

AHMADOU KOUROUMA: NEGRITUDE TIGRITUDE INTERFACE PERSONALITY

by
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Introduction

Negritude has come to mean different things to different people. It is like the elephant being described by blind people; everyone of them perceives it differently depending on the limit of knowledge available to them. To the African man who buys into the concept of Negritude, it goes beyond the minimalist concept projected by the Fathers of the movement – Leopold Sedar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas. The important thing about it is that the movement served as a wake-up call. Unlike the plays of Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, which were easily understood by the West because they seemed adaptations of Greek Myths from African perspective, negritude poetry, mirror of multiple oral genres, was neither an adaptation of classic poetry, baroque, dadaist, *trouvère* or *troubadour* poetry. The characteristics of Negritude orality, the dimension and scope need to be explored to the fullest. Apart from what we can project from our minimalist background of Nigerian cultures which is not our focus for now, we intend to project here what our studies of Ahmadou Kourouma of Malinké background – Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, almost spreading half of the countries in West Africa – project.

1. Characteristic and Scope of Negritude

According to Senghor (1988: 117), logical order in a presentation of Negritude would have required, as Albo-European logic would want it, to start with *The African Word*, *The African Poem* and *The African Art*. However, he put everything together as Negritude to reflect his thought which is more of African civilization in all its entirety. In effect, Senghor sees the African poem, the epicenter of African civilization, as a minimalist concept that projects all about the African civilization. He could not be wrong as in many an African milieu everything is expressed mythically, proverbially, in songs or dance. First, it is verbalized, before it is given life physically. Gassama (1978), captures it in his *KUMA*; Achebe (1958), in *Things Fall Apart*, mentions it as “proverbs are the oil in yam with which words are presented in their entire beauty; Niane (1960), in *Soundjata*, presents it with the griot as a master of words, the same as Camara, *maitre de la parole*; Diop B. (1961) in *Les Contes*; Diop, D. (1983) in poems, Dadié (1970) in *Monsieur Thôgô-gnini*, (1973) in *L'étrange destin...* In effect to Jeusse (1984: 95), the word is not stationary, not easily tractable, it is like life itself, as you trace or try to track it, it keeps on moving, shifting grounds. In effect Negritude tracks what is traceable in all the gamut of African experience beyond what science does. However, beyond that, the human being must move and, the Word which is capable of projection out of fantastic sayings and imagination, reveals the unending chain of life. For every situation, words come to the rescue. Hence, Senghor lined up different oral genres to depict a given condition or state of the human being. Incantation for the departed – “I am the God of Tum”. Adoration of the sun – “You that never give up”. He says:

Poèmes gymniques qui défie l'adversaire. Poème qui exprime la mélodie; poème de rythme; chez l'africain, tout est exprimé en un genre oral spécifique qui, soumis à un développement présent dans l'art reste inexorable.

What we mean here is that for African all is said in an oral genre very specific to a given circumstance which, if presented in written form, could be inexhaustible. According to Senghor (1988: 136), the African in Diaspora has shown how dynamic the Negritude concept could be that one needed to bring it to universal acclaim by including not only what is seen in Africa but also that which is seen in Africa that has taken a value – added shape in the Americas. In effect from the added – value angle, Senghor was inspired to reveal the authentic aspect of Negritude. As a student, Senghor read *la Revue du monde noir* by Panlette Nardal of Martinique, financed by Dr. Leo Sajous, a Haitian. He read the resistance of USA occupation of Haiti that lasted about 20 years. He read *New-Negro*, *Négro Renaissance*, *Souls of Black Fawks*, etc. Etienne Lero and Jacques Roumain are part of the Diaspora inputs of Negritude.

Negritude at a given point acknowledged its weakness which is universal for any human endeavour even the acclaimed scientific or Cartesian method not to talk of the United State's libertarian approach that is in a boomerang state now. Part of the Negritude weakness is unnecessarily exploited by Wole Soyinka. He felt Tigritude should ridicule Negritude.

