

Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research



University of Abou-Bekr Belkaid, Tlemcen
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of English



Section of English

**Images of Cultural Values in Sédar
Senghor's Poem "Prayer to the Masks"**

*Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English as a partial Fulfilment for the
Degree of "Master" in Literature and Civilization*

Presented by:

Miss. Nawel BOUNAGHLA

Supervised by:

Dr. Wassila MOURO

Co-supervised by:

Ms. Amina BOUALI

Academic Year 2015 – 2016

DEDICATION

To my parents, and to the persons- too many to name.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I take pleasure in putting on record my ardent thanks to my ideal supervisor Dr. Wassila MOURO and Miss. Amina BOUALI for their generous support, endless patience, invaluable guidance, constructive criticism and constant encouragement.

I would be much grateful to all my teachers, especially Dr. Ghouti HADJOU and Mrs. Souad BERBAR for examining this modest thesis.

Abstract

This study explores the culture of West Africa which is found in the poem “Prayer to the Masks” written by Léopold Sédar Senghor in 1945. This masterpiece is chosen to be tackled because it hides a lot of cultural images values within its verses. An analytical approach is applied to decode symbolism in the poem. This research gives a historical vision about West Africa and its main writers. It deals also with culture in Senegal since it is the birthplace of Senghor. The practical part gives an analysis of the poem and highlights the most cultural images values from which the four African concepts are raised: African nationalism, African spiritualism, ambivalence, and religious images (Roman Catholicism). The result of this work is that African literature is extremely vast and deep in meaning since it contains symbolism. Senghor is not seen as a poet or a president but as an African man who has self-esteem towards his race.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	I
Acknowledgments.....	II
Abstract.....	III
Table of Contents	IV
General Introduction.....	1

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movements and its Main Precursors

1.1. Introduction.....	3
1.2. Western Colonialism in Africa.....	3
1.2.1. Reasons of Colonialism in Africa	4
1.2.2. Colonialism in Senegal.....	7
1.3. Culture in Senegal.....	8
1.4. Literature in Senegal	9
1.5. The Rise of the Negritude Movement.....	11
1.6. Founders of the Negritude Movement.....	13
1.6.1. Aimé Césaire (1913-2008).....	13
1.6.2 Léon Gontran Damas (1912-1978)	14
1.6.3 Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001).....	14
1.6.3.1 Senghor's Life.....	14
1.6.3.2 Senghor's Major Poems.....	16
1.6.3.2.1 Chants d'ombre (1945).....	16
1.6.3.2.2 Nocturnes (1961).....	17
1.7 The Crisis of Negritude.....	17
1.8 Conclusion.....	18

Chapter Two: Images of Cultural Values in Sédar Senghor's Poem *Prayer to Masks*

2.1 Introduction.....	20
-----------------------	----

2.2	Critical Analysis of “Prayer to the Masks”	20
2.3	Major Cultural Images in “Prayer to Masks”	24
2.4.1	African Nationalism.....	25
2.4.2	African Spiritualism.....	27
2.4.3	Ambivalence.....	29
2.4.4	Religious Images (Roman Catholicism).....	31
2.4	Conclusion.....	32
	General Conclusion.....	33
	Appendix.....	34
	Bibliography.....	36

General Introduction

The years 1930s and 1940s witnessed the outbreak of cultures, civilisations and literatures all over the world. Negritude was a literary movement which was held by French-speaking African and Caribbean writers living in Paris as a protest against French colonial rule and the policy of assimilation. In fact, this production of black writers created an African cultural identity through their use of the French language. African culture was undoubtedly shaped by many traditions that built the African identity such as dance, music, sculpture, masquerades and ceremonies. This notion was highly presented by many poets from whom Léopold Sédar Senghor was the precursor.

Senghor's poem "Prayer to the Masks" is one of the best epitomes of the African poetry. It embodies a rich literary work by its unwonted stylistic and cultural features. The aim of this research is to explore the literary images of the poem and decipher the poet's symbolic words. This research paper also sheds light on the African culture, assumptions and religions of the poet and the African people found in "Prayer to the Masks".

The aspects of the African culture may immediately raise the following question: what are the main important cultural images in Senghor's poem "Prayer to the Masks"?

An analytical approach is to be tackled in order to understand the poet's intent and to make sense of his attitudes in relation to his poem.

However, to answer this question, the work is divided into two chapters. The first chapter is designed to refract on the breakthrough of the Negritude Movements and its main precursors to whom the poet belongs. Furthermore, it tackles the history and culture of Senegal as being the birthplace of Senghor. The following subtitle shows the score of poets that have overflowed the African literature with a rich culture such as Aimé Césaire and Leon Gontran Damas. This foregrounds to the greatest negritude

poet, Léopold Sédar Senghor, with a sketch of his life, then an account to his major masterpieces in poetry. Then, there is an enlightening on negritude, mainly its crisis.

The second chapter, however, gives an answer to the problematic of the current research, and tends to diagnose the poem which is under study. It represents first a general view about the poem. Then, it gauges its main characteristics that lie on the use of nationalism, spiritualism, ambivalence and Catholicism.

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

1.1 Introduction

The history of Africa is deeply rooted in the western colonisation where the African surface has radically converted into a newly born culture. Keeping the ritual heritage, Africa blends the two civilisations in one pot. In 1930, Africa was scarred by an inordinate overgrowth of movements, notably the historical vogue known as “The Negritude Movement” with its masterminds.

All forms of literary works such as prose, poetry, and drama were beautifully stirred by the birth of this trend. Diving in the works of the three father founders boost the critics to chance on the black beauty of African people and their ritual culture.

1.2 Western Colonialism in Africa

The history of Africa was deliberately favourable due to the great changes that occurred between 1880 and 1935. Indeed, the most important dramatic changes happened in the short period from 1890 to 1910 where the imperial powers and the establishment of the colonial system started to spread all over Africa. In the late 1880s, few African countries had come under the direct European rule. For instance, in the West of the brown continent just the island and coastal areas of Senegal, the town of Freetown and its environs (now in Sierra Leone), the southern parts of the Gold Coast (now Ghana), the coastal areas of Abidjan in Ivory Coast and Porto Novo in Dahomey (now Benin) and the island of Lagos (in what is now Nigeria) were dominated by the European forces. Whereas, in North Africa, the only colonised country was Algeria as the French colonisers settled on it during the 1880s. Meanwhile, the Eastern part of Africa was in peace and far away from the European domination, while Mozambique and Angola were ruled by the Portuguese (Boahen 1).

In Southern districts of Africa, the foreign rule was firmly implanted and it considerably enhanced distance inland. In short, by the late of the 1880s, about 80 per cent of African countries were ordered by the continent’s own kings, queens, clan and lineage heads, in empires, kingdoms, communities and polities of various

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

sizes and shapes. However, the next thirty years had thrown Africa to revolutionary and unconditional changes; by 1914, Africa lost her sovereignty and independence, and her cultures were also raped (Boahen 1-3).

The First World War has notably benefited from Africa in terms of resources, human and material. Similarly, by the end of the war French trade in 1930 with Senegal 1 per cent because of the conscript of the potential African producers in the south and north Sahara who bore arms on the Western Front. Hence, the French manpower went to decline which threw the industrial production to a cripple. In Britain, the African fighting troops in Europe were adopted by the Colonial Office to confront the War Office pressure, and they took an enormous position in the East-African campaign, while others assisted and died in the war. The African production had largely cooperated in the independence of Britain. Excepting gold and diamonds, the total percentage of the British imports came from sub-Saharan Africa as those imports rose from 2.8 per cent in 1909-13 to 4.3 per cent in 1919-23 (Roberts 41).

