

**IN DEFENCE OF SARTRE'S CRITIQUE OF SENGHORIAN
NEGITUDE**

BY

**OSAYANDE GIFT OGHENEKEVWE
ART1701692**

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY**

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**AN ORIGINAL ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project titled: **IN DEFENCE OF SARTRES CRITIQUE OF SENGHORIAN NEGRITUDE** was undertaken by **Osayande Gift Oghenekevwe** with **MATRICULATION NUMBER: ART1701692** in the Department of Philosophy, University of Benin, Benin City.

Dr. E. Asia
(Project Supervisor)

Date

Prof. P.F Omonzejele
(Head of Department)

Date

External Examiner

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Almighty God. The protector and guardian of the universe for his love and kindness all throughout my stay in the University of Benin.

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ABSTRACT

Negritude responded vigorously to the alienated position of the blacks in history. The study clearly shows that the Negritude movement was inspired by many Africans to protest colonial rule, as black students, scholars, and artists from French colonies came together in the face of growing fascism, to push criticism of Western culture, colonialism, nostalgia for and glorification of Africa. The study also reveals that aim and objective of Leopold Sedar Senghor in Negritude, which was promoting appreciation of the history and culture of black people. The study equally shows that Leopold Senghor was a major theoretician of Negritude. The study further reveals that the essence of Leopold Senghor's political thought was for the Africans to find pride in his culture, while Jean - Paul Sartre praised Negritude as the revolutionary poetry of the time, he maintained the traditional Marxist view about the proletariat being the true revolutionary class and actor of history. This work adopts method of Hermeneutics to argue a case for Sartre's "Orhée Noir".

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Senghor, writing in 1964, describes negritude as the collective personality of the black African.¹ More precisely, negritude is the “ensemble of the cultural values of the black world, as these express themselves in the life, the institutions and the works of black people”.² Race circumscribes the area within which are to be found common beliefs and values. The emphasis on it though should not be taken to suggest that it is a thing or substance, that is, a fixed, independent reality. Race is rather the child of geography and history. But it is no less real for that.³ Indeed, it is so real that it is constitutive of a way of being in the world, and thus of a particular kind of cultural expression. Senghor, in an earlier reflection, writes of culture as born from the reciprocal action of race, tradition and milieu, and therefore it is appropriate to speak of a “black style”, a “black soul”, rooted in and reflective of black experience. Furthermore, from the

nature of the black soul, Senghor will derive, in numerous writings, a philosophy of negritude, a conceptual analysis of black humanity. The black person's relation to the world is of an essentially sensuous, emotional nature.⁴ It is not thereby blind, but the mode of cognition here is not objectifying. It is instead intuitive, participatory, "magical" and holistic.⁵ This cognitive-affective relation also defines the black person's relation to others, family, society, politics and the divine and equally serves as the justification for the choice of poetry by negritude intellectuals as the most appropriate form for the expression of black experience.

Philosophy generally reflects the social-political situation of its time and place. Socio-political situations generally raise many questions in the mind of people and thus give rise to reflection and philosophizing".⁶ Leopold Sedar Senghor is undoubtedly one of the most important philosophers to have come out of Francophone African. In order to appreciate the ideas of any philosophers, it is very important to know the socio-political situation from which the person philosophy arose.

L.S. Senghor was a prominent figure in the liberation struggle of Africa from the strong-hold of Colonialism, colonialism is an all-encompassing attack on the political, cultural, legal, economic and social realms of African existence, leading to massive and decisive take-over of the African spaces. The primordial effect of this take-over was the destruction of African identity that is to destroy what makes the African truly African and to make the African a slave in the mental and physical realms of his life. This loss of identity has led to an identity crisis in African continent. A lot of African scholars have been discussing this issue. Some have indeed proffered solutions. One of there is L.S. Senghor with his philosophy of Negritude.

