

AN EVALUATION OF LEOPOLD SENGHOR'S CONCEPT OF *NEGRIITUDE* AS AN IDEOLOGY FOR AFRICAN LIBERATION

Chris Abakare, PhD*

Abstract

There are myriad of fundamental problems that are bedeviling the continent of Africa and these fundamental problems are colonialism, neocolonialism, imperialism or trade imbalances, the crisis of African identity, the hegemonic tendencies of globalization, poor national planning, hunger, diseases, abject poverty, poor leadership structure, massive corruption, infrastructural deficit, weak government institutions, poor judicial system, violation of human rights and dignity, gender inequality, high infant mortality, poor health care system, environmental degradation and poor per capita income, and low life expectancy. Leopold Senghor's theoretical analysis and ideological template of *Negritude* encapsulates the critical importance of the family. Senghor's postulation of *Negritude* presupposes that the family is the smallest unit of any society. Be that as it may, the theoretical reconstruction of Senghor's *Negritude* is in consonance with Kwasi Wiredu's context that the family is understood in terms of a non-Western sense of kinship and common ancestry lineage. The objective of this paper is that Senghor's theoretical reconstruction of *Negritude* is a clarion call for African emancipation from the evils of colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism. His ideological template reminds us the implications of Western biases and the evils of Eurocentricism that has been bedeviling the African continent. This evil of Eurocentricism has created a negative implication on the quest for African development. There has been a great divide between developed and developing countries and this has led to certain ideological orientations such as globalization. Senghor's conceptual analysis and ideological templates of *Negritude* presupposes the philosophy of communitarian agreement, rational consensus, we-consciousness and shared common destiny. The conceptual clarification of African communalism reveals that in African communal setting the African person lives within his community and he is defined by a sense of belongingness. Senghor's conceptual analysis and ideological templates of *Negritude* presupposes the philosophy of communitarian agreement, rational consensus, we-consciousness and shared common destiny. The conceptual clarification of African communalism reveals that in African communal setting the African person lives within his community and he is defined by a sense of belongingness. Worthy of note is that Senghor's theoretical reconstruction has theoretical affinity with Kwasi Wiredu's philosophical inquiry that the African is thus held in a form of an umbilical cord or cosmic network of communal fellowship. This binds him at same time with others. However, the African person is fundamentally inspired by the family and the society. The family is the base and the smallest unit of every human society.

Introduction

There are myriad of fundamental problems that are bedeviling the continent of Africa and these fundamental problems are colonialism, neocolonialism, imperialism or trade imbalances, the crisis of African identity, the hegemonic tendencies of globalization, poor national planning, hunger, diseases, abject poverty, poor leadership structure, massive corruption, infrastructural deficit, weak government institutions, poor judicial system, violation of human rights and dignity, gender inequality, high infant mortality, poor health care system, environmental degradation and poor per capita income, and low life expectancy. Leopold Senghor's theoretical analysis and ideological template of *Negritude* encapsulates the critical importance of the family. Senghor's postulation of Negritude presupposes that the family is the smallest unit of any society. Be that as it may, the theoretical reconstruction of Senghor's Negritude is in consonance with Kwasi Wiredu's context that the family is understood in terms of a non-Western sense of kinship and common ancestry lineage.

Furthermore, the objective of this paper is that Senghor's theoretical reconstruction of Negritude is a clarion call for African emancipation from the evils of colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism. His ideological template reminds us the implications of Western biases and the evils of Eurocentricism that has been bedeviling the African continent. This evil of Eurocentricism has created a negative implication on the quest for African development. There has been a great divide between developed and developing countries and this has led to certain ideological orientations such as globalization. Senghor's conceptual analysis and ideological templates of *Negritude* presupposes the philosophy of communitarian agreement, rational consensus, we-consciousness and shared common destiny. The conceptual clarification of African communalism reveals that in African communal setting the African person lives within his community and he is defined by a sense of belongingness. Senghor's conceptual analysis and ideological templates of *Negritude* presupposes the philosophy of communitarian agreement, rational consensus, we-consciousness and shared common destiny. The conceptual clarification of African communalism reveals that in African communal setting the African person lives within his community and he is defined by a sense of belongingness. Worthy of note is that Senghor's theoretical reconstruction has theoretical affinity with Kwasi Wiredu's philosophical inquiry that the African is thus held in a form of an umbilical cord or

cosmic network of communal fellowship. This binds him at same time with others. However, the African person is fundamentally inspired by the family and the society. The family is the base and the smallest unit of every human society.

