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Notes on Contributors

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NEGRIUDE AND BERGSONISM

Messay Kebede

Introduction

It is generally admitted that both the form and the content of Negritude owe much to Western philosophical discourses, especially to French intellectual influence. The fact that the two most outstanding exponents of Negritude, namely Léopold S. Senghor and Aimé Césaire, are deeply impregnated with French culture is taken as a case in point. And among the French roots, some scholars single out the profound impact of Henri Bergson. Thus, Abiola Irele maintains that "it is largely the epistemology of Bergson that Senghor has adopted in his formulation of Negritude."¹

Undeniable as the Western influence and, in particular, the Bergsonian impact are, their extent, however, has not been properly defined through concrete studies of conceptual and ideological connections. Yet seeing how thoroughly Negritude "has impregnated not only poetry and the novel in Africa but also African research in all the different human sciences," a meticulous knowledge of affiliations is most necessary to decide to what extent the self-appointed African philosophy is really authentic, expressive of African indigenous thought.² Besides admitting Negritude's dependence on the philosophy of Bergson, this paper shows its far-reaching impact by establishing conceptual, methodological, and ideological filiations. However, it also raises the question of knowing where Negritude departed from Bergsonism and to what extent this bifurcation inaugurated a distinctly African discourse.

Bergsonian Epistemology and the Other Way of Knowing

The best way to connect Negritude with Western philosophical positions is via the debate opposing the defenders of reason and those who rebelled against its dominance. As an influential trend of Western thinking, the Cartesian philosophical project had promised to bring nature as well as human desires, social environment, and aspirations under the governance of reason. Elevating the Cartesian reductionist project to an even greater level through the use of the dialectical method, G. W. F. Hegel forwarded the bold proposal that "*what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational.*"³ But no sooner had Hegel celebrated the final triumph of reason than a wave of irrationalism swept through Europe with the vogue for romanticism. It evolved into diverse forms, but maintained the leitmotif that everything is not reducible to the rational. As D. A. Masolo puts it: "The pre-World War II European philosophical movements of neo-Marxism, phenomenology, existentialism, and surrealism, with their general revolt against the Hegelian transcendental objectivism and 'system' turned toward a type of irrationalism emphasizing the

European philosophical movements of neo-Marxism, phenomenology, existentialism, and surrealism, with their general revolt against the Hegelian transcendental objectivism and 'system' turned toward a type of irrationalism emphasizing the spontaneity of man's bare existence as constituting the search for meanings or essences."⁴ Since Negritude briskly distinguished itself by a philosophical position claiming non-rationality, one cannot help relating its rise with the misfortunes that have struck the idea of reason in the West.

Yet a question springs to mind: Was this European background of a receding authority of reason enough to inspire Negritude's radical profession of non-rationality? Clearly, to hail Blackness in the manner of Senghor and Césaire, especially, to so proudly claim non-technicalness, something more than the relativization of reason was required. But posit a philosophical ambiance such that what historicism termed backward, primitive is diagnosed as what the West lost as a result of a one-sided advancement. So conceived, the Western path appears as a unilateral move associating progress in some aspects of life with regress in other areas of life.⁵ Because Bergson created this philosophical atmosphere, in many ways, Negritude appears as unthinkable without him.

Let me begin by placing Bergson's contributions in the context of the French culture which, as a compensation for the excessive rationalism of Cartesianism, produced an impressive array of protests against the dominance of reason. From the French romantic movement, diversely highlighted by such writers as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Victor Hugo, Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, to the apex of surrealism, the project to debunk reason has always merged with the consideration that the European model of life may be a truncated type of life, that in particular, non-Western societies are perhaps opening "larger horizons beyond Western civilization."⁶ Thus, Rousseau's bias toward the simplicity and destitution of the noble savage following a diagnosis of European mode of life that particularly deplores the extent to which, as he himself puts it, "our souls have become corrupted in proportion as our sciences and our arts have advanced toward perfection," can be taken as a characteristic example of a reevaluation of the notion of primitive peoples.⁷

Incidentally, the recognition of the importance of the connection between French culture in general and Negritude can be used to settle the issue pertaining to the alleged difference between French and British colonial methods. Here and there, views are expressed according to which Negritude was born on the French soil because of the French assimilationist policy, as opposed to the British system of indirect rule. The forced assimilation, it is argued, brought about a reaction of "passionate exaltation of the black race" in lieu of the restraint that prevailed in the British colonies of Africa.⁸ A distinction of this nature between the two colonial powers is hopelessly futile; in both cases we find the same policy of "reduction and acculturation."⁹ If at all it means something, it must be that the French outcry against the supremacy of reason was more conducive to an exalted assertion of Blackness than the subdued atmosphere of British empiricism.