At the heart of Senghor Negritude was the liberation of the Africans, African personality and cultural domination of the west. L.S Senghor's Concept of Negritude will be critically appraised. In doing this, the essay will be calibrated into four chapters.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The central problem of this work is to determine the extent to which Negritude is successful as a response to colonialism. We wish to establish if Senghor's Negritude was actually an anti-racist-racism. The problem the work attempts to solve is the question of the relevance and contribution of Senghor's Negritude and to what extent did it actually respond to the prevailing European ideology.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of study is to show the defence of J.P Sartre's concept of Negritude as conceived by L.S. Senghor and its contribution to development in African liberation. And finally, the merits and demerit of his concept will be exposed.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this essay will lie in its appraisal of the conception of Negritude as proffered by L.S. Senghor. The importance of this project will also lie in its portrayal of the workability or non-workability of L.S. Senghor's theory of Negritude.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This work will be limited to an overview of Senghor's concept of Negritude. Nevertheless, in the process of over viewing his ideology, cognizance will be taken of the influence on him, the Work "Negritude" itself, and circumstances surrounding the postulation of the ideology.

1.6 Methodology

In the course of this work, two methodologies were employed simultaneously. The methods include the analytic method and critical method; the analytic method will enable use to have a better simplification, clarification and explanation where necessary.

1.7 Literature Review

In his work *Negritude as Hermeneutics: A Reinterpretation of Leopold Sedar Senghor's Philosophy*⁷, J. Obi Oguejiofor argues against what it regards as the uncritical characterization of Leopold Sedar in terms of ethno-philosophy, a derogatory term employed in contemporary African philosophy to describe philosophy that is communal, and which can

sieved out from such genres as proverbs, wise sayings, and myths. It reviews the backgrounds and the contents of Negritude, including its metaphysics and its epistemology of emotion. It calls attention to Senghor's ideas about communalism and his universalism seen in his theory of the civilization of the universal, and concludes that Senghor's particular and personal interpretation of his experience of the African condition, and is therefore eminently Hermeneutical.

In his article "Negritude; A Pan-African Ideals".⁸ B. Le Baron says, Negritude has always been a literary-cultural movement, a movement more potent in the realm of intellect and idea than in terms of concrete political activity, and it might even be argued that its net effect is more detrimental than helpful to the Pan-African aim of political union on a continental scale. According to Le Baron, both Pan-Africanism and Negritude has origins outside the African continent, in Europe and the new world; both gained impetus during the 1940's and 1950's from reaction against different aspects of the experience of colonial subjugation, and each in various ways, derives substance in today's context from the

political, economic and psychological problems of an underdeveloped continent facing a highly competitive world. Obviously, the two patterns of thought will have a numerous points of overlap, but they also have points of conflicts and when the ideas seek objectification in political organizations, the conflicts tend to become acute. His aim is to examine Negritude within a Pan-African frame of reference, especially problem and conflicts. In particular, he wanted to discuss racism, political union, ambivalence toward the white, European or non-African world, and mystical overtones.

The next work to be reviewed is a work done by Leopold Sedar Senghor himself, titled: Negritude: "Humanism or the twentieth century".⁹ According to Senghor, during the last thirty years, we have been proclaiming Negritude, it has become customary, especially among English speaking critics to accuse us of racialism. This is probably because the world is not of English origin. Negritude is an inferiority complex, but the same world cannot mean both racialism and inferiority complex without contradiction. No Negritude according to Senghor is any

of these things. It is neither racialism nor self-negation. Yet it is not just affirmation, confirmation of one's being. Negritude is nothing more or less than what some English-speaking African have called the African personality. It is no different from the "black personality" discovered and proclaimed by the American New Negro movement.

It is as John Reed and Clive Wake called it a certain "way of relating oneself to the world and to other". Yes, according to Senghor, it is essentially relations with others, an opposing out of the world contact and participation with others. Because of what it is, Negritude is necessary in the world today: It is a humanism of the twentieth century.

The last book to be reviewed here is a book by J. Obi Oguejiofor, "Philosophy and the African Predicament".¹⁰ This book is a timely addition to the literature on the interrelated issues of the nature and direction of African philosophy. The author examines the question of the use of philosophy in Africa. In doing this, he questions the conventional assumption that philosophy can offer a special understanding of human affairs which differs from the knowledge provided by the non-

philosophical disciplines. He contends that the use of philosophy lies not in the insight of philosophers or the content of their work as such, but in the practice of philosophy itself, particularly its critical spirit which makes it an implacable enemy of dogmatism.