1.2.1 Reasons of Colonialism in Africa

There were many reasons behind the interest of Europe in Africa, as a Portuguese scholar pointed out: “a crusading zeal, the desire for Guinea gold, the quest for [the mythical Christian kingdom of] Prester John, and the search of spices” (Henriksen 406). In his book: *European Exploration and Africa’s Self-Discovery*, professor Ali Mazrui handed three reasons over the European exploration in Africa that drove to colonisation. In fact, he suggested that the first reason was the need to collect scientific knowledge about Africa as the latter was just known as the “Dark Continent”. The second rooted reason was Western Christianity that gave birth to the concept of European ethnocentrism or racism. The condition of the followers of the faith was to expand any religion either Gospel or even Quran to others. The chief European aim was to proselytise Africans and urge them to embrace Christianity, because they noticed that the Africans stuck to their traditional religious beliefs. Mostly, evangel works were brought by military campaigns, but eventually, missionaries were sent to Africa to build up all the

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

necessities of life such as: health clinics, schools, and social service centers, that were meant to contribute in the spreading of Christianity in Africa. As the plan was meant to work, European colonizers and missionaries started to outstretch foreign languages and cure patients. In return, Africans asked them to translate the Bibles into their African languages, a matter that encouraged and propagated the Christian doctrines. However, a third reason burst from imperialism as the European imperialists honoured their country in other lands (Khapoya 101).

Curiously still, the establishment of the colonial rule emboldened the working relationship between the missionaries and the colonial authorities. Foremost, missionaries sponsored schools which were dominated by the colonial governments that aimed at Africans' education for the purpose of work in colonial bureaucracies. Equally important, the religious syllabus was entirely controlled by missionaries which imposed their presence in the Africans' minds, and who exhilarated them from barbarism. Under those circumstances, African customs, languages, identity, and even heritage were thoroughly concealed. Above all, the Western educational system was fervently taken by Africans, and blew their minds (Vaillant 107). The intentions of missionaries were far beyond the concept of spiritualism, as it was worded by the first president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta:

When Europeans came to Africa, they had the Bible and the African had the land. They gave the Bible to the African and told him to hold it in his hand, close his eyes, and pray. When the African opened his eyes, he had the Bible and the European had his land (Khapoya 103).

European colonisers in Africa such as: Britain, France, Portugal, and Belgium pretended to promote the primitive life of Africans. Likewise, there was segregation in the British colonies between the native Africans and the British in all kinds of facilities particularly in schools, hospitals, and recreational facilities. More importantly, in Kenya where divergent races existed like Asian and Arabic, European settlers separated each group alone, keeping the best facilities for them. For this reason, they established four schools such as: Asian, European, African,

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

and Arab schools. Besides that, the British raised the price of transportation like buses and trains to keep the Africans stuck to the third-class. Another key point was the insulation of residences in which Africans were restricted in low cramped houses including Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. Moreover, wealthy Africans were not allowed to buy houses in the white region if they shared them with Europeans. Even though the British uplifted the Africans and refashioned them into ladies and gentlemen, they were still unequally treated (Vaillant 107).

In general, British commanders included Africans in the governments, but the firm power was leading by the British. Thus, African leaders practiced their political power just over other weak Africans. For instance, the political responsibility in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa was only controlled by the British. Moreover, not only Britain and France had a mission in Africa, but also Portugal whose expedition was a blend between the two British and French cultures (ibid 112).

Identically, marriage took a considerable role in the Portuguese policy in Africa. Purposefully, Portuguese got married with Africans for the sake of melding cultures and races. Nonetheless, African men and women received utter dismay from the public, and Portuguese fathers bailed up for the burden of their children. Eventually, Portuguese society became feeble since children lost their identity (Khapoya 113).

The social policy of Portugal gave birth to different races such as purely Portuguese, who had the complete right in controlling Africa, then, mixed-race people, who had less right than the previous ones, in a third rank came full-blooded Africans who were abused. Additionally, an African could have the right as Portuguese just in case he “could speak Portuguese, had divested himself of all tribal customs, and was regularly and gainfully employed” (Mondlane40). Leopold II, the king of Belgium, tried to civilise Africans through his expansion. The Belgian mission was seen by Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, as follows:

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

Belgium's mission in the Congo is essentially a civilizing one. It has a twofold aim. On the moral plane, it is to ensure the well-being of the native population and their development by the broadening of individual liberty . . . On the economic plane, Belgium's mission is to achieve the development of the colony for the benefit of the natives . . . agriculture, commerce and industry (Lumumba 11–12).

To this end, the term *évolués* was given to those educated and civilised Africans under the Belgian scheme. Behaviours like polygamy and witchcraft were deemed as banned in the Belgian educational system, and 500 Congolese maintained it. Unlike the first system, the Belgian government created another brutal one which was called Immatriculation. For this reason, any candidate should be investigated and even their houses should be scrutinized (Reader 633).

In reality, the aim behind the British, French, Portuguese and Belgian colonialism in Africa was trickery than civilisation. The African culture and law were contemptuous in the bottom. At first, they all pretended to civilise Africans, but later they killed two birds with one stone by getting both civilisation and colonialism in one hand. Too many promises were given to Africans, but they were broken. The French aimed at acculturating them by their membership, the British attempted to uplift them racially, the Portuguese wanted to mix between the two races, but in fact they were inferior to them (Khapoya 116).

1.2.2 Colonialism in Senegal

The Africans and their deeply rooted cultures were abhorred by the French. Identically, the mission of France in Africa was to defend her colonial rule. With this in mind, France followed the same path as Britain did in civilising Africans. When the Second World War broke up, French citizenship was inculcated in Africans. Certainly, those people who lived under the French empire like Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Guinea shared bathrooms, schools, train compartments, and drinking from fountains with the French. Too many expressions such as “Africans Only”, “Europeans Only” or “Africans and Dogs Not Allowed” were no more used.

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

Nevertheless, the concept of racism still prevailed. The French broke some rules with the Africans because they really felt that they were acculturated. As a matter of fact, in the late 1946, France handled Africans in the French political affairs by giving them the right to practice politics in their own countries like Senegal, Guinea, and Cameroon, and in their federated regions as in French West Africa or Equatorial Africa. Eventually, priority was given to culture by the French ignoring African ancestors' dignity and identity (Khapoya 103).

Senegal was ruled by the French power for three centuries using the colony as a springboard for its conquering. For instance, slaves, gold, and gum were most of the French companies' trade in the country. After the abolition of slavery, the governor Louis Faidherbe was sent by Napoleon III for a commercial mission based on peanut trade in Senegal. Similarly, the politician Louis contributed in the expansion of the French control of the interior through his building of forts along the Senegal River. During the colonial period, Senegal endured the navel of France's West African empire. Indeed, Senegalese sharpshooters groomed by Faidherbe to fight the French conquest, and later to defend France in two world wars. Moreover, French schools were opened to train the needed labor force. Additionally, the first railways were enlarged and were built along the Niger River (Sonnenburg 521).

1.3 Culture in Senegal

The genesis of Senegal's traditions is embedded in three salient roots. The abundant ethnic groups and historic kingdoms make the country rich in its orator, as well as the provision of the narrative modes for contemporary novels, plays, and films. Similarly, Senegal's first literary language was Arabic based on Islamic background which is still used nowadays in religious poetry. As a matter of fact, the cohabitation of the French language and civilisation in the colony breeds imprinted artistic masterpieces, mainly the print media of nowadays (Ross 41). Senegal has been highly influenced by the French language and traditions, since France has been attempting to spread its ethereal linguistic influence on all its colonies. This idea is voiced eloquently by a lieutenant governor of Senegal in 1902:

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

The French language is the language of the entire world, and you are not an educated or distinguished person, whatever your race, unless you know how to speak French . . . To speak French, my young friends, is to think in French . . . it is to be something more than an ordinary man, it is to be associated with the nobility and destiny of our country . . . love France with all your strength because she loves you well (Vaillant 53).

Senegal's art is shaped by dancing and music which are the heart and soul of the country's culture, so, the daily life of Senegalese people hinges on these two gifts. For instance, dancing can be practiced at homes, village squares, and street corners, mostly by women. After the independence, the president Senghor established cultural institutions like Senegal's National Ballet, which was the first one that shed light on the African original art such as: dance, and Griot¹ tales, folklore, use of masks, religious rituals, drawings and dancing. In 1970, traditional drums, horns, and guitars were the pulps of most Dakar's dance bands which led to the creation of a cross-bred sound called *mbalax*, in order to keep women dancing for hours (Ross 48).