For that matter, Bergson represents the philosophical culmination of the French protest against the rule of reason. But this characterization falls short of indicating the specific contributions of Bergson unless it brings out the sharp and resounding concepts by which Bergson articulated and redefined the spiritual ambiance. The appropriation of these special conceptual tools as well as arguments was crucial for Negritude's crusade against historicism and Eurocentrism. What is said here is no

mere speculation, since Senghor himself has overtly hailed the appearance of Bergson's *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*¹⁰ as "the revolution of 1889."¹¹ It was a revolution because it had a profoundly upsetting effect on art, literature, and science through the suggestion that "facts and matter, which are the objects of discursive reason, were only the outer surface that had to be transcended by *intuition* in order to achieve a vision *in-depth of reality*."¹²

Bergson's valorization of intuition through the discrediting of reason is somewhat banal, perhaps also misleading: all romantic movements have come up with the same idea. There is revolution only if something previously unsaid is said, if a new vision is attained. Bergson gave an idea of his new conception when, summarizing his idea that life does not proceed by the association and addition of characters and functions, but by dissociation and division, he wrote: "The cardinal error which, from Aristotle onwards, has vitiated most of the philosophies of nature, is to see in vegetative, instinctive and rational life, three successive degrees of the development of one and the same tendency, whereas they are three divergent directions of an activity that has split up as it grew."¹³

The resolute direction of a thought going against the basic assumptions of evolutionism and historicism is palpable in the statement. Equally tangible is the opportunity offered to non-Western thinkers to desert the successive and unilinear conception of evolution for a divergent process resulting in different civilizations. But before going further, one important point must be settled. Bergson is known to have influenced Negritude through his theory of intuition and his criticism of intellectualism. To bring, as I do, the problem of evolution can appear at best as a side issue, at worst as a deviation. Some such objection would, however, totally ignore to what extent Bergson's epistemology is rooted in his theory of the evolution of life.

The opposition between intelligence or discursive reason and intuition presupposes the divergent movement of life. This is so true that what Bergson calls intuition is none other than "the fringe of instinct" that "still hangs round the edge of intelligence" following the separation between intelligence and instinct.¹⁴ Because of its exclusive confinement to the immediate interests of the forms of life resulting from the divergent process of life, the original consciousness of intuition assumed a somnambulistic form by becoming instinct. Not so intelligence: more prone to manipulate the externality of things, it developed into an active consciousness while remaining handicapped by the loss of the inner, intuitive knowledge of reality. All the same, the divergent movement cannot cancel the original unity of instinct and intelligence so that "just as there subsisted around animal instinct a fringe of intelligence, so human intelligence preserved a halo of intuition."¹⁵ The specific contribution of Bergson, over and above the romantic protest against European intellectualism, does transpire in this anchorage of epistemology in a theory of evolution. The result is that discursive reason, masterful in manipulating externality, is at a loss when it turns its attention to the underlying reality. The divergent movement of life explains the inability of intelligence: during the evolutionary journey, intelligence abandoned the complementary function of instinctive apprehension.

Two things are here of interest to African scholars: (1) far from being the summit of human existence, the excessive import of reason in Western civilization reveals a skimpy, one-sided, and for that matter, frenzied form of life; (2) other human civilizations could well be

attempts to preserve and activate what intelligence has abandoned, to wit, the instinctive knowledge of being. That such is Senghor's conclusion is best illustrated by his comparison of the European with the African. The European keeps the object at a distance, and hence immobilizes and fixes it; the Negro is quite different: "he does not see the object; he feels it."¹⁶ These two different attitudes to the world yield distinct types of knowledge. Whereas the need to assimilate, dominate, manipulate the object animates the European, "what affects the African Negro is not so much the appearance of an object as its profound reality, its *'surréalité'*; not so much its form as its meaning."¹⁷ This is an exact reproduction of a Bergsonian formula: "*Intelligence, in so far as it is innate, is the knowledge of a form; instinct implies the knowledge of a matter.*"¹⁸

Insofar as the substitution of the concept of divergent movement for the notion of unilinear evolution clears the way for an epistemological pluralism leading to different types of knowledge, Bergson has indeed handed over to Negritude the vision and conceptual tools liable to articulate and substantiate the idea of different civilizations or cultural orientations. Those societies, it follows, which did not comply with the European model could not be said to be backward or primitive, but rather on divergent lines of evolution. Instead of being unilinear evolution having burst into various directions, the very terms of superiority and inferiority, of advanced and primitive societies, make no sense. All societies are imperfect because they all follow specific courses that particularize them; none is a model. Still less can a given society be backward, since what it achieves is one aspect of humanity, not its inferior stage. Evolution is not the unfolding of humanity according to a stage-producing-stage process resulting in inferior and superior social formations, but the creation of diverse personalities through the emphasis on particular traits drawn from a common stock of virtualities.

