression of Négritude as a posture primarily is to be found in an Aimé Césaire's address delivered in Geneva on June 2nd 1978 on the occasion of the creation by Robert Cornman of a cantata entitled *Retour* and inspired by the*Notebooks of a Return to the Native Land*. In that address reproduced in *Aimé Césaire, pour regarder le siècle en face*, the poet from Martinique declares:

when it appeared the literature of Négritude created a revolution: in the darkness of the great silence, a voice was raising up, with no interpreter, no alteration, and no complacency, a violent and staccato voice, and it said for the first time: “ (Thébia-Melsan 2000, 28)

In fact both answers have been given to that question of posture of revolt vs. philosophical substance, at different moments and in different circumstances by Négritude writers. Nevertheless, it can be said that Césaire and Damas have put more emphasis on the dimension of poetic revolt while Senghor has insisted more on articulating Négritude as a philosophical content, as “the sum total of the values of civilization of the Black World”, thus implying that it is an ontology, an aesthetics, an epistemology, or a politics.

1.5 THE MANISFESTOS FOR NEGRITUDE

Following the example of Alain Locke, Leon Damas in 1947 and Léopold Sédar Senghor a year later published *Anthologies* of poetry to manifest the existence of Négritude as an aesthetics and as a literary movement. Source: ( Négritude *First published Mon May 24, 2010; substantive revision Mon Feb 24, 2014* Retrived 11:25. 26/11/14 http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/negritude/)

In the “Introduction” to his *Poètes d'expression française 1900–1945*, Damas proclaimed that “the time of blocking out and inhibition” had now given place to “another age: that in which the colonized man becomes aware of his rights and of his duties as a writer, as a novelist or a story-teller, an essayist or a poet.” And he stated the literary and political significance of his *Anthology* in non ambiguous terms: “Poverty, illiteracy, exploitation of man by man, social and political racism suffered by the black or the yellow, forced labor, inequalities, lies, resignation, swindles, prejudices, complacencies, cowardice, failures, crimes committed in the name of liberty, of equality, of fraternity, that is the theme of this indigenous poetry in French” (Damas 1947, 10). It is important to notice that he meant his anthology to be a manifesto, not so much for Négritude, than for the Colonized in general, as he insisted that the sufferings of colonialism were the burden of “the black and the yellow” and as he featured in the selection poets from Indochina and Madagascar. Or rather Damas understood the concept of Négritude (in fact the word does not appear in the “Introduction” to the anthology) to encompass people of color in general as they were under the domination of European colonialism. This is a broader meaning of Négritude that the “fathers” of the movement always kept in mind. Damas' view about the substance of the poetry he was presenting, about what the poets gathered in his book had in common besides living the same colonial situation, is generally the same as Etienne Léro's, whose “Misère d'une poésie” (“Poverty of a Poetry”) he quotes abundantly.In a vitalistic language that characterizes Négritude Léon Damas opposes, using Léro's language, the vitality of this “new poetry” to what he denounced as “white literary decadence” (to be contrasted with the revolutionary nature of surrealist philosophy and literature). He quoted in particular Léro's denunciation of writers from the Caribbean “mulatto society, intellectually … corrupt and literarily nourished with white decadence” to the point that some of them would make it a matter of pride that a white person could read their whole book without being able to tell “what their actual complexion was” (Damas 1947, 13). The “Introduction” was indeed a manifesto for Négritude as a vital poetic force that Damas (and Léro) identified as “the wind rising from Black America” which in turn expresses “the African love for life, the African joy in love, the African dream of death” (Damas 1947, 13).

Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, (An Anthology of the New Negro and Malagasy Poetry in French), published in 1948, would eventually overshadow Damas' anthology and his “Introduction” to it as a manifesto for the Négritude movement. Senghor's own “Introduction” is just five short paragraphs as it devoted only to the technicalities of selecting the poets gathered in the book (interestingly, unlike Damas, his choice is restricted to the “Blacks”, the Malagasies being according to him “*mélaniens*” (Senghor 1948, 2)). But what contributed greatly to the fame of the *Anthology* and propelled Négritude into the broad intellectual conversation was the “Preface” written for it by French philosopher and public intellectual Jean-Paul Sartre (1906-1980). The title of the “preface”, *Black Orpheus*, referring to the Greek myth about the evocative force of poetry but also about its eventual impotence in front of fate and death, fully expresses what can be called the kiss of death the existentialist philosopher gave to the movement.