Furthermore, this paper is divided into four sections. Section one is the introductory remarks. Section two focuses on the conceptual clarification of Leopold Senghor's notion of *Negritude* as an ideology for African liberation. The question of African liberation has become a contested one due to the fundamental problems of colonial, neocolonial and imperialist vestiges. Section three is anchored on the evaluative appraisal of Senghor's postulation of *Negritude* as a solid bedrock for reaffirming and reasserting African blackness. Section four is the concluding considerations.

Senghor's Concept of *Negritude*

The work of Senegalese statesman and man of letters Leopold Sedar Senghor is referred to as a philosophical masterpiece in contemporary African political philosophy. The theory of *Negritude* presents another variation on the theme of ethno-philosophy.¹ Senghor argues that the theory of *Negritude* must be a distinctively African epistemology with its own methodology for comprehending the universe.² He grounds his socio-political philosophy of *Negritude* on the idea that the African experience of the world is based on emotion and not reason.³ *Negritude* is a consciousness of the African worldview through the medium of emotion and the expressing of emotion is at the center of African culture.⁴ Senghor holds that Africans were not inferior to Europeans. Senghor's re-assertion of the value of being black represents a search for a political strategy, a methodology that would work for Africans in their quest to reclaim their dignity and rightful place among other members of the human race. Senghor's intellectual contribution was, therefore, to re-assert the value of a continent that was almost entirely colonized, and whose inhabitants were considered savages, barbarians and sub-humans.⁵ Senghor was accused of being a spokesman for Europe. His work has its own inherent contradictions. This treatise is not wasting much time on this shared abstract philosophical concept.

Senghor's contribution to philosophy and to African thought must be assessed in the context of his multifaceted roles as a complex man, poet, politician, president and humanist.⁶ His political philosophy aims at contemporary African political thought – a transition of the African

continent from European rule to African independence. Kwasi Wiredu observes that:

Contemporary African philosophy is in a state of flux, but the flux is not without some watersheds. The chief reason for the flux lies in the fact that Africa, in most part, is in a state of transition from a traditional condition to a modernized one. Philosophically and in other ways, the achievement of independence was the most significant landmarks in this transition. Independence from European rule (which began in Libya in 1951, followed by Sudan 1956, Ghana in 1957 and continued to be won at a rapid pace in other parts of Africa in the 1960s), did not come without a struggle. That struggle was, of necessity, both political and cultural. Colonialism involves not only political subjection but also cultural depersonalization. Senghor's concept of *Negritude* – the beauty of the African essence became part and parcel of this political and cultural struggle.⁷

Consequently, the concept of *Negritude* as championed by Senghor showcases the need for cultural regeneration for the African peoples. Wiredu attests to this fact that, accordingly, at independence it was strongly felt that plans for political and economic reconstruction should reflect the need not only for modernization but also for cultural regeneration.⁸ Wiredu further posits that:

The philosophical basis of the project had first to be worked out and this was attempted by the first wave of post-independence leaders. The task of devising technical philosophies cognizant of Africa's past and present and oriented to her long term future has been in the hands of a crop of professional philosophers trained in Western-style educational institutions. Philosophical results have not been as dramatic as in the case of the political, but the process is ongoing.⁹

Worthy of note is that Wiredu further argues that the political figures that led African states to independence were not all philosophers by original inclination or training. To start with, only the best known, such as Leopold Senghor of Senegal, or Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, were trained philosophers, but others such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kenneth Kaunda of

Zambia, brought only an educated intelligence and a good sense of their national situations to the enterprise. In all cases, they were rulers enthusiastically anointed by their people to chart a new course for Africa and lead them to the promise land.¹⁰ The epistemological anthropology of *Negritude* was one of the fundamentally inspired and propounded blueprints for reconstruction with clearly articulated philosophical underpinnings. Kwasi Wiredu further argues that:

Leopold Senghor just like other African professional philosophers argued for a system of socialism deriving from their understandings of African traditional thought and practice, and from their perceptions of the imperatives generated by industrialization, such as it had been concern with this latter aspect of the situation led to some flirtation and even outright marriage with Marxism. But, according to the leaders concerned, the outcomes of this fertilization of thought had enough African input to be regarded as an African progeny. Accordingly, practically, all of them proffered their theories and prescriptions under the rubric of African socialism. No such labeling is possible in the works of African philosophers, but there are some patterns of pre-occupation.¹¹

Worthy of note is that Senghor's concept of *Negritude* provides the basis for the emotive and participatory character of African socialism and cognition. *Negritude* aims at restoring the dignity of the black peoples. It reflects on a kind of a cultural rebirth. Accordingly, Kwasi Wiredu observes that of all the African leaders, Senghor – a poet and man of letters, is perhaps the most learned and most remarkable in his philosophical views. His philosophical expositions in his concept of '*Negritude*' was focused on restoring in black people the pride in their being and culture that has been eclipsed by colonization.¹² This term refers to both a literary movement and its defining outlook. Moreover, the concept of *Negritude* serves as an epistemological, anthropological, cultural, social and political roadmap for the black people. Mutiso and Rohio, cited by Kwasi Wiredu, collaboratively observe that:

The pioneer of *Negritude* was Aime Cesaire, the black poet and playwright from Martinique. In the hands of Senghor, *Negritude* also became a kind of epistemological anthropology and a political philosophy. According to Senghor, *Negritude* designates the whole complex of civilized values – cultural, economic,

social and political which characterize the black peoples or more precisely, the Neo-African World. Senghor's notion of *Negritude* showcases the socio-political, epistemological and communal character of African society.¹³

As Kwasi Wiredu succinctly observed, the character of these values emerged at the social and more fundamentally, epistemological levels. According to Senghor cited by Kwasi Wiredu, socially, the key to those values were held to consist in what Senghor calls the communal characteristic of African society. Countries exhibiting that kind of social formation are ones in which the group takes precedence over the individual; they are above all, religious countries where money is not king.¹⁴ Senghor's *Negritude* emphasizes on the importance of the family in African political setting. He argues that the family is the smallest unit of political organization in the society. Senghor, in consonance with Wiredu, points out that the family in this context has to be understood in a non-Western sense as referring to a kinship unit including all persons, living and dead, who acknowledge a common ancestor.¹⁵ Kwasi Wiredu again proceed to argue that:

Senghor stresses on the importance of the institution of the family, which he says is the microcosm of this kind of society. Senghor suggests that this unit is better called a clan following anthropological usage. In a typical traditional village or town it would be more numerous and at the level of a nation, innumerable in its smallest proportions, then, a family in this sense, is a substantial community and provides, as the immediate context of early socialization; a natural school for the cultivation of a broad sense of social belonging and obligation.¹⁶

Senghor's *Negritude* assumes the philosophy of we-consciousness or shared common destiny or social belongingness. According to Senghor cited by Kwasi Wiredu, the African is thus held in a tight network of vertical and horizontal communities, which bind and at the same time support him. More significantly, the African is the fullest illustration of the truth honoured in time by socialism, that man can only live and realize himself in and through society.¹⁷ The family and the society are fundamental aspects of the individual human person.

Moreover, Senghor does not suggest that African's devalue individuality: the African claims his autonomy to affirm himself as a being. Broadly speaking, the logical point to be noted here is that in the African scheme of things, individuality is defined in terms of

community, not vice versa.¹⁸ In consequence, the African approach to self-consciousness is non-Cartesian. Senghor's epistemological reading of this mode of the axiom of communalist self-consciousness – *I think, therefore, we are* – as a self-affirmation remains uniquely his own. His conceptual clarification of *Negritude* reflects on the emotive and participatory character of African cognition.¹⁹

Further expositions from Senghor are cited here by Kwasi Wiredu:

Let us consider the negro-African as he faces the object to be known as he faces the other: God, man, animals, trees or pebbles, natural or social phenomenon. In contrast to the classic European, the African person does not draw a line between himself and the object, he does not hold it at a distance, nor does he merely look at it and analyze it. More exactly, after having hold it at a distance, after having scanned it without analyzing it, he takes it vibrant in his hands, careful not to kill it or fix it. He touches it, feels it, and smells it. Thus, the African sympathizes with other fellow Africans.²⁰