Reproducing almost the very words of Bergson, Senghor writes: "nature has arranged things well in willing that each people, each race, each continent, should cultivate with special affection certain of the virtues of man; that is precisely where originality lies."¹⁹ As a result, Africa became the seat of a civilization based on intuition, the very intuition that Europe deserted in favor of a civilization urging for material conquest. The great merit of Bergson, in Senghor's eyes, is to have combined the critique of discursive reason with a choice of civilization intent on emphasizing some aspects of life at the expense of others, thus replacing the evolutionary hierarchy by the idea of pluralism.

From the viewpoint of Negritude, no better illustration of the distinction between intuition and intelligence can be found than in Bergson's refutation of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's notion of primitive mentality. The refutation is a complex one, but the basic argument revolves around the untenability of the idea of prelogicality. After having shown that primitive peoples rely, as civilized peoples do, on the invariability of natural laws in the ordinary course of their life and, inversely, that civilized peoples too give in to mystical beliefs occasionally, Bergson concluded that "there is nothing illogical, consequently nothing 'prelogical'" about the thinking of primitives.²⁰ Instead of rushing into evolutionary inferences, Bergson advised analysts of primitive mentality to ponder when the civilized person appeals to mystical forces. They will find that the resemblance between the thinking of the civilized and the mentality of the primitive becomes striking "when dealing with facts such as those . . . [of] death, illness, serious accident."²¹ Put otherwise, human beings, be they primitive or civilized, revert to supernatural explanations when they face vital events directly affecting them as

persons. If primitive peoples seem overflowed with mystical beliefs, the explanation lies in the little control they have over their environment. Owing to this major limitation, supernatural references are indeed more frequent and more extensive than is the case with the civilized. This demonstrates that mystical explanations appear whenever human thinking pays attention to the "human significance" of phenomena over and above their mere physical nature.²²

In *The Foundations of "Africanité" or "Negritude" and "Arabité"*, Senghor reiterated these premises of Bergsonian epistemology. He gave a long quotation from *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* in which magic is depicted as an endowment of things with "human fluid".²³ This involvement of the human translates the evolutionary distinction between pre-logical and logical stages into two different approaches to reality, the intuitive and the intellectual, the former being interested, to use Senghorian expressions, in the "meaning" of the object and the latter in its "form."²⁴ Lévy-Bruhl called pre-logical stage this attention to meaning, the very one which drew from Césaire this cry of a strange pride:

my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral
it plunges into the red flesh of the soil
it plunges into the blazing flesh of the sky²⁵

In thus transposing Lévy-Bruhl's discrimination between prelogicality and logicity into distinct forms of knowledge rather than into hierarchical moments of the same process, Bergson provided Negritude with all the premises legitimizing its conceptions of dissimilar races that culminate in the opposition between European civilization and the African Negro civilization.

Let us insist on the difference in value orientation issuing from the epistemological disparity. The human intellectual orientation, Bergson maintained, implies the drive to conquer matter. However, unlike intuition, which goes in the direction of life, the conquest of matter has required that consciousness should "determine itself more especially as intellect."²⁶ Nonetheless, intuition is never completely erased; however vague and discontinuous, it coexists with intelligence. Above all, "it glimmers whenever a vital interest is at stake."²⁷ In opposition to the intellect, its method of approach is not conquest and manipulation, but "sympathy."²⁸ Rational knowledge separates, dissociates, and fixes the object; sympathetic or intuitive knowledge associates, incorporates, and so provides a unified, integrated vision of reality. Sympathy grasps meaning rather than mechanism because it feels the vital link running through all phenomena and conceives them in their unity and solidarity, transcending all forms of dualism. This power to unify, merge, establish kinship, which is then truly sympathy as opposed to the dislocating, dismembering work of intelligence, brings out the great metaphysical aptitude of intuition.

There remains the application of these dissimilar characters of intuition and intelligence to peoples of different races. Using almost the same words, Senghor converted into the distinguishing features of the European what Bergson attributed to intelligence, while the characters of intuition pass to the African. Unlike the European white who fixes the object and "dissects it with a ruthless analysis," the African Negro feels the object; ²⁹ he/she is emotion, "going centrifugally from subject to object on the waves of the Other."³⁰ Had it not been for imposing facts coming to its rescue, this Senghorian transposition would have appeared as totally arbitrary and artificial. But facts show the material retardation

of Africa, still more the European colonial conquest of Africa. These two major facts are not *intelligible*, especially to Africans, unless they are placed in the context of divergent epistemological and axiological orientations. In short, the distinction between intelligence and intuition has crystallized in human history into the appearance of divergent mental and cultural trends situated respectively in Africa and Europe.