Endnotes

1. L.S. Senghor. *Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century*, (New York, 1970). p.9.
2. p. 8
3. Ibid., p. 9.
4. Ibid., pp. 8-9.
5. Ibid., pp. 23-4, 260.
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7. Ibid., pp. 71-7.
8. J. O. Oguejiofor. “Negritude as Hermeneutics: A Reinterpretation of Leopold Sedar Senghor’s Philosophy”. *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 83 (1): (2009), pp.79-94.
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CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF LEOPOLD SEDAR SENGHOR

2.1 Life, works and influence

Leopold Sedar Senghor was a politician, an anti - colonial intellectual and a poet per excellence.¹ He rose to become one of the significant cerebral leaders that assisted African countries to attain the status of political independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Senghor was an astonishing Senegalese intellectual who went on to become the country's first President in 1960. He was a scholar and African traditionalist poet.² Ideologically, Senghor was an African socialist and a major theoretician of Negritude, a literary and political movement which was formed in Paris in the 1930s, by a group of students from the French Caribbean and Africa.³

Negritude which is a dream and philosophy of action for the black people as a race of discriminated and exploited humanity, was co- founded by

Aime Cesaire and Leo Damas, who were notable poets, writers and political activists.

The three of them were concerned not only with the cooperation between blacks within the group, crystallizing a vision of a new African perspective, elimination of barriers between black students from the various French colonies, but also with the well being and unity of the black race.

The conceptual frame work of Negritude, which in essence is the sum total of the cultural values of the African civilisation that had to be preserved and revitalized for active contribution to the global dialogue of cultures, was spelt out by Leopold Senghor as follows:

“The sum total of the cultural values of the black world as they are expressed in the life, institutions and the works of blackmen...The Negro has reactions that are more lived, in the sense that they are more direct and concrete expressions of the sensation and of the stimulus, and so of the object itself with all its original qualities of power”.⁴

This fantastic Senegalese cum French citizen, was born on October 9th, 1906, in Joal, Senegal. He had his early education in Catholic mission school in Senegal, before he immigrated to France to seek greener pastures in 1928, at the age of 22.

Leopold Sedar Senghor studied Philosophy and French Literature at Sorbome University, after he had attended Louis-le-Grand High School. His gradual incorporation into the French society became ripened when in 1932, he got the French citizenship.⁵

This foremost architect of Senegalese nationhood, who was the first African ever elected to the Academic Francais; a Minister in France long before Senegal obtained Independence; a symbol of cooperation between France and its former colonies, co- founded the Senegalese Democratic Block in 1948, with Mamadou Dia.

After the Second World War (1939 - 1945), Senghor became the Chair of Linguistics at the French National School for Overseas Department and

Territories, until 1960. He was elected a representative of the Senegal - Mauritania region at the French National Assembly.⁶

His Senegalese Democratic Block won legislative elections in 1951. In 1956, he became Minister- Counselor for the Michel Detre government; member of the Commission in charge of Drafting the Constitution of the French Fifth Republic; elected President of the Senegalese nation on September 5th, 1960, and presided over the then newly born Republic of Senegal.⁷

For two decades (1960 - 1980), the cultural theorist presided over the affairs of Senegal, as the first President. Senghor wrote the country's national anthem; the Red Lion.⁸

Also known as the 'poet president' Leopold Sedar Senghor, who sought improvement for Senegal within the frame work of a broad community of nations, to accommodate economic and political objectives/interests, developed systematic interrelated set of ideas which justified close French

- African ties and legitimised an elite rather than a mass based political system, once said that:

“Negritude is the single acknowledgement and acceptance of the fact of being black, of our destiny as black people, of our history, and of our culture”.⁹

By the time Leopold Sedar Senghor breathed his last on December 20, 2001, in Version, France, the world remembered him not only as the first ever President of independent Senegal, but more as man who offered Negritude as a controversial movement to blacks around the world, to reject the social, political and moral domination of European domination.

2.2 The Socio-Political Atmosphere of His Time

Leopold Sedar Senghor was a product of French colonial circumstance. He was born at a time when he could not lay claim to a functional national geographical entity, as full blown imperialism and colonialism was hanging over his head and shoulders in Jaol, in 1906.

He struggled and succeeded to make a meaning of his earthly existence; and in spite of his romance with Negritude, he was a dye-in-wool French citizen.