1.6 NEGRITUDE AS ONTOLOGY

When it comes to defining the substance of Négritude, there is an important difference between the three “fathers” of the movement. Damas, a poet more than a theorist, spoke of it in the “introduction” of his anthology as the vital force behind any new and true—that is liberating—poetry. As to Césaire, he has often insisted that Négritude was primarily the reclaiming of a heritage in order to regain initiative. He declared:

Négritude, in my eyes, is not a philosophy. Négritude is not a metaphysics. Négritude is not a pretentious conception of the universe. It is a way of living history within history: the history of a community whose experience appears to be … unique, with its deportation of populations, its transfer of people from one continent to another, its distant memories of old beliefs, its fragments of murdered cultures. How can we not believe that all this, which has its own coherence, constitutes a heritage? (2004, 82)[

Unlike Damas and Césaire, Senghor affirmed that Négritude was also the expression of a philosophy to be read in the cultural products of Africa; and above all in African religions. Different as they are from one region to another, from one culture to another, there is still ethnographical evidence that many of them share to be founded on an ontology of life forces. “The whole system”, Senghor declares, in a lecture “On Négritude” delivered at Lovanium University in Kinshasa, “is founded on the notion of vital force. Pre-existing, anterior to being, it constitutes being. God has given vital force not only to men, but also to animals, vegetables, even minerals. By which they are. But it is the purpose of this force to increase” (1993, 19). Senghor then explains that in the human being the increase of the force is the process of her becoming a *person* “by being freer and freer within an interdependent community” (1993, 19). He adds that the ultimate meaning of religion is to assure the continuous increase of the vital force of the living, in particular through the main ritual of the sacrifice of an animal.  (“Notebook of a return to my Native Land” (Césaire 2000)),

1.7 NEGRITUDE AS AESTHETICS

The aspect on which Senghor insists the most is that of Négritude as a philosophy of African art. One of the main activities of Senghor when he first arrived in Paris at the end of the 1920's was to visit the ethnographical museum at Place Trocadéro in Paris. By then the vogue of *art nègre* (black art) had already produced its effects on modern European art. Pablo Picasso, in particular, in 1906 had made the turn of making African sculptures and masks part of his artistic pursuit: his*Demoiselles d'Avignon*, painted in 1906, manifested that move. The 1930's, the years when Senghor, Césaire and Damas started writing, is the time when what was labeled “primitive objects” were now more widely perceived as art, beyond the circles of the artistic avant-garde. The Universal Exposition in Paris in 1931 showed that new “sensibility”

Senghor wanted Négritude to be the philosophy of the geometrical forms so characteristic of African masks and sculptures across different regions and cultures. He would often explain that the raison d'être of art in Africa is not to reproduce or embellish reality but to establish the connection with what he labeled the *sub-reality* that is the universe of vital forces. What modern art understood from the consideration of *art nègre* is that the issue was not anymore to simply reproduce sensible appearances but to deal with the forces hidden beneath the surface of things. That is why the African objects at the Trocadéro museum were at once religious and artistic artifacts.

Plastic forms are life forces, they are rhythms. So objects such as masks or sculptures are to be read as combinations of rhythms as we can see in the following aesthetic analysis by Senghor of a feminine statuette from Baule culture (in today Ivory Coast): “In it, two themes of sweetness sing an alternating song. The breasts are ripe fruits. The chin and the knees, the rump and the calves are also fruits or breasts. The neck, the arms and the thighs are columns of black honey.” [This reading establishes the object as a composition of two rhythmic series (what is referred to here, poetically, as two themes of sweetness): the concave forms of the breasts, chin, knees, rump and calves, on the one hand; on the other hand, the cylindrical forms that are the neck, the arms and the thighs. This example indicates what Senghor understands by “rhythm” and illustrates what he sees as its omnipresence in Black aesthetic products, as he certainly remembers here the notion expressed, ten years before by Jane Nardal, of a “rule of rhythm, the sovereign master of [black] bodies” (Nardal, 2002, 105). In his first essay on Négritude, “What the Black Man Contributes”, Senghor wrote:

This ordering force that constitutes Negro style is *rhythm*. It is the most sensible and the least material thing. It is the vital element par excellence. It is the primary condition for, and sign of, art, as respiration is of life – respiration that rushes or slows down, becomes regular or spasmodic, depending on the being's tension, the degree and quality of the emotion. Such is rhythm, originally, in its purity, such is it in the masterpieces of Negro art, particularly in sculpture. It is composed of one theme – sculptural form – that is opposed to a brother theme, like inhalation is opposed to exhalation, and that is reprised. It is not a symmetry that engenders monotony; rhythm is alive, it is free. For reprise is not redundancy, or repetition. The theme is reprised at another place, on another level, in another combination, in a variation. And it produces something like another tone, another timbre, another accent. And the general effect is intensified by this, not without nuances. This is how rhythm acts, despotically, on what is least intellectual in us, to make us enter into the spirituality of the object; and this attitude of abandon that we have is itself rhythmic. (Senghor 1964, 296) Seventeen years later he would reiterate the same credo:.

In conclusion, Négritude as aesthetics is predicated on such oppositions as those between sub-reality (or sur-reality) and appearance, force and form, emotion and intellect, Dionysian and Apollonian. Césaire, Damas (as shown in the preface of his *anthology*) and Senghor all agreed that art was a vital response to the mechanistic and de-humanizing philosophy that produced (and was produced by) modern Europe. And like Nietzsche, they believed that art was another approach by which a sense of the world as totality would be restored. These lines from Césaire's “Discourse on African Art” delivered in Dakar on April 6, 1966, at the opening of the “World Festival of Negro Arts” summarize Négritude philosophy of the significance of art, especially black art: “Through art, the reified world becomes again the human world, the world of living realities, the world of communication and participation. From a collection of things, poetry and art remake the world, a world which is whole, which is total and harmonious. And that is why poetry is youth. It is the force that gives back to the world its prime vitality, which gives back to everything its aura of marvelous by replacing it within the original totality” (Thébia-Melsan, 2000, 21).

And it can be argued that it is because of that significance of art that Négritude also presented itself as another type of knowledge or epistemology and as another politics.

1.8 NEGRITUDE AS ESPISTEMOLOGY

In the same 1939 essay in which he explored what he called the “rhythmic attitude” by which we enter in profound connection with the object of art, its reality or its sub-reality, Senghor wrote the statement which is probably the most controversial of all his formulations of the philosophy of Négritude: “Emotion is Negro, as reason is Hellenic” (“*L'émotion est nègre, comme la raison héllène*”). (Senghor 1964, 288) The criticism was that the formula was an acceptance of the ethnological discourse of the Levy-Bruhlian type making a distinction between western societies suffused with rationality and the colonized world of what he labeled “inferior societies”, under the rule of “primitive mentality”. While rationality is defined by the use of the logical principles of identity, contradiction and excluded middle and the empirical notion of causality, primitive mentality functions according to a law of “participation” and magical thinking. The law means that a person can be herself and at the same time be –or rather participate in the being of—her totem animal ignoring (or rather indifferent to) the principle of contradiction, and magical thinking, superposing a supernatural world to reality, allows for example action from distance in the absence of any causal link between two phenomena. (Levy-Bruhl 1926) For his critics, Senghor's formula did ratify the view of Lucien Levy-Bruhl, while the ethnologist himself eventually recanted them in his *Notebooks of Lucien Levy-Bruhl* posthumously published ten years after his death in 1939.