The distinct mental orientation defines the European as a "man of determination, a warrior, a bird of prey,"³¹ while the African tendency emphasizes sensitivity, the fact of living "in symbiosis" with the world.³² Césaire has poignantly expressed the difference as being the very one existing between the conquerors of matter and those who give themselves up to the essence of all things ignorant of surfaces but struck by the movement of all things free of the desire to tame but familiar with the play of the world³³

In this way, the deep reason for the African material lag is to be found in the spiritual orientation of Africa rather than in the circumstantial causes enumerated by scholars, such as geographical handicaps, slavery, colonialism, etc.

To the extent that this analysis suggests that Senghor and Césaire spoke with the same voice, it can provoke the objection according to which, much more than Senghor, Césaire blamed colonialism for the failure of modernization in colonized societies. Granted that Césaire's more revolutionary and anti-Western stand, as opposed to Senghor's more conservative and conciliatory attitude towards the West, is undeniable, the disparity, however, does not erase the fact that both basically agree in their understanding of African originality. The political divergence means, not the lack of a common philosophical inspiration, but as often happens in the history of ideas, the split of the Negritude movement into different trends. The split shows the wealth of the movement, but also divergent analyses of the Western challenge. While Senghor and Césaire both blamed colonialism and imperialism, Césaire developed the need for a rebellious attitude as an appropriate response to the brutality and deep damages of colonial rule. Increasingly exhibiting Marxist leanings, he ruled out Europe's ability to solve "the two major problems to which its existence has given rise: the problem of the proletariat and the colonial problem."³⁴ For his part, Senghor hoped for a progressive course through the integration of African, Western, and other cultures the end product of which will be the rise of the universal, which transcends races and works toward the narrowing of economic disparities. "This triple dialogue, between ourselves and the others, can have only one aim, to assure peace and build the Civilization of the Universal,"³⁵ he writes.

The Multifaceted Nature of Bergsonian Influence

The fact that Bergson's theory of knowledge is inseparable from his metaphysical views suggests that his decisive influence on Negritude extends beyond epistemological questions. It presupposes metaphysical affinities so that a true picture of the dependence of Negritude on Bergsonian philosophy must take into account ontological borrowings. And as metaphysical affinities have repercussions on all aspects of life, the ramifications of Bergsonian influence are bound to reach ethical and social ideas.

Take the idea of vital force, considered by many scholars as the embodiment of Africa's specific comprehension of being. According to

Senghor, the characteristic feature of African ontology is that "the Negro identifies *being* with life: more precisely, with vital force."³⁶ So close is this idea of vital force to Bergson's central notion of vital impetus that Masolo speaks of "its filiation in the philosophy of Henri Bergson."³⁷ To be more specific, the closeness springs to mind when Senghor argued that, for the African, life is "a force, living matter, capable of re(in)-forcing his energy or de-bilitating it."³⁸ For Bergson too, life cannot be resolved into physical and chemical facts; it is "an inward impulse that passes from germ to germ through individuals" so that what living individuals are capable of doing is an outcome of the impulse or force they have received.³⁹

Granted that Bergson's idea of vital impulse is a complex concept referring to a no less complex philosophical and scientific debates concerning the origin and evolution of life, it is nevertheless interesting to note that his vitalism is directed against Western idealism and materialism, since "it claims to transcend both mechanism and finalism."⁴⁰ As a dissident conception, it became entitled to be used, first by Placide Tempels, then by the exponents of Negritude, to express the philosophical views of Africans. Moreover, Bergson's grand manner of articulating and elevating the notion of vital impetus to the level of a theory matching the most elaborate philosophical and scientific theories of life has freed vitalism from the stigma of being a primitive, pre-scientific conception. Senghor must have had this Bergsonian backing in mind when he made the point of saying that the idea of vital force "does not contradict the present scientific ideas."⁴¹

Because the notion of vital force is refractory to Western intellectual canons, Bergson insisted that it is obtained more by intuition than by discursive reason. Negritude saw in this restriction the possibility of an extensive use of the notion both to affirm the African difference and to propose a well-matched version of life. The issue of the vision of life is all the more important, since it is concerned with the question of meaning, beyond the conquest of matter. Those who did not invent anything can claim to be familiar with the world only if it is proven that mastery over things does not necessarily entail an insight into reality. The main condition for the insight may be the displacement of the dominating impulse by a disposition to play with the world. The notion of vital force is the one that the mind forges as soon as, refusing to dominate, it becomes a participant ready to play with the world. Whereas for the dominator the world appears as an ensemble of fixed and divided, that is, objectified phenomena, for the player it is an ensemble of interpenetrating forces which can reinforce or debilitate his/her energy, to use Senghor's revealing terms. The player does not stand out from the world, as a tower or a cathedral, but plunges into the network of interpenetrating forces and gives way to the resulting current.