On the other hand, Senegal has three types of traditional music such as: the solo works in which *xalam*² is used by a griot, and the male musicians are buoyed up by women's songs. Barely enough, Africa is rich by some musical performances which are steered by groups, orchestras, and bands as forms of strings following the singer, and also some drummers and percussion bands with their sprightly music for dancing (ibid 108).

Interestingly still, one of the most stunning Senegalese crafting is that of sculpture which embellishes tourism in the country. This tradition is ingrained since the creation of wooden statues and masks for ritual grounds (ibid 55).

1.4 Literature in Senegal

¹ a member of class of travelling poets, musicians, and storytellers who maintain a tradition of oral history in parts of West Africa

² plucked lute in Wolof language

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

What makes the African literature deviate from other literatures like the French, Russian and English ones is that Africa itself is a giant continent which consists of 51 countries, whereas other literatures are specific to their countries. The colonial powers of France, Portugal, German, and Belgium have left an indelible influence on Africa. African literature is defined by maverick troika: “works done for African audiences by Africans and in African languages, whether these works are oral or written, constitute the historically indisputable core of African literature” (Chinweizu et al. 11-12).

On the other hand, Chinua Achebe clarifies in a conference: “we cannot cram African literature into a small, neat definition. I do not see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units-in fact the sum total of all national and ethnic literatures of Africa” (56). In fact, literature in West Africa, like Senegal, was swayed by the French civilisation and was based on oral tradition which it bestowed the narrative modes for contemporary novels, plays, and films. During the inter-war period, Senegalese intellectuals set up in Paris and were instrumental in the renaissance of African cultural expression (Ross 41-44). For instance, the Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor was under the influence of the French culture:

French has enabled us to send to the world, to our brother men, the wonder message that we alone could send them. It has enabled us to contribute to this universal civilization something without which it would not have been universal, without which it would have lacked that inner warmth that is man’s true hallmark (Egejuru 14).

Literary works in Senegal were written in French such as: novels, short stories, poems and books for children giving moral support to the spirit of the French civilization. One of the most influential philosophical novels that highlight the concept of colonialism, religion and the social transformations of Senegal is *An Ambiguous Adventure* written by Cheikh Hamidou Kane. Furthermore, in her ironic masterpiece *The Beggar’s Strike* 1986, Aminata Sow Fall spotlights the dissimilarity between rich and poor and the power of political elite (Kane 53).

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

Among the first Senegalese authors whose works were an applaud for the French culture, one can bring to the fore: Amadou Ndiaye Dugay Cledor (1886 – 1937), Amadou Mapathe Diagne (1890–1976), Bakary Diallo (1892–1980), Massyla Diop (1885–1932), and his brother Birago (1906 –1989). Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001), AiméCésaire (1913-2008) as well as Léon Damas (1912-1978). Some of these writers are deemed to be the precursors of the Negritude Movement(Ross 45).

1.5The Rise of the Negritude Movement

The Harlem Renaissance³ infected and gave birth to some notions like the prominent concept Negritude (1930) in France. Indeed, the Negritude Movement sprang from the two major dreadful events in the life of Africans: slave trade and colonialism. With this in mind, the term Negritude was defined as a literary and cultural movement, also a cry of the blacks for freedom in their isolation Diaspora (Wintz and Finkelman 875).

The word Negritude was first coined by Aimé Césaire in his poem Notebook of a Return to my Native Land 1939. Then, it was revived by the help of some black intellectuals such as: Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Leon Gontian Damas in their establishment of The Black Student newspaper. The aim behind the coining of this term was to fuse the black people under one cultural umbrella, defending their identity, and wiping up the stings of Eurocentricism⁴ (Muhatia 116). Indeed, most of them based on the rehabilitation of Africa and blacks from all kinds of white oppressions, rejecting the political, moral and social domination of the West (ibid 875). For the Nigerian professor Oguejiofor, “Negritude is an effort to counter the pride and western culture” (Ruch and Anyanwu 65). It was, no doubt, a yell against assimilation and a reverence for African heritage.

³Harlem is a city in New York (Manhattan now) where African Americans got consciously aware of their race and all kind of arts such as music, literature and drama. Renaissance was defined in the Webster’s New World Dictionary as rebirth or revival.

⁴Eurocentric refers to considering Europe and Europeans as focal to world culture, history, economics, etc.

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

The fledgling ties between the Harlem Renaissance and Négritude were the translation of *The New Negro* into French by the Martinican sisters Andrée, Jane, and Paulette Nardalin 1931–1932 which was written by Alain Locke. In the light of their magazine *The Review of the Black World*, the three scholars wanted to put an end to all kinds of racial discrimination against people of African descent particularly from French territories in the Caribbean, an abolition of bourgeois hierarchical values, and recognition of black and African racial difference as positive rather than as a deficiency. Equally important, black students, artists, writers, and politicians were hosted every Sunday by Jeanne, and Andrée Nardal at their apartment in Clamart, a Paris suburb where they talked over themes pertinent to black race and Africa. Indeed, they sacrificed for the sake of revalorization the African culture and heritage through their magnificent works (Wintz and Finkelman 875).

In fact, ambivalence and contradictions were most of negritude's burdens. The movement was seen as relativist, sought to dismantle the racial binaries and took a long period struggling decolonization. Through centuries, Africans were presented as child-like and were raspily denigrated. For this reason, the term was created to break down all kinds of tyrannies that were racked over decades. Seeking racial binaries, Africa gained curious attention from other voices. At best, negritude was regarded by the former British colonies as a cultural movement that had a bantam relation with the political conflicts which drew to independence. Furthermore, the literary and critical theory considered negritude as a movement of over-plus rather than taking a key position in decolonisation. Indeed, there was a deep French extension in the French colonies reckoning citizens as their major subjects. When the African and West Indian students came to Paris, they suffered from isolation because of their colour, and discovered the bitter truth that they are not French. On account of this assimilation, they revived their past, black roots, and their African heritage (Ashcroft et al. 230).

The negritude spirit was adorned by many African poets whose literary works were undisputedly a tower in the African literature.

1.6 Founders of the Negritude Movement

Poetry was the weapon of choice for many writers to fend for the black identity, culture and freedom of African people. Among these eminent poets of the time, one can bring to the fore:

1.6.1 Aimé Césaire (1913-2008)

Mostly known as the artificer of the term negritude and the one who awakened the black soul through his clamorously voice as a politician in the government of his native Martinique. He was born on 26th June, 1913, in Basse Pointe Martinique from a wretched family that tried to outstrip its berth. Likewise, his father was a local tax inspector, while his mother was in charge of her six children. His experience as a student at *L'Ecole Normale Supérieure* in France earned him friendships with black intellectuals and writers, in particular with Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon Damas. In 1937, Césaire tied the knot with the Martinican poet Suzanne Roussi and gave birth to six kids, among them the writer Ina Césaire 1942 (Gates et al. 51). With a striking grief, the playwright passed away at an age of 95. In fact, Césaire first forte was poetry leaving that clinking poem *Return to my Native Land*⁵:

My negritude is not a stone,
Its deafness hurled against the clamor of the day
My negritude is not a leukoma of dead liquid over the earth's dead eye
My negritude is neither tower nor cathedral
It takes root in the red flesh of the soil
It takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky
It breaks through opaque prostration with its upright patience
(quoted in Eshleman and Smith 41).

⁵ the original French version : Ma négritude n'est pas une pierre, sa surdit  ru e contre la clameur du jour, Ma n gritude n'est pas une taie d'eau morte sur l'oeil mort de la terre , Ma n gritude n'est ni une tour ni une cath drale, Elle plonge dans la chair rouge du sol, Elle plonge dans la chair ardente du ciel, Elle trouve l'accablement opaque de sa droite patience (C saire Aim , *Cahier D'un Retour Au Pays Natal*, 1956).