Sylvia Washington Ba, the author of 'The Concept of Negritude in the Poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor', here offer this stark decription of Leopold Senghor thus:

“Consciously allowed himself to be french, adores french things, used his poetic vacation to seek and fashion the spiritual and psychological discord emanating from a clash between his African roots and his french acculturation into a tool for the liberation of African selfhood from colonial disfiguration”.¹⁰

Though a champion of adventurist cultural theory of cultural fraternity amongst diverse nationalities, it is very clear that the socio- political atmosphere of his time entrapped him just as Franx Fanon described him as 'a revolutionary, who became assimidator per excellence.'¹¹

Jean - Paul Sartre laid bare the contradiction that worked against the likes of Leopold Sedar Senghor in their days, for promoting french cultural hegemony. According to Jean - Paul Sartre:

“The European elite undertook to manufacture a native elite. They picked the promising adolescents; branded them , as with red hot iron with the principles of western culture, they stuffed their mouths full with high sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country, they are sent home whitewashed. These walking lies had nothing to say to their brothers”.¹²

Though, Leopold Senghor could not be categorized as a complete robot to French colonialism or 'a walking lies' to his people, but he controversially established himself as a theorist of cultural universalism that promoted French globalism.

That is to say that Senghor was a conformist who adapted the then prevailing social political customs and attitudes which were dominantly French.

Frederico Mayor, the then UNESCO Director- General, hit the nail on its head about Leopold Sedar Senghor's characteristic traits, when he said:

“But when, in the splendour of his adopted language, he lays claim loudly and clearly to his African identity, it is never in a spirit of introversion, withdrawal or refusal of otherness. His Negritude is, as he himself says, a 'trowel in the hand', and is proclaimed in other to create rather than negate, to define himself in relation, not in opposition, to the other”.¹³

2.3 The Francophone Philosophy of Policy of Assimilation

Napoleon Bonaparte, as Emperor of France, in the 19th century created new laws to replace the previous universal laws that applied to both France and the colonies (en.m.wikipedia.org). That was how the French policy of assimilation birthed.

According to Nardial, J,¹⁴ the policy of assimilation was the official colonial policy of the French administration in West Africa. The system involved the imposition of the French culture over the West African culture.

Assimilation was meant to substitute the culture, language, religion, law, mode of dressing of the African people.

The imperial French authorities main purpose of establishing this policy was to turn African natives into Frenchmen by educating them in the language and culture and making them French citizens.¹⁵

The policy of assimilation was based on the idea that immigrants should adopt the language, customs, and values of natural majorities and abandon there cultural heritage. Assimilationist policies therefore was to homogenise the population to reduce cultural diversity.¹⁶

Senegal was one of the Francophone countries that were Incorporated into French culture and regarded as an Overseas province of France. In fact, Africans from Senegal were allowed to participate in the political affairs of France. Assimilation policy of France condemned and undermined African culture. Francophone became more assimilated into the French political system as there was centralised Federation of French West Africa.¹⁷

However, there was stiff resistance by West Africans against imposition of French imperial policy of assimilation, as it discriminated against traditional institutions, even it recklessly affirmed the supremacy of French culture to those of its non- European countries. In deed the French colonial authorities apppointed and dismissed traditional rulers and chiefs at will.¹⁸

Endnotes

1. N. Mandela. *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, (Nolwazi: A Macmillan company, 1994), p.23.
2. K. White Man. *Leopold Senghor: Poet and International Leader of Independent Senegal*. Oxford: Oxford Signal books. 2001, p.47.
3. Ibid., p.48
4. L.S. Senghor, *Anthologie De La Nouvelle Langue Poesie Negre et Malgache De Franciaise*, Paris Presses Universities de France, 1948, p.60
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7. Ibid., p.58.
8. Ibid., p.59.
9. L.S. Senghor, Op.Cit., p.123.
- 10.B.A. Washington, *Negritude in the Poetry of Leopold Senghor*. University of Kansas Press. 2016, p.98.
- 11.F. Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York: Groove Press, 1991, 70.
- 12.Sartre, J. P. *Black Orpheus*, trans. S. W. Allen, Paris Presence Africane. 1976, p.67.
- 13.T. Shelby, “We Who Are Dark”, *The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*, Cambridge: Cambridge Press. 2007, p.34.