If the urge to dominate leads away from the truth, then how much more so may it divert from the good? According to Bergson, "there is something frenzied" about Western civilization, due to its one-sided pursuit of wealth and power.⁴² In opting for mechanism to the detriment of mysticism, it has suppressed the complementary tendency able to mitigate the frenzy of wealth and power. It is now in a deadlock: no sooner are old needs satisfied than "new needs arise, just as imperious and increasingly numerous."⁴³ It is an endless race whose consequence is the exasperation of the pursuit of pleasure and consumption, not its satisfaction. It inflates the mechanical force, less so the ascetic power of humanity, unfortunately with the consequence that increasingly destructive weapons are put at the disposal of a tendency

already too inclined to war and luxury.

As a substitute for the vain and dangerous search for more power, Bergson recommended "the return to a simpler life."⁴⁴ Not only does this mean putting a curb on the pursuit of wealth and power, but also using the material power thus far accumulated by humanity to expand its intuitive, mystical power, for instance through psychical researches. In the words of Bergson, "the body, now larger, calls for a bigger soul, and that mechanism should mean mysticism."⁴⁵ The increase of the mystical power of humanity upgrades its ascetic will; better, it opens up access to joy by eclipsing the frenzy of pleasure.

Nothing could be more appealing to the thinkers of Negritude than this recommendation to expand mysticism to remedy the defects of Western civilization. In addition to rehabilitating the African way of life by displaying the inner wisdom of simple life, the advice redirects the civilizing mission. Everything appears as though Africa—the siege of "mystic civilization" according to Senghor—was summoned to the rescue of a West overwhelmed by the products of its megalomania.⁴⁶ Césaire can demand "pity for our conquerors, all-knowing and naïve!"⁴⁷ Indeed, to see the whole Western uproar winding up in the deadlock of a mechanized and hazardous civilization would have been comical, had it not been for the high stakes involved. Pity is, therefore, the appropriate feeling, soon followed by the resolution to save what deserves to be saved, but this time the saviors coming from all the corners of the world. For no race holds a monopoly of beauty, intelligence and strength there is room for all at the meeting-place of conquest⁴⁸

Senghor agreed: the African eligibility to find a place in the chorus of civilizations passes through Negritude, squarely defined as the "defense and development of African cultural values."⁴⁹ Clearly, this vision of Africa as having a place, as being an autonomous personality leans on the Bergsonian reevaluation of some of African realities considered so far as backward, such as simplicity of life and technological lag.

But this is not all that there is to be said. In suggesting that the West, to come to its senses, needs some of the characteristics relegated to a primitive age, Bergson lends himself to an interpretation that projects the African legacy from prehistory into the future. Senghor has fully utilized this Bergsonian lift to articulate what he called the "civilization of the universal." Arguing that all great civilization "resulted from an interbreeding,"⁵⁰ the twentieth century, he maintained, would not be universal "unless it is seasoned with the salt of *negritude*. For it would be without the savour of humanity."⁵¹ True, when Senghor portrayed the specific content of Negro civilization, he drew more from Marx and other socialist thinkers than Bergson, the reason being that Bergson had nowhere hailed communalism as an advanced social organization. By contrast, Marx's views on collectivism authorize the characterization of the "collectivist and communal" nature of African civilization as "socialist."⁵² In addition to describing and rehabilitating the past, the concept of socialism opens up the future: the Marxist idea of placing collectivism at the end of the history of class struggle transposes African communalism from prehistory to the denouement of Western history.

Limited though the use of Bergsonian concepts for the glorification of communalism may be, Senghor understood that the spirit of Bergson's theory of vital force as well as his rehabilitation of intuition perfectly agree with, even posit, a socialist pattern of life. How otherwise could the conception of being that promotes the "reconciliation between the inert and the living" celebrate integration and unification?⁵³ In

opposition to the fixed and juxtaposed notion of being, the path to ontological unity avoids confrontation, individualism, and domination. In a word, Bergsonian ontology and epistemology define communalism as an attitude consistent with the nature of life. Emotion would surely dry up if confrontation and aggressiveness became the norm of life. The mystic temperament of the Negro requires a mode of existence in which solidarity supplants confrontation. The fact that the African Negro was thus "enclosed in a narrow network of vertical and horizontal solidarity" gives "the most precise illustration of [the] truth, upheld today by Socialism, according to which Man lives and is realized only by and in society."⁵⁴