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

Thus, this poet is marked as one of the shining names in the field of poetry, and his pen is known as a leading one that effectively tackled and contributed to the reflection of negritude as a literary movement.

1.6.2 Léon Gontran Damas (1912-1978)

He is another pillar of the negritude movement. He was born on 17 July 1912 in Cayenne, Guiana from a bourgeois family which was bent on assimilation with the French culture. Notwithstanding, Damas rejected this inherited absorption endorsing his roots. Carrying his studies in Paris made him fortunate to meet Senghor and Césaire where the three established Review of the Black World. Furthermore, he was gifted in poetry, story tales, pamphlets, as well as lectures in American universities. After his divorce from Isabelle Victoire Vécilia Achille, Damas went to Jamaica, Cuba, Haiti, Latin America and other various parts of the world in 1953 for a cultural mission on behalf of French ministries of foreign affairs. Léon Gontran Damas died on 22 January 1978. In his prestigious poem *Pigments*, Damas recounts the revolt of a young black man who has found his identity in African-Guiana traditions (Riddleberger 77-78).

POSITION For J. D⁶.

The days themselves have taken the shape
of African masks, indifferent
to any profanation of quicklime

Hence, literature was for another time introduced to a literary pillar in the person of Léon Gontran Damas who left a remarkable position with his rich poetry and artistic productions that highlighted Africa and its culture.

1.6.3 Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001)

1.6.3.1 Senghor's Life

⁶ The french version is *POSITION Pour J. D.: Les jours eux-mêmes ont pris la forme, des masques africains indifférents, à toute profanation, de chaux vive qu'encense.*

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

Léopold Sédar Senghor is considered as the glowing specimen of the negritude movement. Senghor was born on 9th of October, 1906 in Joal, south of Dakar to a noble wealthy father and a mother of pastoral roots. At the age of eight, he joined Ngazobil Catholic School, then, the College Liberman in Dakar in 1923 as a pupil. After passing his baccalaureate in 1927 with high grades, Senghor was yielded a scholarship by the French government, the prize that lighted his future. One year later, he went to France joining the Lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris, then, the Sorbonne University studying literature. Senghor was extremely genius, since he brought home the bacon, like the *Agrégation de l'Université* in grammar (one of the highest examinations in France which selects teachers for secondary schools and universities, and awarded French citizenship). In 1931, a squeamish fortuity forgathered Senghor with Césaire and other students from Caribbean. Additionally, Senghor was inspired by the works of Harlem Renaissance's writers and poets, chiefly Claude McKay, Langston Hughes and Alain Locke. Three years later, the two poets launched the journal *The Black Student* and coined the concept of negritude (Adi and Sherwood 169-170).

The outbreak of the Second World War was marked by the joint of Senghor into the French army, and then he was captivated by the German army for eighteen months. Despite his capture, the precious poet carried on bringing forth his fingerprint through magnificent poems and articles published in the bulletin *L'Etudiant de la France d'Outre-Mer: Chronique des Foyer* 1943. After his release from prison in 1942, he returned to his teaching profession (ibid170).

In 1945, the political surface of Senghor started to appear, when he was elected to represent his country Senegal in numerous French political forums, eventually, he became that gallant voice and adjuvant hand of Senegalese peasantry and countryside in 1948. Senghor hooked up with the Guyanese Ginette Eboué and delivered two children. Unfortunately, this marriage was ceased by divorce and exhorted him to remarry later with a French woman. In addition, the leader Senghor became the first president of Senegal in 1980 (Parekh and Jagne 427-428). With a hope that one day he will be back as Africans wish, Léopold Sédar Senghor passed

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

away on 20th December 2001 in France sculpturing his name with the forty living ‘immortal’ members of the French Academy.

1.6.3.2 Senghor’s Major Poems

The ‘immortal’ man Senghor was considered as the sterling poet of all times writing in French. *Chants d’ombre*, *Nocturnes*, *The Collected Poetry* and *Prayer to Masks* are polished gems of his artistic creativity.

1.6.3.2.1 *Chants d’ombre* (1945):

It was translated as “Songs of Shadow”, “Shadow Songs” or “Songs of Darkness”, in which Senghor treats themes of exile and nostalgia and records his own experiences in Europe. Within this collection, there are renowned poems like *Nuit de Sine* (Night of Sine), *Neige sur Paris* (Snow upon Paris), *Masque Nègre* (Black Masks) as well as *Femme Noir*⁷ (Black Woman) in which he limns the peerless black beauty of womanhood, praises her as sublime African Woman (Kini-Yen 431).

Black Woman

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

⁷ The original poem : *Femme nue, femme noir, Vêtue de ta couleur qui est vie, de ta forme qui est beauté, j’ai grandi à ton ombre ; la douceur de tes mains bandait mes yeux, et voilà qu’au cœur de l’Été et de Midi, Je te découvre, Terre promise, du Haut d’un haut col calciné, Et ta beauté me foudroie en plein cœur, comme l’éclair d’un aigle*

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

(Translated by Melvin Dixon in *the Collected Poetry*).

1.6.3.2.2 *Nocturnes (1961)*:

It is one of the blazing volumes that hide umpteen of Senghor's life's secrets. In this collection, the poet strives to strike the conflict between night and light, love and abandonment through his rattling kudos of the lion's courage, the public figure, and the freedom fighter. Also, the poems picture the struggle between death and life and shape sophisticatedly the triumph of life. When reading this collection, the reader becomes hosted smelling all kinds of cruel desperation which are painted by Senghor like the farewell of the father, the friend, the companion, and the lover (Gikandi 685).

The Collected Poetry (1991)

To New York

(for jazz orchestra and trumpet solo)

New York! At first I was bewildered by your beauty,

Those huge, long-legged, golden girls

So shy, at first, before your blue metallic eyes, and icy smile,

So shy, and full of despair at the end of skyscraper streets

Raising my owl's eyes at the eclipse of the sun

(Léopold Sédar Senghor *The Collected Poetry*, translated in Dixon 1991:87)

1.7 The Crisis of Negritude

The negritude motion was mostly criticized by many scholars as well as its intellectuals. Indeed, it was called by the Senegalese writer and politician Gabriel d'Arbousier 1949 as "*unedangereuse mystification*" (dangerous mystification). Similarly, in his book *Peau noir, masques blancs* 1952 (Black skin, white masks), Frantz Fanon delineated the Negro as a phobogenic victim referring to negritude as an anxiety syndrome. In 1963, the African social writer Sembène Ousmane disregarded negritude and did not have faith in its future. Eloquently enough, Ousmane conjugated his disapproval to the movement believing that it did feed the hungry and did not build roads. Through his debate, the sociologist St. Clair Drake

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

asserts that his concept of negritude has been rejected by many Negro intellectuals because it keeps mysticism for science and snubs the reality (Letters to the Editor 261-263).

Being born with a fractured pump, negritude has neither causes nor effects. Its beginning was like a sad song for its end. In fact, negritude was not fortunate enough since its birth, because there have been troubles within its definitions, ideology and language. Moreover, it has begun without a name since its existence is moral more than practical (Egar 7).

Another reason of the collapse of negritude was its birth with the hand of the two feminine and maternal sisters, Paulette and Jane Nardal with their journal *Review of the Black World*. One of the most eminent themes of this journal was the value of the black experiences throughout the world which was in question. Indeed, the problem with this theme was its silent insinuation for accepting the African values' inferiority by critics. Consequently, this espousal created a feeling of soreness between the master and servant where the master was better than the servant in in spite of the servant's new position.

In reality, the historical facts of slavery urged the West Indians and African Americans to fend for their cultural experiences. The movement devolved mostly on the West Indians and African Americans for its endurance and support in the period between 1920 and 1940. Furthermore, they were engaged with building and forming the Harlem Renaissance. Accordingly, most of Senghor's lyrics were inspired from the Harlem Renaissance. So, thanks to this historical burden, negritude was sounded out with separated allegiances (ibid 8).