Nonetheless, the global family and the global society are fundamental aspects of the human person. However, Senghor's theory of *Negritude* suggests African value of communalism and not individuality: the African claims his autonomy to affirm himself with his immediate communal society. But, the point to be noted here is that in the African scheme of things, individuality is defined in terms of community. In consequence, the African approach to self-consciousness reflects on the concept of the African families. It is on this premise that Wangari Maathai argues thus:

As in other regions of the world, the basis of African society is the family. A critical element in promoting and sustaining development in Africa is to keep African families intact. Achieving this will involve what we might call the "reintroduction" of the African man to his family. Since the earliest days of slavery, through colonialism and beyond, virtually the entire economic system of sub-Saharan Africa has depended on uprooting the African man and forcing him explicitly or by default to seek employment away from his home.²¹

Worthy of note is that African society is characterized by unity in diversity. For Wangari Maathai, Africans must make a deliberate choice to move forward together towards more cohesive macro-nations, where all can feel free, secure, and to be at peace with themselves and others, where there is no need for any group to organize violence against their neighbours. Then, everyone would begin to reap the benefits of unity in diversity.²²

Evaluation

Senghor's philosophical inquiry demonstrates the need for Black liberation and the emancipation of the black peoples from the evils of colonialism. The continent of Africa requires socio-political and economic liberation. Colonialism, imperialism, and neocolonialism have been the major hindrances to African emancipation. Based on these major hindrances African leaders such as Leopold Senghor, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Frantz Fanon, and Sekou Toure have proffered solution to the continent of Africa. Senghor foregrounds his socio-political matrix of *Negritude* on African notion of emotion and reason. For Senghor, the African people are perceptual, emotional and rational. Senghor's concept of *Negritude* emphasizes on the contemporary significance of the African family. Senghor's concept of *Negritude* seeks to salvage or regain African identity. The concept of African identity has been at the front burner of the philosophical enquiries of many scholars. Senghor's concept of *Negritude* is reflective, emotive and participatory.

Furthermore, the theoretical discourse of Senghor's philosophical masterpiece best represents contemporary issues in African philosophy. The theory of *Negritude* represents the dialectical variation of ethno-philosophy. Senghor's postulation of *Negritude* comprehends African notion of the universe. Senghor foregrounds his postulation of *Negritude* on the idea of African lived experiences. Senghor's dialectical variation and postulation of *Negritude* is a represents African worldview. Senghor avers that Africans were not mediocre to Europeans. Senghor's re-affirmation of African epistemology and African value represents an exploration of African world in their search for to reaffirm their humanity.

Worthy of note is that Senghor's theoretical contribution was, therefore, to re-affirm African worldview and African value. He was accused of being a presenter for Europe. His theoretical reconstruction has some logical inconsistencies. His theoretical contribution was

actually a radical response to Western biases. However, Senghor's conceptual clarification of *Negritude* as represents the need for cultural rebirth for the African peoples.

Worthy of note is that Senghor's theoretical contribution and ideological postulation of *Negritude* is a reassertion and reaffirmation of the furtherance of African independence and African identity. Senghor's philosophical postulation of *Negritude* reveals that Africans must take their common destiny in their own hands. Consequently, Senghor, Nkrumah, Kaunda, Nyerere, were trained African philosophers. These African statesmen brought their intelligence, ideological vigour and a good sense of their national situations to the philosophical enterprise of Africa. They were enthusiastically and fundamentally inspired by their people to lead and plan a new course for the African continent. Worthy of note is that a conception of African epistemological dimension of Senghor's postulation of *Negritude* was fundamentally inspired by the need for construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of African emancipation.

Worthy of note is the conceptual clarification of Senghor's postulation of *Negritude* provides an overview and the ideological basis for African emancipation. The African peoples are defined by their sense of perceptive, emotive and participatory character. The African peoples are also defined by their sense of belongingness in terms of African characteristics of communitarian consensus. However, Senghor's ideological template and philosophical postulation of *Negritude* aims at reestablishing the peoples of Africa. His ideological template and philosophical inquiry of *Negritude* is a reflection on the need for African cultural rebirth. Senghor's postulation or explanations of the concept of '*Negritude*' was actually aimed at reinstating the black peoples in the African continent. Worthy of note is that Senghor's ideological template and theoretical postulation of *Negritude* represents a social and literary movement.