On the other hand, Senghor did not forget the meaning of divergence in Bergson's theory of life. To be sure, divergence is the source of originality. Nonetheless, it is also true that it imparts a particular mode of life that falls short of the full wealth of life. Notwithstanding its merits, the African civilization is only one variety among other ways of life; as such, it is incomplete and unilateral. This one-sidedness sets off the historicity of Negritude, its quest for completion through interbreeding with other modes of life, in particular with Western civilization because of its technical achievements. "Our task," wrote Senghor, "is to integrate, to assimilate the complementary values with our own to make new blood."⁵⁵

We are touching on a sensitive issue here. More often than not, Senghor has been strongly condemned for views labeled sympathetic to the West. Critics could not but deplore the dismaying divergence between the original revolutionary stand of Negritude and the politics pursued by Senghor, politics that many define as a "strategy of compromise with the colonial master," as "a mask for a policy of accommodation to neo-colonial situation."⁵⁶ These same critics revel in the consistently revolutionary position adopted by the other outstanding theoretician of Negritude, namely, Césaire.

My point is not to deny the discrepancy between the two most important thinkers of Negritude, but to emphasize that the defense of otherness calls for completion through interbreeding. In this regard, Césaire is as open as Senghor: for him too, the struggle of black peoples must help "to found the universal humanism" by steering otherness toward convergence.⁵⁷ The choice between fidelity and the West does not appear to him as a sensible proposal, for "in the African culture yet to be born," "there will be many new elements, modern elements, let us face it, borrowed from Europe."⁵⁸ To the Senghorian plea for "an assimilation that leaves room for association,"⁵⁹ there corresponds Césaire's vision of a "rejuvenated world with its balance restored" by the contribution of all the cultures of the world.⁶⁰

All this is to say that the Bergsonian injunction to crown intelligence with intuition so as to restore the full capacity of the human mind finds its social interpretation in Negritude's thesis of the civilization of the universal. The higher civilization is the one that reinvents a new humanism by integrating all the positive assets divergently developed by each cultural trend. Where Bergson appealed for a more balanced world in which mechanism works in tandem with mysticism, Senghor read the imperative of collaboration between the West and Africa.

Jean-Paul Sartre was therefore right when he intimated that Negritude "knows itself to be transitory."⁶¹ This transiency is inscribed in the conception assigning divergent tasks to Western and African civilizations. The conception vigorously calls for convergence as a way of

completion: if an original unity has split into distinct parts, what else but reunification is the right avenue? Grant that the split refers to the emergence of races, and the contradiction, imputed to Negritude by many critics, between the static, immutable nature of race and historicity vanishes.⁶² Instead, as Sartre said, "the *race* has transmuted itself into historicity: the Present black explodes and temporalizes himself; Negritude inserts itself into its Past and its Future in the universal History; it is no more a *state*, neither even an existentialist attitude; it is a Becoming."⁶³ Césaire gave a forceful expression to this state of becoming when he intimated that the heavy European baggage that Negro intellectuals carry with them in their return to the source metamorphoses them into "inventors of the soul."⁶⁴

The Originality of Negritude

This celebration of Africa's mission demands an inquiry into the measure of autonomy that the thinkers of Negritude have secured vis-à-vis their illustrious inspiration. All the more reason for raising the issue is that the demonstration of the great influence of Bergson can be interpreted as a support to those African scholars who maintain that Negritude is an imported ideology that is entirely submissive to the West, especially to its racist ideas. Indeed, some African scholars, dissatisfied with the idea of mere influence, go so far as to indict Negritude for endorsing the colonial viewpoint on Africa. The blame stretches beyond the charge of imported and inauthentic intellectual expression; it sees a trend of thought frankly detrimental to African interests and modernization. When ethnophilosophy is exposed, to use V. Y. Mudimbe's expression, as "an imaginary, intoxicating interpretation," Negritude is in the frontline of this attack.⁶⁵ Since the denial of the authenticity of Negritude is corroborated each time a filiation is established with Western discourses, the display of the profound reliance of Negritude on Bergsonian concepts can only tilt the balance in favor of the denouncers of Negritude.

Concerning this issue of authenticity, my contention is that the manifold linkages to Bergson, while establishing the substantiality of his influence on Negritude, should be seen against the background of numerous and significant reinterpretations attesting the originality of Negritude. The transposition of non technicalness and intuitive knowledge from the realm of divergent human faculty to that of racial endowment is a case in point. Also, Bergson was nowhere near to endorsing the polarized picture describing traditional Africa as a civilization of peace and harmony while the West is war-driven and hierarchical. Far from implying the unequal distribution of bellicosity among races, Bergson spoke of a "deep-rooted war-instinct underlying civilization," regardless of its particularity.⁶⁶ What is more, according to his views, the less a culture is detached from the natural state, the more its social organization is based on "self-centeredness, cohesion, hierarchy, absolute authority of the chief," and so is highly prone to war.⁶⁷