1.8 Conclusion

Right from its onset, the negritude movement was like a beam of light, bewitching but alluring. Negritude poets foregrounded their African culture, identity, and the sense of the black beauty in their artistic verses. On the other hand, it was knocked by other African writers as a waste of time since it did not deepen the Africa's slavery. The cultural tyranny of Europe garroted the African culture.

Chapter One: The Breakthrough of the Negritude Movement and its Main Precursors

Negritude poems were not enough to heal most of the African's agony. Despite the fight of the three founders of the movement, most of their works were snubbed by other African writers' friends seeking for a new stiff concept that befits their ground.

2.1 Introduction

Senghor's generous potency and overwhelming imagination shudder his inner inspiration to create a great poetic works from which "Prayer to the Masks" was indisputably his optimal poem, the polished gem that was lovingly crafted and luxuriantly written.

"Prayer to the Masks" is considered by some critics as the ideal statue of African culture established by Léopold Sédar Senghor in 1945. In this poem, Senghor dramatises a supreme epitome of the negritude movement. It is a poem almost brimmed over with subtle ingenuity, uplifting verses, and it reveals in a mellifluous tones of spirituality, pride, culture, and religion.

2.2 Critical Analysis of "Prayer to the Masks"

Prayer to the Masks is one of the wreathy poems that belong to Léopold Sédar Senghor. In truth, the poem comes out as the glorious masterpiece in his Songs of Shadows (1945) written in France. The original of the poem appears in the French language, and then it has been translated to English (Wright 94).

When reading Prayer to the Masks, the reader mesmerizingly receives a bell for the negritude movement. In addition, the poem embodies negritude in divergent fashions. In fact, the poem foregrounds one of the renowned negritude values which is the role of ancestors in the traditional African life. Moreover, the title Prayer to the Masks is symbolic in which the word masks shrouds historical and cultural aspects and refers to spirit and race, whereas prayer enunciates religion.

The poem is divided into five stanzas. The first starts from "Masks" till "the lion head", the second from "You keep" till "listen to me!", the third from "the Africa" till "the World", the fourth from "As white" till "oil", and the fifth one from "They call" till "firm ground". In fact, the poem starts with a spondaic rhythm with two strong syllabus "Masks, Masks". With an outcry in the first stanza, this prayer asks for helping Africa to subdue its grief from European colonisation. The free

verse is one of the evidential Senghor's techniques used in this poem where the tone shifts accordant with the poet's temper.

Senghor writes this poem in first person, because he is speaking from his point of view to masks which symbolise his ancestors. The poet fancies a man, who is going before the masks, which signify his ancestors. However, the poet starts calling the masks as if they are near to him appealing their attention "Masks! O Masks!" which is an apostrophe. At first glance, it seems to the reader that Senghor is inspired by colours, but in reality behind that timbre there are assorted renderings out of the blue. Equally important, Senghor calls all kind of coloured masks, "Black mask, red mask, you white-and-black masks" to pay homage to their spirits which are still alive, evincing that one of the values of the masks is the diversity of their colours and enkindling racism by tempting all kinds of races together under one humanistic umbrella.

The mesmeric repetition of the two engrossed colours white and black is done by design, as a kind of a metaphor combination between Africa and Europe. He also greets the spirits of these masks in silence "I greet you in silence!" as if secrecy is one of the spirits' properties. Without doubt, Senghor trusts the presence of "Masks of the four cardinal points where the Spirit blows" in protecting all the nooks of the world. Indeed, the line "And you, not least of all, Ancestor with "the lion head" is fathomable either delineating the shape of the mask as a lion's head, or the family's totem, or emblem of the lion. Also, in some traditional societies, the spirits of the dead members of the family are certainly shaped by an animal-totem which typifies the nobility and the bravery of Senegalese people "the masks represents, as image, the dead members of the family, whose spirits are sometimes identified with an animal-totem, considered in many traditional societies as the first ancestor" (Irele101).

With a howling sympathy, Senghor handles the masks in the second stanza as inheritances of his culture, as well as personifying and addressing them as his pure ancestors. It is noteworthy to point out that the whole poem is characterised by

allegory¹. However, the reader is smacked by the fragrance of femininity “ You keep this place safe from women’s laughter, Any any wry, profane smiles” Mournful women who are prohibited from laughing and even from cracking jeering smiles because they are down in the mouth by the roughshod stings left behind by colonization. In the light of this vicious tone, the places where women used to share their smashing time, laughter, talk, and dance are now raped. For this reason, the agleam hope and flashing smiles are lost.

In his drawn-out and vastly booming career, Senghor celebrates the ethos of the dead ancestors as it is shaped in “You exude the immortal air where I inhale / the breath of my Fathers” where he pleads them to sublimate the African immortal air bearing on the existence of these spirits. Applying one of his literary weapons which as wisdom or wit, Senghor opts the word “immortal” to signify that the masks purify his sight of the past generations allowing him to divulge and feel his heritage as well as his culture. According to Senghor, every person’s face is forged by blemishes of temporality, like dimples and wrinkles except masks which are speechless with one unalterable everlasting figure where the dead remains haunting as a part of the living present Masks do not have the mark of our temporariness: shape of “dimple”, shape of “wrinkle” (Schulthes 62).

Likewise, Senghor compares his physical figure to that of his ancestors in “You created this portrait, my face leaning/On an altar of blank paper”. The use of the word “altar” draws the reader’s imagination straight to the Christian churches which are adorned by altars. Begging his ancestors to listen to him in: “and in your image, listen to me!” expresses their sacredness in the African society where Senghor holds the responsibility of their guidance, safety and aspiration. With an intense emotion, Senghor ignites the torch of his ancestors as he is the ancestors’ unsuspecting mirror.

In the third stanza, Senghor explains dolefully the quandary of Africa and Europe. With a grief-stricken of hope, “The Africa of empires is dying-it is the

Allegory is a figure of speech in which abstract ideas and principles are described in terms of characters, figures and events.

agony/ Of a sorrowful princess" the princess that symbolizes old Africa; the glorious empire that exists before the prestigious European culture, now is giving-up the ghost and is haunted by agony. However, the poet reckons even Europe as dead with Africa, since both of them now are getting their divorce from each other.

Despite the bitter farewell between Europe and Africa, there still remains an affectionate literary tie at the navel in "And Europe, too, tied to us at the navel", which is a kind of allusion to the umbilical cord that ties a mother to her baby. In the verse, "Fix your steady eyes on your oppressed children", Senghor portrays one of the cruel effects caused by European colonialism which is children's homelessness. Indeed, these children were downtrodden "Who give their lives like the poor man his last garment", but their sacrifices are compared to the poor man whose fight is coupled with his last dirty clothes which alludes to the courage of people through their poverty. Accordingly, the reader is treed in a very ambiguous sense, and thoroughly lost in a maze of the agony of the African civilisation.

In addition, the poet praises Africa consciously as being the cell organ for the rebirth of the world in "Let us answer "present" at the rebirth of the World". Only with much concentration and further reading that one can grasp accidentally the metaphor used in the fourth stanza: "as white flour cannot rise without the leaven." Indeed, Africa stands for the leaven whereas the French represent the flour. As a matter of fact, African people are considered as the incumbent catalysts for the progression of European. Moreover, one may feel that Senghor pulls smoothly the reader to the African race which he sees the Negro as the one who brings life to a world that is victimised by all kinds of technology's evils. "The Negro race is seen as bringing life to a world that has fallen victim to evils of technology" (Ngara 25).

Being proud of his nationality, Senghor portrays the African as the one who teaches white people rhythm "It is the African who is to teach white people rhythm, joy and natural way of life" (Ngara 25). Moreover, he over-praises the African and makes an allusion to the industrial revolution in "Deadened by machines and cannons?" Additionally, the West is regarded as a world of technology, wars and wickedness, where the industrial revolution demolishes the world. In exploring the

sense of spirits in the poem, the poet questions the masks and entails that the orphans and the dead in "Who will sound the shout of joy at daybreak to wake orphans and the dead?" give more an enlivened presence in the African culture than in European culture. In addition, he implicitly boosts the Europeans to awaken their lost ancestors. Furthermore, he pleadingly asks the masks again with a sensation of complaint to help the man of gutted hopes defeating his lifeless depression.