2. Tigritude Interlude

Tigritude is the term used by Wole Soyinka to express misgiving on the approaches adopted by Negritude in creating awareness about the African man's heritage and in asserting negritude. In effect, it was a hasty criticism because he gave an a-priori limit to Negritude. His works, especially plays, make the Greek plays look childish because of their sophistication and their resemblance to that of the Greek. In such sophistication tigritude is asserted. Even as both Greek plays and his are mostly tragic events, he sees it as win-win situation calling on both the African and the European to return to sources where meanings to life level all civilizations. However, Feuser (1978: 95) feels that Soyinbka could be seen as wavering for as he put it,

Soyinka who in *A Dance of the Forests* – (1960) had debunked the past as a recurring cycle of violence and who in *The Interpreters* (1965), had one of his characters declare that the fabric of the past had to be ruthlessly disrupted if Africa's global or national politics were ever to make sense, is now searching for powers of tradition to sustain the African revolution.

Feuser sees him finding in Atooda, the Promethean traitor of the gods and Ajantala, archetype of rebel child, iconoclast, anarchic, anti-clan, anti-matriarch, virile essence in opposition to womb-domination. They are all in Yoruba myth. What is more, he finds Ogun – the Mars of the Yoruba Pantheon – who for him becomes the deity of the revolution, the goredrunk hunter who in a sweeping Pan-African gesture strikes at the Rhodesian rebel regime of then. "Shaka, roused, define his being new in Ogun's embrace".

Still in line with asserting tigritude, Yakubu (2001: 106) views Soyinka's works as being governed by the principles of artistic [re]creation of Ogun, the Yoruba god of war. According to Yakubu, Soyinka's placement of Ogun as humanity's Promethean instinct is one which tacitly elevates the Yoruba to the position of a master – race. Whether Soyinka discusses *Death and The King's Horseman*, *Kongi's Harvest*, *Mandela's Earth*, *Idanre*, or *Beautification of Area Boy*, his constant vision is in the capacity of Ogun for destruction and creativity in human beings, a process which produces the phenomenon of self-realisation in society.

Soyinka's approach to asserting the African heritage and African roadmap among other races is quite intimidating. It could be foolhardy trying to intimidate other races who had succeeded in taking the black race into slavery by whatever means; bizarre or barbaric. Hence, Senghor, Damas and Césaire conjugating their combined experiences had to come to term with the concept of Negritude. According to Senghor, it is an inheritance of a method of knowledge – African mode of knowing. In effect, it is important to expose and explain why the European thinks and behave how he does and, also why the African behaves and thinks the way he does. The African own is compounded by oppression and attempt to annihilate him/her both in and outside Africa. Hence, the following summary of Falaiye (2004: 29) is necessary to usher in Ahmadou Kourouma, a Negritude Tigritude Interface personality.

Since every human being depends upon his cumulative experiences with others for clues as to how he should view and value himself, children who are constantly rejected understandably begin to question and doubt whether they, their family and their group really deserve no more respect from the larger society than they receive. These doubts become the seeds of a pernicious self-and group-hatred, the Negro's complex and debilitating prejudice against himself. The Negro Speaks of Rivers' is Hughes' attempt to bring the black soul out of this pernicious evil of self-doubt. The new image of the African that stems from a soul that is as deep as the rivers and that bathed in the Euphrates and built his hut near the Congo are clear indications of a Negro with history, a tradition of accomplishment and a hope for the future. The Negro Speaks of Rivers' reclaims the origins of the black soul in Africa, his/her physical and spiritual humanity.

3. **Ahmadou Kourouma's Perspective of Negritude**

Ahmadou Kourouma seemed to have taken up the challenge of projecting Negritude to another level. In effect, as earlier on said, Senghor and his Negritude friends were trying to project the many means, through poetry, proverbs, songs, etc, that permit the African to know – paradigm of knowledge and its means of revelation to the African. It was not like expressed by Soyinka; a Nigeria, a Senegal, Igbo, Yoruba, Serrère, Wolof or Malinké issue. It is beyond Africa as a continent. However, Kourouma in his first novel: *Les Soleils des Indépendances* (*The Suns of Independences*) published in 1970, came up with a genre that was quite peculiar to his people. That novel is presented in chapters with titles encapsulating sub-myths. For example, the main words of the book's title – "soleils and indépendances" – are quite revealing of what symbols convey to the African mind. "Suns" and "independences" in plural

convey the meaning of good and bad seasons in one object “sun”; while “independences” convey also good and bad sides of freedom. It is all about respecting and disrespecting values in or out of seasons; issues of restraints imposed by values and excessive freedom that annihilates the process of knowing. The first chapter is entitled: “Le molosse et sa déhontée façon de s’asseoir ». The female dog that has given many birth or, just out of giving birth to puppies and its posture or sitting manner, some time reveals an unbridled freedom; sitting anyhow as against manners of sitting that conveys civility. Hence, when you remind a person about that posture, a message is sent. No sex discrimination is intended here. Both male and female genders are targeted in relaying such message.