These divergences are important enough to allow the characterization of Negritude as an original, authentic African discourse. Take the issue of non-technicalness. The affirmation of human diversity through the assertion of non-technicalness clearly diverges from the premises of Eurocentrism and evolutionism. In proudly claiming what the West despises, Negritude conquers autonomy. Even if Western discourses had here and there ennobled non-technicalness, they could not shake off their strong romantic overtones, restricted as they were to expressing their attachment to non-technicalness in terms of regret, of longing for a lost disposition. Whereas for Negritude non-technicalness is an

existential characteristic to which Africans owe their originality as well as colonial onslaughts and acculturation, for European thinking it could only represent a pre-rational stage left behind long ago following Europe's engagement in the path of progress. This explains the ambivalence of the West: committed to extirpating primitiveness through the civilizing mission of colonialism, yet celebrating it in its artistic imagination, as though the pause of rational thinking had opened up the valve of primitive marvels. Stated differently, nostalgia for non-technicalness is quite different from the claim to non-technicalness as one's originality.

With regard to authenticity, Senghor himself has an elegant argument. According to him, the connection between Africa and the West, no doubt palpable, should be looked at from the viewpoint, not only of Africans being merely borrowers, but also from the viewpoint of Europeans borrowing from Africa. This suggests that the attempt to analyze Negritude as a product of the West should also consider whether the movement against the dominance of reason is not itself a product of the slow, insidious impregnation of the West with African values. Noting that "art, like literature, is always the expression of a certain conception of the world and of life, the expression of a certain philosophy and, above all, of a certain ontology," Senghor concluded that it is impossible not to agree with Emmanuel Berl when he said that "Negro revolution . . . helped to stir European plastic art at the beginning of [the twentieth] century."⁶⁸ This revolution brought about such schools of art as nabism, expressionism, fauvism, and cubism, that is, the major moments of Western contemporary art whose impact on Western philosophical ideas was considerable.

The discovery of different civilizations had already inspired relativist philosophies in the West. The artistic influence of Africa on the West goes deeper by questioning the primacy of the rationalist view. Indeed, European rationalism had favored the artistic vision known as realism. Through imitation, but idealized by rationalism, the object is fixed and reproduced, that is, objectified. Beauty is then the immobilized entity offered for contemplation; it is not that which plunges into the sub-reality, into the network of forces, but that which sticks out, doubtless victorious, but cut off from the roots of life and facing only the surface of reality. When Western contemporary art abandons the primacy of the fixed object in favor of the interplay of shapes and colors, as Senghor put it, "a world of life forces that have to be *tamed* is substituted for a closed world of permanent and continuous substances that have to be *reproduced*."⁶⁹ The point is that the substitution of interplay of forces for the photography or objectification of the object bears witness to a philosophical change questioning many of the assumptions of rationalism. Instead of immobilizing the object, this attempt to let it be seems to announce the rise of the desire to play within the desire to conquer. The more firmly this philosophical revolution is associated with the aesthetic impact of Africa on Europe, the less surprising becomes the connections that scholars have observed between Negritude and certain forms of Western thinking. Negritude is only claiming what originally belongs to Africa.

Even if this argument is not entirely convincing, it cannot be altogether excluded for three reasons. First, the influence of African art on European artists is recognized by the artists themselves and by many European scholars, who spoke of the "Negro revolution," of surrealists being "modern primitives."⁷⁰ Second, supposing that the influence is not admitted, the pronounced propensity of the West to baptize borrowings as its own invention should guard us against the exclusion of African influence. The contact with and the study of non-Western

peoples must have had an impact, however small, on the whole philosophy of the West. Third, we cannot assume that the authors of Negritude were so empty that they were only echoing Western thoughts. In the process of their appropriation of Western thinking, some remains of their cultural legacy must have crept into it. An insistence on the one-sided process of acculturation should be moderated by the admittance of an inverse process, even if its effect remained subdued.

This argument should be completed by a non-negligible factor pertaining to the repeated excursions of Negritude into the realm of discrepant concepts. For instance, regarding the theory of intuition, discrepancy between Bergson and Senghor is not long coming. As far as Bergson was concerned, intuition by itself does not provide knowledge; it must be informed by discursive reason and purified by science. Intuition means "instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely."⁷¹ This becoming requires the active support of reason, not to mention the need to clean the faculty of sympathy from magic and all sorts of bad habits. As implied in the notion of divergent evolution, the purpose of intuition is to complement intelligence; it is not to become an independent source of knowledge.