In the closing verses, the poem answers the questions as a form of proudly verses like in: "They call us men of cotton, coffee, and oil" which symbolise the black colour of the materials as well as the earth. However, the earth is a sacred source which gives to the Africans power "the earth as a source of energy and of life" coupled with an inherited natural strength of the Africans (Irele102). In the fifth stanza, Senghor gives us forked answer in "They call us men of death". In this verse, the reader may grasp two interpretations. In fact, either the poet means that Europeans consider the African civilisation as a dead one and putting that responsibility of failure on men, or it sounds like Europeans regard the African men as those brave, heroic, gallant and lionhearted warriors whose fights never end until their last heartbeats in wars. After all the enquiries that are fuelled by the pride and the honour of Africans, comes an assertion from Senghor when he affirms the beauty of life through dance "But we are men of dance, whose feet get stronger".

In truth, Senghor vigorously uses dance as a symbol for grace, strength, creativity, flexibleness, and beauty where he finds the rebirth of the world in the pounding of feet on the ground in: "As we pound upon firm ground". The intimate relation between the Africans and the dance is apparently tied to the earth which forms the African identity.

2.3 Major Cultural Images in "Prayer to Masks"

Prayer to the Masks is a delightful masterpiece in African poetry, which can be tackled from different angles. When reading the poem, one may find many cultural aspects that shape Africa such as: African nationalism, African spiritualism, ambivalence, and religious images which lie in Roman Catholicism.

2.4.1 African Nationalism

Through his career, Senghor is impassionate with the African nationalism which emerges in his politics and poetry. In fact, the reader becomes overzealous with African nationalism in the poem Prayer to the Masks. Being born in a small town in Senegal, Senghor holds a profound desire to see the restoration of pride and culture in the people of Africa. In fact, one may notice that the masks are considered as sacred parts of Senegal's culture as in the poet's plead "Masks! O Masks!" This can be clearly seen in Senegalese ceremonies where masks are always present. Additionally, culture in Senegal is based on sculpture of wooden masks, as Egonu illustrates "the mask is a symbol of the African past and an inseparable of African art" (Oguibe 66).

As a matter of fact, Senegalese people do not worship masks as most people believe, but have faith in "Masks of the four cardinal points where the Spirit blows". Interestingly enough, the masks are created to represent the spirit of their deities. Michelle M. Wright clarifies this notion by adding that "the masks do not specifically refer to people, although they are clearly linked to Africa, which in turns affirms Africa as the possessor of a universal spirit that extends to the world as a whole"(Wright 94).

Another aspect of the African culture is their pride of their race in the verse "Ancestor with the lion head". Moreover, in this verse, Senghor dedicates his work to his first ancestor of his own family alluding that their courage is similar to the lion. In addition, the poet awakens the spirit as in "You exude the immortal air where I inhale", giving a sign to the reader that the African culture is still alive. Despite the death of his fathers, the haunted soul still exists until today according to African beliefs. Identically, another feature of the African nationalism is manifested in the poem by delineating the power of African civilisation in the past: "The Africa of empires". In the light of these empires, the poet portrays the Africans as warriors and intelligently pushes the reader to sink in African civilisation like the two famous African empires. "The Almovid or Senegalese Empire lasted for a century,

and was followed by another African Empire, the Almohade...The Almohade Empire has been described by some writers as the greatest of the African Empires"(Graft-Johnson 88).

Added to this, Africans consider themselves as the ones who witness the resurrection of the world and believe that they add huge contributions to the rise of the whole universe as in "Let us answer "present" at the rebirth of the world". From another angle, Africa is presented as a peaceful continent and the only place that brings natural life to people as in "Who else will teach rhythm to the world". However, the word rhythm refers to the African music which consists of drums, whistles, guitars, horns and flutes. In the last four lines of the poem, Africa is portrayed as a rich famous continent with raw materials and this can be clearly shaped in "They call us men of cotton, coffee, and oil". Particularly, during the independence and thanks to the French policy, West Africans' life were characterised by the production of cotton especially in Cote D'Ivoire and Senegal, "In contrast of the colonial period, yields were low and farmers hostile to cotton development initiatives, the independence period has witnessed a revolution in cotton growing involving the participation of thousands of peasant farmers" (Bassett 2).

It is well-known that coffee is the king of perfumes. According to Senghor, Africans must be proud of coffee since Ethiopia is its birthplace (Ukers 24).Another black raw material which adorns Africa is oil. Interestingly enough, Senghor confronts Europe by the real black beauty of Africa which is oil. Indeed, the reader may feel that the poet wants to say, even if Europe describes Africans as blacks, servants, subordinates, and slaves' workers in their lands. Their culture is pure, as it belongs to nature which they do not create like the industrial revolution in Europe.

Alternatively, religious ceremonies in Africa are coupled with many cultural traditions, like dance as in "But we are men of dance". In most African beliefs, people dance helping people to make spiritual connections with their ancestors. With this in mind, dance in Africa creates scenes of masquerades and drummers with their sophisticated music in which "dance and music are very closely

interwoven in African cultures" (Thompson 30). Consequently, African nationalism is dominant in the whole poem. As mentioned above, Senghor is proud of all what has to do with the black colour, lands, and dance.

2.4.2 African Spiritualism

One of the main themes in Senghor's poetry is his celebration of ancestors. In fact, the title "Prayer to the Masks" itself is symbolic as it echoes spiritual feelings, and draws the reader's imagination to a man doing religious ceremony towards masks. These masks stand for Senghor's Gods and ancestors. Similarly, it seems that the poet calls wooden masks "Masks! O Masks!", but the unexpected truth is that he asks for the help of his fathers' spirits that are hidden behind these masks. "In that poem, the ancestors are involved through the masks to come to the aid of their descendants" (Le Hir and Strand 265).

In addition to that, African spiritualism can be found first in the black masks which the poet means Africans, then in all different races of the world being red or white "Black masks, red masks, you white-and-black masks". This verse portrays spiritualism as a common existing shared concept in Europe and that masks do not refer to people but to a universal spirit:

The European has almost lost his belief in survival after death altogether, but even where it still exists, the separation between the living and the dead is final ... In African, on the other hand, the idea of death is not associated with horror. The living and the dead are in continuous contact and a large part of the religious life of the African is devoted to establishing a harmonious contact with the dead (Beier 105).

Moreover, the poet stresses on the mask of the black colour to confirm to the world that African spirits exist and have not died with their people, but they are everlasting. As a matter of fact, the secret behind the mask is that of spirit which is craved in it and is still having impulses. However, the word masks in the poem wakes up the reader's reminiscence of African ceremonies and mournings which

anthropologists are familiar with. Under those circumstances, the poet seems to be in a masquerade celebrating a spiritual mysterious ceremony in which the function of spirits can change.

Hence, this may lead also to think about Senghor's position as a poet and as a man facing these spirits which bring either fortunes or damns. Meanwhile, the poet continues spreading his spiritual touch in the poem as in "Masks of the four cardinal points where the Spirit blows". According to Africans' assumptions, the exact place of the spirit is sited in the heart of the dead and is circled rectangularly by four other parts of the body. Consequently, these four cardinal points help swimmingly the spirit to practice an exorcism by getting rid of all evil spirit.

Another spiritual aspect which characterises the poem is silence as in "I greet you in silence!" which demonstrates that spirits like to be quiet, since the poet salutes them secretly. In general, silence is linked to nature. In other words, spirits exist in nature where they feel free in their communication. Senghor has a strong tie with "Ancestor with the lion head". Thus, the dead ancestor symbolises the poet's ascendant's spirit and denotes also the connection between the dead and the living in African spiritualism. Indeed, one of the roles of the ancestors is the protection of the living "The ancestors are the guardians of morality among the living community; they are guides and protectors. Through priests and masquerades a constant communication is maintained with the dead" (Beier 105).