. Donna Jones rightly speaks of Negritude as an “Afro-Bergsonian epistemology”. (Jones, 2010) Senghor did use the language of the author of *Primitive Mentality*, (Levy-Bruhl 1923) for example when he wrote in his 1956 article on “Negro African Aesthetics” that “European reason is analytical by utilization, Negro reason is intuitive by participation” (1964, 203). But he also stated clearly, as early as in 1945, six years after the essay in which the (in)famous formula was written: “But are the differences not in the ratio between elements more than in their nature? Underneath the differences, are there not more essential similarities? Above all, is *reason* not *identical* among men? I do not believe in ‘prelogical mentality.’ The mind cannot be prelogical, and it can even less be alogical” (1964, 42). This affirmation is clearly directed at Levy-Bruhl. So the influence on his thinking claimed by Senghor is rather Henri Bergson's. The poet often refers to the importance of the “1889 Revolution”, in reference to the year of publication of Bergson's *Essay on the immediate data of consciousness*. Bergson, for Senghor, has given a philosophical expression to a new paradigm which, unlike Cartesianism and, even before it, Aristotelism, makes room for a type of knowledge which does not divide by analysis the subject from the object and the object into its constitutive separated parts: different from the reason-that-separates, says Senghor following Bergson, there is a reason-that-embraces, which makes us experience “the lived identity of knowledge and the known, the lived and the thought, the lived and the real” (1971, 287). That approach of reality is the other side of our analytical intelligence: according to Bergson, the push of life in evolution, the *élan vital*, has produced consciousness. Now “consciousness, in man, is pre-eminently intellect. It might have been, it ought, so it seems, to have been also intuition. Intuition and intellect represent two opposite directions of the work of consciousness: intuition goes in the very direction of life, intellect goes in the inverse direction, and thus finds itself naturally in accordance with the movement of matter. A complete and perfect humanity would be that in which these two forms of conscious activity should attain their full development” (Bergson 1944, 291–292). Clearly Bergson does not see “intuition” and “intelligence” as dividing humanity into different types: he calls for their equal development in a fully accomplished humanity.

Two conclusions can be drawn from Senghor's Bergsonism. First, the epistemology of Négritude, what he calls a Negro way of knowing does not simply reproduce Levy-Bruhl's radical cognitive dualism which ultimately divides humanity into two categories, the European and the non-European. It is rather a way of emphasizing the role played by what Bergson has called “intuition” in the production of African cultural objects, more particularly African art. Because, and this is the second conclusion, when he speaks of an African epistemology in fact Senghor is still speaking about art and aesthetics. He is speaking about art as knowledge, art as a particular approach to reality, art as the realm par excellence of intuitive knowledge or emotion. The meaning of “emotion” in Senghor's formula corresponds to its definition by Jean-Paul Sartre as a way of seeing the world as a “non-instrumental totality”: “in this case, writes Sartre, the categories of the world will act upon consciousness immediately. They are present to it *without distance*” (Sartre 1989, 52,90).

We can now conclude with a reexamination of Senghor's infamous formula, which he kept explaining again and again: “Emotion is Negro as Reason is Hellenic”. To pay attention to the context in which it was written is to recall that Senghor, in the late 1930's was absorbing not only ethnological literature but also writings about “art nègre”. In particular a book that he refers to in a simple footnote but which was very influential on his thinking: *Primitive Negro Sculpture* by Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro, published in the US in 1926 and translated into French in 1929. One of the main points made in the book was to contrast Greco-Roman statuary expressing the ideal of the beautiful form as it exists in reality even if it is transfigured by art and African sculpture as a manifestation of the life force beneath the appearances of things. When that context is taken into account, it becomes clear that Senghor's neatly crafted formula (it is an alexandrine in French) can be read as an analogy: Hellenic art is to analytic reason what African art is to emotion. And thus it becomes less scandalous as the simple expression of the Nietzschean way in which Senghor's Négritude has considered art as knowledge and aesthetics as epistemology. As Abiola Irele has rightly remarked: “Senghor's theory of the African method of knowledge and his aesthetic theory” are not just “intimately related [but] even coincide” (Irele 1990, 75).

1.9 NEGRITUDE AS POLITICS

In 1956 Aimé Césaire wrote a resounding public letter to Maurice Thorez, then the General Secretary of the French Communist Party, telling him that he was resigning from the party. He had been a member for more than ten years and had been elected in 1946 as a communist mayor of Fort-de-France then as a Representative of France in the French Assembly. The three “fathers” of Négritude found themselves members of the same French Parliament: Senghor who had been elected a deputy from Senegal in 1946 was sitting with the Socialists and so was Léon Damas who got elected to represent Guiana in 1948.