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- 17.Ibid., p.106.
- 18.T. Shelby, Op.Cit., p.24.

CHAPTER THREE

SENGHOR AND NEGRITUDE

3.1 Concept and Origin

Leopold Sedar Senghor himself defined Negritude as: “The sum total of the cultural values of the black world as they are expressed in the life, institutions, and the works of black man”.¹ Ba cleverly analyses Leopold Senghor's poetry to expose the fact that the concept of negritude influence it at every level. Life is an essentially dynamic mode of being for the black African, and it has been Senghor's outstanding achievements to communicate through the use of the nuances, subtleties, and sonorities of the French language.²

Therefore, Leopold Senghor believes that every African shares certain innate and distinctive characteristics, values and aesthetics. Negritude is the active rooting of an Black identity in African essence.

3.2 Negritude as Affirmation of Being

The themes of alienation and exile pervade Senghor's poetry, but it was the opposition of his sensitivity and values to those of Europe that he was able to formulate his credo. Its key theme, and the supreme value of black African civilization, is the concept of life forces, which are not attributes of being, but the very essence.³

Senghor describes African culture in terms of precisely those supposed markers of African life that had been so long revived 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.⁴

Negritude is indeed 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.⁵

3.3 Negritude and Black Struggling

From a political stand point, Negritude was an important aspect to the rejection of colonialism. Emerging at the cusp of African independence movements, Negritude made an impact on how the colonized viewed themselves. It also sparked and fed off of subsequent literary movements that were responding to global politics. The Negritude movement was influenced by the Harlem Renaissance, a literary and artistic flowering that emerged among a group of black thinkers and artists (including novelists and poets) in the United States, in New York, during the 1920s.⁶

Negritude, French Negritude, literary movement of the 1930s , '40s, and '50s that began among French speaking African and Caribbean writers living in Paris as a protest against French colonial rule and the policy of assimilation.⁷

3.4 Negritude as Racism

Negritude rehabilitates breaking from the European ideology that classifies them as inferior to White. By breaking the colonial “white/black”, binary, negritude sought to reproduce the imaginary.⁸

The literature of Negritude is demonstrated 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 preoccupation of the movement revolves around this central problem, the negro predicament of having seen freed by historical circumstances upon the west considered the master society and dominating culture. The literary themes if Negritude 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.⁹

3.5 Relevance of Negritude as an Ideology

PAN - AFRICANISM has been described as essentially a movement of emotions and ideas, and this description equally applicable to Negritude, which is its cultural parallel. Indeed no better phrase could be found to sum up its double note, first as a 'psychological response to the social and cultural conditions of the colonial situation', and secondly as a fervent quest for a new and original orientation. In further respect, the imaginative writings of French - speaking Negroe intellectuals offer a precious testimony to the human problem and inner conflict of the colonial situation. In the later respect, their propaganda writing and other activities represent an effort transcend the immediate conditions of this situations by a process of reflection. Negritude is thus and the same time a literary and ideological movement.¹⁰

3.6 Emotion vs. Reason

Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions.¹¹ Reason helps us to refine our emotions and help us to evaluate and validate our

reasoning. In order to see this more clearly we need how our reasoning and our emotions are means to understand the world around us, but either one by itself is incomplete.¹² Reason is infinitely more powerful than emotions if we make proper and conscious use of it. It allows us to regulate the emotional response. It leads us to balance the conflict. It gives us the ability to feel our emotions properly and modulate them in response to a stressful stimulus.¹³

3.7 The Reactionary Extremes of Senegalian Negritude

Ten years after independence, criticism of Negritude has become a controversial subject at the universities in Cameroun, Dahomey and in other West African countries. Although at some universities the "true scholars" of Negritude are still dominating the scene, members of a new generation openly voice their criticism; they focus on the ideological aspect of Negritude and rely to a lesser extent on the interpretation of poetry.¹⁴

Such criticism on the part of younger scholars reached its peak during the First Pan - African Cultural Festival held in Algiers in 1969. There Negritude was declared dead. It is an interesting phenomenon that within this group of critics the poets and creative writers are only a minority. Writers in Guinea, Ivory Coast, and elsewhere are preoccupied with the search for a new identity and a new responsibility in independent Africa, and generally are not very interested in fighting last year's war¹⁵