By the same token, these spiritual ancestors are eternal as in "You exude the immortal air where I inhale". In fact, the word immortal is strong enough convincing the world that spirits are attached to the living. Interestingly enough, nature is the safe orphanage of spirits since natural air is blended with the breath of his fathers. All in all, the concept of spiritualism is not parenthesised only in the African culture, but transcends to be worldwide.

2.4. 3 Ambivalence

The use of the term ambivalence² is intelligibly befitting while tackling the poem of Prayer to the Masks. In fact, Senghor is highly distinguished from other African poets by his assimilation of the two cultures African and European in most of his poetry. Indeed, the word negritude itself is tightly tied to ambivalence. One may grasp that the poet has twin tendencies towards Africa and France, as Irele avers: "... as in 'Neige sur Paris' and 'Prière de Paix'. Senghor's cultural and emotional attachment to France is expressed in these poems with a candour that reveals the paradox of his individual situation" (18).

At the first glance, the poem is written in its original language which is French. Nevertheless, jumping through the verses, drives one's mind to develop another concept which is cross-culturalism³. In the light of this concept, the line "Black mask, red mask, you white-and-black masks" is skilfully couched in one of the marvellous aspect of ambivalence of African and French cultures. Undoubtedly, the black mask represents the African race, whereas red and white masks correspond to the European race. Stricken by this assumption, these races are culturally coalesced in different ways through marriage like Senghor's French second wife Colette Hubert and colonisation of Europe to Africa (Tranberg et al. 180). Moreover, the dependency of the two cultures lay in "And Europe, too, tied to us at the navel". Curiously still, Senghor strengthens his poem using the word navel to confront the world that civilisation would not exist without the presence of Africa. In general, navel is a scar where the umbilical cord is attached like the potent bond of a mother to her or his baby. Particularly, the motherhood of Africa gives birth to great civilisations. This idea is voiced eloquently by Senghor when he claims in a conference:

I would like to emphasize at this point how much these characteristics of Negritude enable it to find its place in contemporary humanism, thereby permitting black Africa to make its contribution to the

²Ambivalence is a state of having simultaneous conflicting reactions, beliefs, or towards some object.

³Cross-culturalism is relating to or involving two or more different cultures or countries.

"Civilization of the Universal" which is so necessary in our divided but interdependent world of the second half of the 20th century (quoted in Coetzee and Roux 433).

On the other hand, it is too hard if not late now for Africa to get its divorce from European culture. Equally important, Senghor believes strongly that the exchange of knowledge through culture is an invaluable asset to civilisation, which is called cross-fertilisation (Newell 210).

Additionally, the poet praises a lot African culture for the development of the whole world in "Let us answer "present" at the rebirth of the World". According to Senghor, the present picture of the world now is painted by the African touch. Indeed, this notion leads to look deeply in anthropology and search for the contribution of African civilisation for the world.

"It would seem the single greatest gift that Africa has given to world civilisation is that it was in East Africa that the origins of humankind developed" (Benjamin Lee Wren 167). In the same vein, Senghor progressively fuels the poem with another metaphoric image: "As white flour cannot rise without the leaven". White flour refers to Europe, whereas leaven symbolises Africa. To put it another way, all kinds of breads would not be prepared without the help of the yeast like all cultures and civilisations of the world, they could not stand without the power of Africa. Furthermore, the tie between Africa and Europe is like a mathematical equation where Africans provoke the world with culture as in "Who else will teach rhythm to the world". On the other hand, Europe has largely bestowed the development of the third world countries through the industrial revolution by damage as in "Deadened by machines".

However, in line "They call us men of cotton, coffee, and oil", Senghor clarifies the need of Europe in importing cotton, coffee and oil from Africa. That is to say, Africa and Europe play a role of two couples whose love is getting stronger due to their instinctive needs. On balance, Senghor assimilates two cultures in one hand showing to the world that the relation between the European culture and the

African one is interlacing with the past. After all, Senghor holds great sensory memories of his African upbringing.

Another cultural aspect which can be found in the poem is the religious images which demonstrate Senghor's faith.

2.4. 4 Religious Images (Roman Catholicism)

Being born from a Roman Catholic mother, Senghor has maternally inherited the Catholic religion. At the age of eight, he joined the Ngazobil Catholic School where he has become a Catholic statesman (Jagne and Parekh 425). In the entirety of this poem, Senghor skilfully uses religious images of his own Catholic backgrounds. Indeed, the title "Prayer to the Masks" rings the bell for the reader of that religious rituals which are performed by people in Christian churches or African playgrounds. To set this assumption on firm ground, Christian T. Collins Winn and others claim that Africans "hold orderly prayer meetings, singing, reading the Bible; they fall on their knees, and at some places it is reported they fall on their faces praying and repeating" (Winn at al. 43).

Furthermore, masks in "Black mask, you white-and-black masks" portray the deities of the poet. The compelling evidence is that these masks hide an ambiguous religion which dwells in the concept of animism⁴. However, this religion is defined as the doctrine of natural objects and the universe itself that have souls like the coloured soul of the previous masks (Segy 21).

In addition to that, Senghor continues his series of Christian images in the poem as in "Masks of the four cardinal points where the Spirit blows", also in "And you, not least of all, Ancestor with the lion head". Importantly still, the blow of Spirit as well the word ancestors bring unconsciously the reader to the Holy Spirit or the Holy Ghost which means in Christianity God as being the third person in the Trinity⁵ (Kärkkäinen 94). Likewise, the verse "You exude the immortal air where I

⁴ Animism is the doctrine that all natural objects and the universe itself have souls.

⁵ Trinity is a term used to denote the Christian doctrine that God exists as a unity of three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

inhale the breath of my Fathers" bursts another Christian image which is the Resurrection of the dead after their death, where the poet is still feeling the presence of his deities in their instant smell.

Equally important, another religious picture is couched in the verse "On an altar of black paper" which portrays Senghor's fondness and adherence to the Roman Catholic Church. In general, the Catholic Church is decked by long carpets, candle holders, and Cross without the oblivion of that attractive altar or Lord's Table. This altar is used for a specific function. This concept is elicited by Frank K. Flinn as such: "Christian use the term to refer to the sacred table upon which is celebrated the sacramental Eucharist"⁶ (16).

As a matter of fact, Senghor's belief in the Resurrection⁷ is evidently revealed in "Let us answer "present" at the rebirth of the World". In the light of this verse, Senghor strongly believes in the Resurrection of the world, for being influenced by the Christian doctrine of the Christ's Resurrection (Berkouwer 181). Alternatively, Senghor closes his poem with "... to wake orphans and the dead" trying radically to wipe out the grave and the shroud from the dead burdens.

In the long run, Senghor is mountainously filled with faith towards his religious doctrines that he has acquired from his education and from his sincerity to his origin.

2.4 Conclusion

In essence, Prayer to the Masks is one of Senghor's most brilliant and enchanting poems, which offers the ripest fruit to the African literature. To say African culture is to sink bravely in man's beliefs, spirit, and faith exploring the African animism. Senghor aims at setting a conceivable clue to his philosophy about African culture in association with nationalism, spiritualism, ambivalence, and Catholicism. It is then the passion of the soul that takes Senghor to a holy adventure exploring the funereal ceremony of the dead.

⁶ Eucharist: A Christian sacrament commemorating the Last Super by consecrating bread and wine)

⁷ the rising of Christ on the third day after the Crucifixion

General Conclusion

Through the 19th Century African literature, the negritude movement bloomed in France as well as in Senegal. It was brought to life by a coterie of poets who had been attentively zealous to renovate the old fashions of poetry with their own poetic vogue, and were sufficiently daring to question the tough truths of African's life experiences. Léopold Sédar Senghor is considered by the critics as the father founder of the negritude movement.