In his *Letter to Maurice Thorez*, Césaire started by enumerating his many grievances against a communist party that had uncritically pledged total allegiance to Russia before he came to “considerations related to [his] position as a man of color.” As a person of African descent, he declared, his position expressed the singularity of a “situation in the world which cannot be confused with any other … of … problems which cannot be reduced to any other problem … [and] of [a] history, constructed out of terrible misfortunes, that belong to no one else” (Césaire, 2010, 147). That is why “black peoples”, he argued, needed to have their own organizations, “made for them, made by them, and adapted to ends that they alone [could] determine” (Césaire, 2010, 148). Césaire insisted also that Stalinist “fraternalism,” with its notions of the “advanced people” who must help “peoples who are behind,” says nothing different than “colonialist paternalism.” (Césaire, 2010, 149)

finally, What Césaire was seeking in formulations such as “it should be Marxism and communism at the service of black peoples, not black peoples at the service of the doctrine” was to define the notion of a people by means of culture rather than politics. And consequently he was refusing to just dilute the cultural dimension of the existential response of black peoples to colonial negation in Marxist universalism: Césaire's “letter” was also, eight years later, a political response to Jean-Paul Sartre's *Black Orpheus.* Is my decision an expression of “provincialism”, Césaire asked at the end of his letter. “Not at all”, he answered. “I am not burying myself in a narrow particularism. But neither do I want to lose myself in an emaciated universalism. There are two ways to lose oneself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the ‘universal’” (Césaire, 2010, 152).

Césaire called then for the promotion of an “African variety of communism” as a way of avoiding tboth pitfalls. Senghor also has insisted on an African socialism born of a “Negro African re-reading of Marx.” This African socialism of Senghor could be presented briefly in two fundamental points: first the insistence that it is the early Marx who can truly inspire an African doctrine of socialism, second the understanding that socialism is a natural development of African societies and cultures. So in article titled “Marxism and humanism” and published in 1948 in *Revue socialiste* (a Journal sponsored by the French Socialist Party) Senghor notes that which will later be the point of departure for Louis Althusser's reading of Marx: between the early Marx and the Marx who writes *The* *Capital*, there is an epistemological break. It is to be recalled here that in 1844 in Paris, Marx wrote a certain number of texts that he just abandoned afterwards to “the criticism of the mice”. Those texts, known as *The 1844 Manuscripts* were later discovered and published in Leipzig in 1932. They manifest that Marx's thinking and language were then fundamentally ethical as he was outraged by human condition under capitalist regime characterized by reification and alienation: human beings are alienated because, Marx writes, the product of their work sucks out their life force and stands in front of them as strange and hostile artifacts. Alienation is the sentiment of living in exile and imprisoned in a de-humanized world. The Marx who writes the *Capital* will abandon that moral language and analyze the condition of the working class through technical concepts, for example that of extortion of surplus value. While Althusser considered this break the advent of Marxist science as an “anti-humanist theory” Senghor saw it as self-betrayal by Marx repudiating his identity as a philosopher and giving to his views the appearance of dogmatic economic petrifactions. The task of an African re-reading of Marx is then

* To save Marx the humanist, metaphysician, dialectician and artist from a narrowly materialist, economistic, positivist, realist Marxism;
* To invent an African path to socialism which is inspired by black spiritualities, and which continues the tradition of communalism on the continent.

The concept of alienation in particular, so central in the writings of the early Marx are at the heart of Senghor's reflections on Marxism and liberation. Liberation for Senghor is liberation from all forces of alienation, natural and sociopolitical. And in his 1948 article he writes about the early works of Marx: “For us, men of 1947, men living after two world wars, we who have just escaped the bloodthirsty contempt of dictators and who are threatened by other dictatorships, what profit is to be had in these works of youth! They so nicely encapsulate the ethical principles of Marx, who proposes as the object of our practical activity the total liberation of man.” In Senghor's vitalistic philosophy, total liberation will be reached when the human being reaches the stage when her artistic end can now flourish, when the evolution from *homo faber* to *homo sapiens* has now given birth to *homo artifex*.