3.8 Negritude and Identity Crisis

The waves of slavery, racism and colonialism that swept across Africa left the identity of the African in disarray. In a bid to capture the identity of the African , Senghor used the concept Negritude to symbolize what the blackman stands for. He defines Negritude as the whole complex of civilized values, cultural, economic, social, political which characterize the black peoples, or more precisely, the Negro -African world.¹⁶

The word Negro refers to a people of designated colour: black. And this identity of the African has been a source of ridicule from the West; at one

point everything black was inferior and devilish. It was in response to this background that Senghor developed a colour based ideology for the African. He maintains that the black colour of the Negro, rather than demean him, assigns him a unique place world community. The concept of Negritude sprang up as the culmination of that desire earlier conceived as a celebration of the black endowment and a drive for the restoration of the dignity of the black race.¹⁷

3.9 The Distractors of Negritude

Curiously, Negritude has no originating text as such; it took root, and flourished in Paris in the mid 1930s, fed by the writings of two black scholars from the French colonies, Aime Césaire (b. 1913) of Martinique and Leopold Sedar Senghor (1906 - 2001) of Senegal. Both of these figures would go on to become major writers, and each would play a leading role.¹⁸

Negritude was led by the Martinican poet, Aime Césaire, French Guyanese poet, Leon Damas and the future Senegalese President, Loepold

Sedar Senghor. It was influenced by a range of styles and art movements including surrealism and the Harlem Renaissance.¹⁹

Negritude became internationally recognized with the publication of Césaire's book length poem, Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (Return to my native land) in 1939. The Césaire - Senghor collaboration that led up to this movement was indeed serendipitous.²⁰

3.10 Sartre's 'Orphée Noir'

Orphée Noir is a key document in the history of the concept of Negritude. In Black Orpheus, Jean - Paul Sartre speaks of Negritude as a poetic entity that provides the avenue for the rebirth of the black man in his innate roots. Sartre illustrates Negritude in a similar light of Aime Césaire, in which Sartre expresses that the black man uses his damaged being to create a more positive sense of self.²¹

Through the European mindset of logic and reason, the black man encountered oppression and subjugation. Given this ordeal, Sartre explains that the black man's ultimate goal is to redefine himself and

discover his human and cultural qualities. Through this process, Negritude reverses the subjugation effects of the French Language and utilizes the language as a positive force to bring about an African cultural expression. Despite the usage of the French Language, Sartre also articulated that the black man must eliminate white cultural traits from his entire being upon this cultural shedding, the black man can then rebuild himself through his African roots and develop a culture from poetic image.²²

Sartre's idea of Negritude faces tension between two ideas in terms of the struggle's focus - race and class. Sartre's vision of Negritude surrounds the idea of class given his reference to the proletariat. Although the proletariat are relevant to the Negritude movement, the initial struggle surrounds the concept of race.²³

3.11 Objections to Sartre's Anti - Racist Racism

Sartre's phenomenological theories of race, juxtaposing dominant and subaltern ideologies, are contrasted with his dialectic of Negritude. The antinegritude movement of the late 1960s is also considered with

reference to Sartre's theories and inspiration. During this period , the relationship that Sartre established with the Martinican intellectual and revolutionary Frantz Fanon helped to place Sartre into prominence as an activist and a theorist of decolonization and third world politics.²⁴

Sartre's theories of race, self and society were integral to both his early and later works and warrant review as approaches to the sociology of culture and sources of reflection for contemporary studies. Few philosophers have opposed institutionalized racism as vehemently as Jean - Paul Sartre, both in his intellectual work and political action.²⁵

3.12 In Defense of Sartre's Critique of Negritude

Jean - Paul Sartre was one of noted critics who gave Negritude an extended critical exposition. It was his famous essay "Black Orpheus" which he wrote as a preface to Sengho's anthology of Negro poets of French Expression that defined and consecrated the term, which has since entered into the popular French dictionary, Larouse, and may one day be accepted by the French Academy for inclusion in its official dictionary.²⁶

Sartre illustrates Negritude in a similar light of Aime Cesaire, in which Sartre exposes that the black man uses his damaged being to create a more positive sense of self.²⁷