Moreover, the concept of *Negritude* as championed by Leopold Senghor represents epistemological, anthropological, cultural, social and political and contemporary significance for Africa. The character of African values is encapsulated on the social, moral and epistemological

dimensions. Senghor's ideological template, philosophical postulation and theoretical reconstruction of Negritude is deeply rooted in those African values that were held in high esteem and this consist in communitarian consensus and characteristic of African society. The African person believes that he is not purely individualistic but his human personality revolves around communitarian agreement or communal fellowship. The African person holds that the meaningfulness and meaninglessness of his human existence is tied to the communitarian setting.

Worthy of note is that Senghor's theoretical analysis and ideological template of *Negritude* encapsulates the critical importance of the family. Senghor's postulation of Negritude presupposes that the family is the smallest unit of any society. Be that as it may, the theoretical reconstruction of Senghor's Negritude is in consonance with Kwasi Wiredu's context that the family is understood in terms of a non-Western sense of kinship and common ancestry lineage. Worthy of note is that Senghor's conceptual analysis and ideological templates of *Negritude* presupposes the philosophy of communitarian agreement, rational consensus, we-consciousness and shared common destiny. The conceptual clarification of African communalism reveals that in African communal setting the African person lives within his community and he is defined by a sense of belongingness. Worthy of note is that Senghor's theoretical reconstruction has theoretical affinity with Kwasi Wiredu's philosophical inquiry that the African is thus held in a form of an umbilical cord or cosmic network of communal fellowship. This binds him at same time with others. However, the the African person is fundamentally inspired by the family and the society. The family is the base and the smallest unit of every human society.

Nonetheless, Leopold Senghor's theoretical reconstruction does not suggest the devaluation of the concept of individuality in the African continent. Worthy of note is that the African person asserts his autonomy by living within the community. However, the logical necessity of Senghor's postulation of Negritude points to the fact that the African scheme of things revolves the harmonious completeness between the individual and the community. Consequently, the African person is deeply rooted in self-consciousness exemplified by the Cartesian paradigm. Worthy of note is that Senghor's epistemological relevance of the mode of the communalist self-consciousness is that African individuality is subsumed in African communalism. Senghor's theoretical reconstruction and philosophical postulation of Negritude is a self-affirmation of the African person that remains uniquely his style.

In addition, the family and African society are complemented, peaceable, sociable and normative in nature. Worthy of note is that the African person believes that African communitarian society revolves around normative conclusions. However, Senghor's theoretical reconstruction of *Negritude* suggests the perceptual representation of African value and African communalism. The African person is defined by unity in diversity.

1.4 Concluding Considerations

Senghor's theoretical analysis and ideological template of *Negritude* encapsulates the critical importance of the family. Senghor's postulation of Negritude presupposes that the family is the smallest unit of any society. Be that as it may, the theoretical reconstruction of Senghor's Negritude is in consonance with Kwasi Wiredu's context that the family is understood in terms of a non-Western sense of kinship and common ancestry lineage. Worthy of note is that Senghor's conceptual analysis and ideological templates of *Negritude* presupposes the philosophy of communitarian agreement, rational consensus, we-consciousness and shared common destiny. The conceptual clarification of African communalism reveals that in African communal setting the African person lives within his community and he is defined by a sense of belongingness. Senghor's conceptual analysis and ideological templates of *Negritude* presupposes the philosophy of communitarian agreement, rational consensus, we-consciousness and shared common destiny. The conceptual clarification of African communalism reveals that in African communal setting the African person lives within his community and he is defined by a sense of belongingness. Worthy of note is that Senghor's theoretical reconstruction has theoretical affinity with Kwasi Wiredu's philosophical inquiry that the African is thus held in a form of an umbilical cord or cosmic network of communal fellowship. This binds him at same time with others. However, the the African person is fundamentally inspired by the family and the society. The family is the base and the smallest unit of every human society.

*** Chris Abakare, PhD**

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

Email: oc.abakare@unizik.edu.ng

Endnotes

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