2.0 NEGRITUDE BEYOUND NEGRITUDE

Reflecting on what has been achieved by the Négritude movement, Lucius Outlaw notes that for all the criticisms it has received, “nonetheless, the Négritude arguments, fundamentally, involved a profound displacement of the African invented by Europeans.” And he continues: “It is this African challenge and displacement, through radical critique and counter-construction, that have been deconstructive in particularly powerful and influential ways: involving direct attacks on the assumed embodiment of the paragon of humanity in whites of Europe, an attack that forces this embodiment back upon itself, forces it to confront its own historicity, its own wretched history of atrocities, and the stench of the decay announcing the impending death of the hegemonic ideal of the Greco-European Rational Man” (Outlaw 1996, 67).

L. Outlaw acknowledges that that was the main point of Sartre's *Black Orpheus*. It could now be argued that the question, *today*, is no longer that of a “deconstructive challenge” to “the hegemonic ideal of the Greco-European Rational Man” but that of what Outlaw calls “the reconstructive aspects of this challenge” (Outlaw 1996, 68). Has Négritude anything to contribute, *today*, to that reconstructive aspect? What does it say about the present and future of Black arts, since Négritude as ontology, as epistemology, and even as politics takes us back, according to Césaire and Senghor, to the philosophy of art considered as a vital knowledge of a reality conceived as a web of forces?

To such a question, it can be said that Césaire had given an answer in the conclusion of his 1966 Dakar address. There could be no prescription of what African art should be. There is no model it should imitate not even its own past. It has to continuously invent itself and that self invention is not to be separated from the question of Africa's self invention. “African art of tomorrow will be worth what Africa and the African of tomorrow are worth”, Césaire declared before ending his lecture with these final words: “… the future of African art is in our hands. That is why to the African Heads of States who say: African artists, work to save African art, here is what we respond: people of Africa and first of all you, African politicians, because you have more responsibility, give us good African politics, make us a good Africa, create for us an Africa where there are still reasons for hope, means for fulfillment, reasons to be proud, give back to Africa dignity and health, and African art will be saved” (Thébia Melsan 2000, 25–26).

One way of raising the question of political relevance is to ask: is there any room for a version of Négritude in what could be considered as a philosophical foundation of black solidarity? In September 1956, at the First Meeting of Black Writers and Artists held in Paris, at the Sorbonne, Aimé Césaire gave a lecture on “Culture and Colonization” (Césaire 1956). This was quite a historic reflection, at a time of maturity for the Négritude movement and just a few months before the shaking of decolonizations started with the independence of Ghana, on the relationship between Négritude and Pan-Africanism. “What is the common denominator”, Césaire started his lecture by asking, “in this assembly gathering people as diverse as Africans from Black Africa, North Americans, Caribbeans and Malagasies?” The first obvious answer, he declared, was that they all lived in a situation that could be described as colonial, semi-colonial or para-colonial. In fact, he continued, there are two aspects in the solidarity of people of African descent gathered then at the Sorbonne: one that could be characterized as “horizontal” and one “vertical”. The horizontal solidarity is political: Pan-Africanism or Black solidarity between Africans and the African Diaspora is their common response to the situation of submission to colonialism and racism. The vertical solidarity or “solidarity throughout time” is the way people of African descent manifest different faces of an African *civilization*. Not to be misunderstood, Césaire hastens to make the precision, with cultural commonality. African cultures in Africa and in the African Diaporas are at least as different as Italian culture would be from Norwegian culture. But they share civilizational traits in the same way Norwegian and Italian cultures share European traits. Césaire's distinction between cultures (characterized by difference) and civilization (defined by the existence of commonalities) would mean that the “vertical” dimension of Pan-Africanism is what could be identified as Négritude. How do we see Pan-Africanism today?