The paradox of Sartre's preface to the Anthology by Senghor is that in many respects the Negritude movements had, after Black Orpheus, to define itself against Sartre's positioning of its philosophical meaning. It did so (1) by insisting that it was not a mere particularism defined as the antithesis to a white supremacist view (with black self affirming using the figure of inversion that Sartre characterized as an anti - racist racism before some dialectical post - racial synthesis; (2) by showing that there was something substantial (and not just poetic) in the reference to African values of civilization by which Senghor had defined Negritude : that Negritude was indeed an anthology, an epistemology, an aesthetic and a politics.²⁸

Again, Sartre's preface was a real kiss of death as it played an immense role in popularizing the Negritude movement and contributed to establishing Senghor's Anthology as its manifesto, but at the same time

dismissed its historical significance by emphasizing that its being was ultimately only poetic without real substance. And in fact, ironically, *Black Orpheus* contained and announced most of the criticism that would be directed at Negritude afterwards. First the criticism which very quickly came from certain Marxists, who accused Negritude of creating the distraction of "race" where there should be only a focus on objective social contradictions in the historic phase of the struggle of the Proletariat to bring authentic liberation to the oppressed workers in Europe and the dominated peoples in the world. So, while he praised Negritude as the revolutionary poetry of the time, Sartre maintained the traditional Marxist view about the proletariat being the true revolutionary class and actor of history.²⁹

Talking really about African philosophy, "In African Philosophy in Search of Identity", Masolo offers an expansive and lucidly panoramic view of the origin and developments in African philosophy. In what he terms the "rationality debate," the author explores distinguishing features separating Western from non-Western peoples. He clearly provides an

historical overview and background to the issues in African philosophy today. Western ethnocentrism, he argues, stemmed partly from slavery and academic expressions. European scholars like Kant and Hegel laid the groundwork for Eurocentrism that has continued with other scholars. Disciplines of philosophy, history, anthropology and subsequently religion were effectively utilized to separate "logocentrism from emotivism," reason from prelogism.³⁰

African reaction gave rise to various concepts of negritude, Harlem renaissance, African personality and Pan-Africanism. Writings of Aime Cesaire, W. E. B. Du Bois, Leopold Senghor, Edward Blyden, Frantz Fanon, Cheikh Anta Diop, and Martin Bernal demonstrated efforts toward African self-definition and identity. Theirs was a concerted effort to combat racist stereotypes of Africa and people of African descent. Most of these initial writings were political, historical, and sociological. The first piece of literature on African philosophy that would provide a springboard for discussion in the academic institutions was the work of Father Placide Frans Tempels. His work, *Bantu Philosophy*, provided the

setting of what has been subsequently called "Ethnophilosophy." A. Kagame, John Mbiti, and M. Griaule are cardinal disciples of ethnophilosophy. It is highly popular among clerics³¹

Endnotes

1. S. Washington. *Negritude in the Poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor*, University of Arkansas Press, Arkansas, 2016, p.30.
2. Ibid., p.31.
3. Ibid., p.32.
4. Ibid., p.33.
5. Ibid., 34.
6. Shireen K. Lewis. *Race, Culture, and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean Literature and Theory From Negritude to Creolite*, (Lexington Books 2006), p.60.
7. Ibid., p.61.
8. Ibid., p.63
9. A. Irele. “Negritude—Literature and Ideology,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol, 3, No, 4, Cambridge Press, 1965, pp. 499 – 526.
10. Ibid., p.527.
11. Ibid., p.529.
12. L.F. Barret. “How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain”. Amazon Kindle Store, 2017, p.56.

- 13.D.C. Shindler. *Plato's Critique of Impure Reason*. Amazon Kindle Store.2015, p.105
- 14.A. Shelton. *The Black Mystique: Reactionary Extremes in Negritude*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1964, p.56.
- 15.Ibid., p.57.
- 16.I.C.A. Kanu.” Negritude and the Quest for an African Identity”. Vol.:4, Issue 8/August 2004, p.20.
- 17.Ibid., p.23.
- 18.B.A. Abanuka. *A History of African Philosophy* Onitsha: Spiritan Publication, 2011, p.109.
- 19.Ibid., 110.
20. Ibid., 112.
- 21.D.L. Christopher. *Negritude in Black Orpheus*. University of Texas Press. 2011, p.38.
- 22.Ibid., p.39
- 23.Ibid., p.40
- 24.B. Jules-Rosette. “Jean - Paul Sartre and the Philosophy of Negritude: Race, Self and Society.” *Theory and Society*. University of California Press. 2007, p.69.
- 25.Ibid., 70.