The second novel published after 20 years – *Monnè, Outrages et Défis*, (Ignominy! Outrages! Defiances!), is part of expressing value degradations in Africa. It has the same pattern of presentation like the first novel. However, this time around, the hero is an African king enmeshed in alien cultures – Islamic and European, and trying to assert his Africanness to no avail.

His third novel – *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages* (Waiting for the vote of beasts), 1998, showcases the foolishness of adopting a system of governance that rebuffs the values and culture of the people. The head of state ridicules democracy à la West. Make – believe structures of democracy are created but the votes that ensure the winning of an election are not votes from the majority. In effect, democracy could negate Africa’ way of life if not appropriately, the African head of state could emerge amongst those abhorred to be natural leaders by African standards. Such leader could make others look like beasts to be hounded as in games reserve. That novel never mentioned Senghor as one of those heads of state who saw in the majority beasts.

Le diseur de vérité (The truthsayer) is a play presented as a satire of the regime of Houphouët Boigny in Côte d’Ivoire. He was a truthsayer quite alright; however Kourouma ironically disagrees; truthsayer of whose truth and for whose interest?

Allah n’est pas obligé (2000) is like saying Allah is not constrained by anybody or anything. He does what He likes and He is not bound by the rules or self-discipline, human beings impose on themselves to curry His favour or mercy. He dispenses His favours or punishment as He wishes. The atrocities of wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea are part of what Kourouma sees as artificial incidents by people who are not in communion with their ancestral beliefs and fail to know that what feeds the soul is more important than the pursuit of ignoble wealth. Here, the emphasis is spiritual harmony not quest for flesh satisfaction which precipitate degradation of both mater at spirit.

Quand on refuse on dit non (2004) (when you reject, say no). In this book the same hero in *Allah n’est pas obligé* ... crosses the border to Côte d’Ivoire in the name of tribal war. Here, it reminds one of the vow made by French people after the Great Revolution of 1789: Never again. They rejected Ancient Regime and said never again. Even when Jean Le Pen wanted to enact it during the second ballot with Jacques Chirac, they repeated in unison by their votes: NO. Africans have rejected tribal wars for long but have failed to adopt measures that could lead to saying “NO” whenever it rears its head. Hence, the problem remains one of the Achilles heel of the continent. The novels of Kourouma are in tandem with structural principles of anthropologies like Calude Levi-Strauss and Ferdinand de Saussure; to any

given people and any given culture there are immanent processes that convey knowledge revelation to them and such processes are never to be ignored if the world wish to gain from them and become a better place for all races to live.

Conclusion

Negritude is a process as we have seen in this our presentation. Tigritude had served it as an antithesis, it seems also to be partially what Kourouma projects. Both Soyinka and Kourouma help in sharpening negritude. Negritude does not die with the death of Senghor, Césaire and Damas. A neo-approach is called for. There is need to project Negritude to another level – panhuman level. It is a phase that could take a longer process. However, it is worth embarking on. Senghor was a Christian who remained head of State of quasi Islamic State like Senegal for decades. He, certainly, employed mostly African paradigm in his government while not losing sight of the two worlds infringing on his person. Today, the world is at crossroads of virtues, vices, and doctrines. Projections by Negritude on conflict resolution processes and humanistic solution to pluralistic cultural conflicts should engage everyone for another decade.

What we read in *Black Boy* of Richard Wright and Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* are all worthy of what help in internal conflict resolution; that is self-esteem and self assertion; for a better understanding of where the Africans come from toward knowing better where the Africans are heading to. Hence more of such writings in the African Diaspora are needed.

Jacques Rouman's *Gouverneur de la Rosée* is also a write-up encapsulating courage which is also part of Negritude quest. More of them are needed. Novels, Literatures and Write-ups produced in both Africa and the Diaspora must be made available for larger readership. There should be no feelings of them being trash, they are the heritage of a race, they could be fine-tuned for a panhuman appreciation.

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