Our times are dominated by the postcolonial and anti-essentialist view that differences should not be subsumed under a notion of Black identity which might have worked as a response to colonial negation but does not have any substantial meaning (just what Sartre said in 1948, when he labeled Négritude an “anti-racist racism”, which Senghor and Césaire forcefully dismissed, insisting that their antiracist combat should never be confused with racism, even a counter or a reverse one). As an example, the *créolité* movement in the Caribbean claimed creoleness as a continuous process of hybridization (“Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles”, the Créolité writers famously stated at the beginning of the manifesto (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant 1990, 75)) turning its back on Césaire's Négritude and his claim of an African heritage as constitutive of his identity: Négritude is *ante-*creole, they wrote. This movement established itself as following from Edouard Glissant's philosophy of creolization. This philosophy is based on a distinction between what Glissant calls “atavistic cultures” grounded in some “creation myth of the world” (a group to which sub-Saharan African cultures belong), and what he calls “composite cultures” “born from history” (Glissant 2003, 111). Thus, he asks, “my own genesis, what is it if not the belly of the slave ship?” Not Africa, then, where the ship was coming from with its hideous freight, but the journey itself, the unpredictable becoming of the voyage to new shores, to new continuously proliferating, rhizomatic identities. The Africanness of African-Americans could be another example. The demand to be called African-Americans after having been “Negroes” then “Blacks” has certainly more to do with the internal identity politics of being Americans in the same way Irish-Americans or Chinese-Americans are than with any claim of substantial solidarity with Africans. Pan-Africanism that is engagement and solidarity with the African continent has always been the concern of a tiny elite among African Americans (even if it is associated with considerable names such as Marcus Garvey or W.E.B. Dubois).

Within the African continent, there is today a renewed attempt at reviving Pan-Africanism under the form of African unity, what is referred to sometimes as “the United States of Africa”. The African Union has thus divided the continent into six great regions that should achieve economic and political integration in a near future as a significant step towards continental unity. It is significant that the decision was made to consider the African Diasporas a symbolic sixth region. Is that a gesture which will remain simply symbolic, a last tip of the hat from the new pragmatic Pan-Africanism to the lyricism of Négritude about Black Solidarity (it should be noted that Pan-Africanism means that the divide between sub-Saharan Africa and the Maghreb has no significance and that Africans are black as well as of European or Asian descent)? In 1956, Césaire seemed to have been conscious that a “horizontal solidarity” as a response to a shared condition of living under colonial and racist domination was less problematic than a vertical solidarity throughout time binding together peoples who have come to develop very different cultures or, within the same nations, very different subcultures. He still believed in that shared “Négritude” as a “civilization” under which those differences would be subsumed. But above all he believed, against any “incarcerating conception of identity” (2004, 92) that Négritude, ultimately, amounts to the continuing fight against racism: “one can renounce the heritage”, he declared in his Miami address but “has one the right to renounce the fight” when one understands that what is at stake today is not Négritude but racism, “seats of racism” here and there which need to be confronted if we are to “conquer a new and larger fraternity”? (2004, 90–92)

To dismiss too quickly Négritude as an essentialism of the past, which might have been necessary as a “deconstructive challenge” to an oppressive colonial order but has nothing to say when it comes to the call for cosmopolitanism and creolization, would miss an important dimension of that multifaceted movement. The essentialist language is pervasive in Négritude literature, no doubt, but so is the language of hybridity which can be seen as undermining it the way Penelope used to undo at night what she had woven during the day. Senghor is as much a thinker of “métissage” (mixture) than he is a thinker of Négritude. His watchword, “everyone must be mixed in their own way” is as central to Négritude as the defense and illustration of the values of civilization of the black world. There is in fact a de-racialized use of the word “nègre” by Senghor which is crucial to understand why painter Pablo Picasso, poets Paul Claudel, Charles Péguy or Arthur Rimbaud, philosopher Henri Bergson, etc. have been somehow enrolled by Senghor under the banner of “Négritude”. The message being, ultimately and maybe not so paradoxically, that one does not have to be black to be a “nègre”.

2.1 CONCLUSION.

This paper has talked about the life history Leopold Senghor, his concept of negritude and its impacts to the African race both within Africa and abroad. Notwithstanding, The concept of Negritude has been traced to its origin where the following sub- topics was addressed and they are as follows:

* The manifestos for Negritude
* Negritude as Ontology
* Negritude as Aesthetics
* Negritude as Espitemology
* Negritude as politics

In summary, Negritude is a concept which holds that there is a shared culture and subjectivity and spiritual essence among members of racial group. That is Negritude has to do with the reactions of people of the black race to criticisms against their beliefs and values.

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