26.A. Irele. Op.Cit., p.526.

27.Ibid., p.527

28.Ibid., p.538

29.Ibid., p.529

30.O. Bolade. “Review of African Philosophy in Search of Identity”.
Africa Today Associates Press, Vol. 42, Issue 3. 1995, p.79.

31.Ibid., 80.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Evaluation

From chapter one it is very clear that Negritude or self-affirmation of black peoples, is a protest tool against French colonial rule and the policy of assimilation. It developed partly as response to Western views of Africa as a primitive and savage land and blacks as an inferior race. These views inspired people in the Negritude movement to emphasize positive African qualities such as emotional warmth, closeness to nature and reverence for ancestors.

Negritude is a term coined from a literary and ideological movement developed by French-speaking black intellectuals during the 1930s, which reflected a widespread reaction to the colonial situation. It was a movement that influenced Blacks around the world to reject the social, political and moral domination of European colonizers. The external factor defining black persons in modern society is their physical and

physiological domination by white persons; the beauty and vitality of the black person is constricted by internalization of colonialism. Negritude rehabilitates blacks from the European ideology that classifies them as inherently inferior to whites. By breaking the colonial “white/black” binary, negritude sought to reproduce the imaginary. The term negritude, originating from the same French term as the “n-word”, embodies these movements efforts transform the value of black personality. By treating a racial slur as a treasure, Aimé Césaire highlights the explosive value of the expression; a term used so stoutly to curse a people has even greater power to connect an entire race, which is exactly what negritude did for African and Caribbean peoples.

Black intellectuals used poetry and literature to affirm black personality and redefine the collective experience of blacks. Though some of the leaders demanded a complete removal from colonial ideology and others stressed the significance of accepting one’s past they all insisted on the expression of black peoples Africanism. Through poetry and stories these thinkers played the role of magician reproducing a culture in a land where

culture didn't exist; they would help move the Caribbean from sterility to virility. The epic poets role was to layout the possibility of hope to a peoples whose hope was internalized by oppression. They recreated the myths for black persons to begin reimagining themselves within. Negritude demands black solidarity through the total consciousness of belonging to the black race and the passionate praise of the black experience. People were encouraged to reach an imaginative expression that was connected with the romantic myth of Africa. Because of this, surrealism became a foundational tool in the Negritude movement since it praised undomesticated blacks—a people who were not yet possessed by reason and logic. It was believed that life and liberation could only come from a capacity to receive from the true; love; fear; beauty; darkness; the marvelous, a capacity which only the decolonized black could achieve.

4.2 Conclusion

As this chapter four elapse here, it has been revealed that, one of the marked features of the contemporary black African is his unquenchable desire to regain, in Sartre' s phrase, his existential integrity. This implies

"the original purity of his [black African] existence'. Before now, the black race is regarded as debased by the whites who claim to be the epitome of civilization and development in all its ramifications. They see the black race as having contributed nothing and can contribute almost nothing to the global development. This make them to increasingly question the rationality of the African which eventually is the necessary condition that makes one a human. As such, some like the French went to the extreme of trying to make French people of the blacks. The negritude movement as championed by Leopold Sedar Senghor is as a result of this negative attitude of the whites against the blacks and it gears towards asserting the black identity. His drive is not for social progress, economic consolidation and stability but above all for self actualization through the resource of his being and culture. It is back to his root as source of his existence and survival as a being in the world. ⁴

The three major themes recurring in David Diop's poetry are criticism of Western civilization and its attendant colonialism, nostalgia for and glorification of African, and a firm belief in a future Africa which is

prosperous, united and strong. Negritude constituted a dream and above all a philosophy of action for the black people as a race of discriminated and exploited humanity. Negritude contained in its vision a new African personality, African world view, and a path to authentic black existence.

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2. J. Vaillant, "A Black, Friend, and African. A Life of Leopold Senghor. Cambridge Press, 1990, p.34.
3. Ibid., p.35.
4. Ibid., p.36.
5. Ibid., p.37.

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