This research paper focused on the cultural images delineated in Senghor's poem "Prayer to the Masks". Culture in West Africa depends on dance, music and sculpture from which masks are made for ritual ceremonies. While probing Senghor's poem "Prayer to the Masks", it comes crystal clear that it is a poem of grotesque plenitude of inventiveness and a medium of radical play of mind. It is a typical African poem that divulges Senghor's verbal genius and cultural potency.

Hence, the use of African cultural images in the poem expresses Senghor's real view of his love to Africa. A passion which lives as long as the spirit of the dead heavenly blows. Fathers and ancestors have died, but they are still alive in every African's heart and the Holy Spirit is still blessing their weddings and mournings. Accordingly, the black colour that nigrifies the fortune of Africa as being most of the time evil-looking is pictured by Senghor as the bright colour of hope, faith, affluence, pride, and prestige.

Confessedly, "Prayer to the Masks" is a great poem that creates a wonder, excitement, and rapture which creep in the reader's heart. The Negritude Movement as a whole has taken later a generation of critics to rediscover in Senghor's poetry the thoughts of a complex and very masculine brain, not to forget his prodigious power to grope the inner entirety of Africa.

Appendix (a)

Prayer to the Masks

Masks! O Masks!

Black mask, red mask, you white-and-black masks

Masks of the four cardinal points where the Spirit blows

I greet you in silence!

And you, not least of all, Ancestor with the lion head. **Stanza 1**

You keep this place safe from women's laughter

Any any wry, profane¹ smiles

You exude the immortal air where I inhale

The breath of my Fathers.

Masks without faces without masks, stripped of every dimple

And created wrinkle

You created this portrait, my face leaning

On an altar² of blank paper

And in your image, listen to me! **Stanza 2**

The Africa of empires is dying-it is the agony

Of a sorrowful princess

And Europe, too, tied to us at the navel.

Fix your steady eyes on your oppressed children

Who give their lives like the poor man his last garment.

Let us answer "present" at the rebirth of the World **stanza 3**

As white floor cannot rise without the leaven.

Who else will teach rhythm to the world

Deadened by machines and cannons?

Who will sound the shout of joy at daybreak to wake orphans and the dead?

Tell me, who will bring back the memory of life

To the man of gutted hopes?

They call us men of cotton, coffee, and oil **stanza 4**

¹ (wry: humorously sarcastic or mocking)

² (altar: The table in Christian churches where communication is given)

They call us men of death.

But we are men of dance, whose feet get stronger

As we pound upon firm ground. **stanza 5**

Bibliography

1. Primary Sources

- Senghor, “Prayer to the Masks” in Léopold Sedar Senghor: The Collected Poetry, trans. Melvin Dixon. Charlottesville: Virginia University press: 1998.

2. Secondary Sources

- Steins, Martin “Letters to the Editor”. Indiana University Press. J Store. 1987.
- Adu Boahen,A. “General History of Africa”: Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935, Africa and the Colonial Challenge. VII. USA: California press. 1990.
- Adi, Hakim and Marika Sherwood. Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787. UK: Routledge press, 2003.
- Ashcroft, Bill et al. Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies. UK: Routledge press, 1988.
- Bassett, Thomas J. The Peasant Cotton Revolution in West Africa: Côte D'Ivoire:1880-1995.UK: Cambridge University press, 2001.
- Berkouwer, G.C. Studies in Dogmatics: The Work of the Christ.USA Press, 1965.
- Chinweizu, Ibekwe et al. Toward the Decolonization of African Literature. USA: Howard university press 1980
- Coetzee, Pieter Hendrik.The African Philosophy Reader. UK: Routledge, 1998.
- Coleman, John and De Graft-Johnson. The African Glory: The Story of Vanished Negro Civilizations. Baltimore: Black Classic press: 1986.
- Collins, Winn, et al. The Pietist Impulse in Christianity.USA: California unipersity press 2011.
- Dixon, Melvin. Léopold Sédar Senghor: The Collected Poetry. USA: Virginia University Press, 1998.

- Egar, Emmanuel Edame. The Crisis of Negritude: A Study of the Black Movement Against Intellectual Oppression in the Early 20th Century. USA: Brown Walker press, 2009.
- Egejuru, Phaniel Akubueze. Towards African Literary Independence. New York: Greenwood Press, 1980.
- Eshleman, Clayton and Annette Smith. Notebook of a Return to the Native Land. USA: Wesleyan University Press, 2001.
- Flinn, Frank K. Encyclopedia of Catholicism. USA: Yale university press, 2007.
- Gates, Henry Louis et al. Dictionary of African Biography, Volume 2. UK: Oxford university press, 2012.
- Gikandi, Simon. Encyclopedia of African Literature. UK: Routledge pub, 2003.
- Henriksen, Thomas. "Portugal in Africa": A Noneconomic Interpretation, African Studies Review, Vol. XVI, No. 3 December, 1973.
- Irele, Abiola. Selected Poems of Leopold Sedar Senghor. UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Kane, Katharina Lobeck. The Gambia and Senegal. Singapore: Printed by SNP, 2009.
- Karen, Tranberg Hansen, and D. Soyini Madison. African Dress: Fashion, Agency, Performance. UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. Holy Spirit and Salvation: The sources of Christian Theology. USA: Virginia university press, 2010.
- Khapoya, Vincent B. Colonialism and the African Experience. UK: Routledge, 2006.
- Kini-Yen, Fongot. Pan-Africanism: Political Philosophy and Socio-Economic Anthropology for African Liberation and Governance. UK: Routledge, 2003.
- Lumumba, Patrice. Congo, My Country. London: Pall Mall Press, 1961.
- Marie-Pierre Le Hir, Dana Strand. French Cultural Studies: Criticism at the Crossroads. USA: New York University Press, 2000.

- Mondlane, Eduardo. The Struggle for Mozambique. Baltimore. MD: Penguin Books, 1969
- Muhatia, Maurice. An Introduction to African Philosophy: Past and Present. Keney: Kolbe press, 2007.
- Newell, Stephanie. West African Literatures: Ways of Reading.UK: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Ngara, Emmanuel. Ideology and Form in African Poetry: Implications for Communication. UK: London press, 1990.
- Oguiibe, Olu. The Culture Game. USA: Minneseta university press, 2004.
- Parekh, Pushpa Naidu and Siga Fatima Jagne. Postcolonial African Writers: A Bio-bibliographical Critical Sourcebook.UK: Routledge Pub, 1998.
- Reader, John. Africa: A Biography of the Continent.New York: Alfred Knopf, 1998.
- Riddleberger, Patrick W. The Critical Year Revisited. USA: America University Press, 1866.
- Roberts, Andrew. “The Colonial Moment in Africa”: Essays on the Movement of Minds and Materials, 1900-1940. UK: Cambridge University press: 1990. 41
- Ross, Eric S. Culture and Customs of Senegal. USA: Greenwood press: 2008
- Ruch, Paul, and John Anyanwu. African Philosophy. Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1984.
- Schulthess, Daniel. La Nature : Thèmes Philosophiques Thèmes d’Actualité. Lausanne press, 1994.
- Segy, Ldislas. Masks of Black Africa. USA: Dover publication: 1976.
- Sonnenburg, Penny M. Colonialism: an International, Social, Cultural, and Political Encyclopedia. USA: Melvin Eugene Page: 2003.
- Thompson, Robert Farris. African Dance. Printed in USA: Virginia university press, 2010.
- Ukers, William H. All about Coffee: A History of Coffee from the Classic Tribute to the World’s Most Beloved.USA: Beverage printed in USA: 2012.

- UlliBeier, Ulli. Introduction to African Literature. London. Longman Group, 1982.
- Vaillant, Janet G.Black, French, and African: *A Life of Léopold Sédar Senghor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990
- Wintz, Cary D, and Paul Finkelman. Encyclopedia of the Harlem RenaissanceVol 1 A–J. UK: Routledge: 2004.
- Wren, Benjamin Lee. Teaching World Civilization with Joy and Enthusiasm. USA: America University Press, 2004.
- Wright, Michelle M. Becoming Black: Creating in the African Diaspora. USA: Duke University Press, 2004.