Such is not the position of Senghor: emotion is explicitly categorized as a sufficient form of knowledge and ranked above discursive reason. Refusing the dichotomy between spirit and matter that Bergson maintained, Senghor posited one reality, that of the vital force accessible in its depths only to intuition. For Bergson, the dualism of matter and spirit warrants the validity of reason with regard to material phenomena, while prescribing the collaboration of intuition and reason as a way of transcending dualism and reaching the absolute. Senghor accepted absolute monism only; he had, so to speak, no job for reason: being of the same stuff throughout, reality is wholly accountable to the intuitive faculty so that what reason claims to know is but an apparent reality. Bergson did not endorse this somewhat Kantian approach to science for the simple reason that for him "positive science bears on reality itself, provided it does not overstep the limits of its own domain, which is inert matter."⁷² In thus rejecting dualism and pushing Bergson's idea of complementary faculties toward the autonomy and self-sufficiency of one faculty, Senghor was but violating essential components of Bergson's philosophy. Bergson regretted the neglect of intuitive faculty, but he never suggested that it could provide a self-sufficient knowledge.

Extreme caution is, therefore, required when, for instance, Sartre read into the poems of Negritude "the famous distinction which Bergson established between intelligence and intuition."⁷³ Not that the filiation is wrong—we have established its deep ramifications—but because it does not underline the numerous escapes proving that Senghor took from Bergson what he wanted to take. Besides, Sartre himself revised his position a little further by pointing out that the intuition of Negritude is "far from the chaste and asexual intuition of Bergson."⁷⁴ We conclude, then, that Senghor's philosophical project remains distinct. Insofar as Bergson was used for a philosophical goal that was not his own, his influence amounted to the provision of intellectual tools. The violation of Bergson's epistemology is a proof of this utilization: in not being respectful to the end, Senghor evinced his freedom through the subjugation of Bergsonian concepts to an alien philosophical stance.

Closely connected with this epistemological divergence between the two thinkers is the issue of race. From Bergson's viewpoint, intuitive

knowledge is not the appanage of a specific race any more than rational knowledge is. His refutation of Lévy-Bruhl's notion of pre-logical mentality is a pertinent illustration of his rejection of the racist interpretation. The part of sympathetic knowledge is certainly greater among the primitives than among the civilized, but with the proviso that, other than this difference due to usage, both faculties are inherent in humankind. Not so for Senghor who specifically attributed the African gift for sympathetic knowledge to the environment, to the "warm and humid" nature of the tropical climate of Africa.⁷⁵ The resulting physical and psychic mutations, among other things impressionability, are then transmitted biologically. This Senghorian deviation illustrates to what extent Bergsonian concepts are used to promote a discrepant philosophical discourse. Senghor needed the concept of race both to establish the African otherness and to ground its non-technicalness in a biological particularity. To articulate his idea of Africa as the seat of a different civilization, he interpreted racially the Bergsonian distinction between intuition and intelligence while knowing perfectly that the original distinction referred to two human faculties, less so to different races.

The best way to determine the standing of Negritude is, then, to uncover discrepant treatments against the background of substantial borrowings. By highlighting the points of deviation, the method isolates the independent purpose that initiated the borrowings. Besides, even the opponents of Negritude recognize this independent purpose. When Negritude is accused of being an irrelevant escapism, a conservative ideology, a vindication of past vices, the properly African content of the thinking is thereby admitted. For instance, the profession of non-technicalness as well as of communalism cannot be ascribed to any Western exhortation. The West has so stigmatized the absence of technical prowess in Africa that the proud claim to non-technicalness can only be the work of African scholars.

To my mind, the whole originality of Negritude lies in this inversion of values. Sartre expressed it when he noted that "the Negro cannot deny that he is Negro nor claim for himself [the] abstract uncolored humanity. He is black. Thus he is held to authenticity. Insulted, enslaved, he redresses himself; he accepts the word 'Negro' which is hurled at him as an epithet, and revendicates himself, in pride, as black in the face of the white."⁷⁶ This inversion of the racist discourse, this "reevaluation of the values" of the West, to use Nietzsche's expression, seems to me not only genuine but also philosophically significant. Though Western thinkers too have variously and intermittently criticized, in the name of spiritual values, the Western drive to conquest and material wealth, precisely what they said appeared as individual idiosyncrasies going against a general trend. They could not claim non-technicalness as a virtue, as a cultural disposition, still less philosophize and poeticize about it being the gift of a race.

Likewise, when Senghor transformed the idea of primitive Africa into the seat of a different civilization characterized by such features as intuitive knowledge, communalism, matriarchy, absence of classes,⁷⁷ the description of the features was certainly borrowed from anthropology, not the idea of a different civilization. Cheikh Anta Diop developed this idea into the theory of the two cradles of civilization. The development represents the most radical attempt to channel the Western hierarchical and evolutionary concepts into a pluralistic understanding of human history. The merit of being the first to question the scheme of unilinear history thus goes directly to Negritude.

Lastly, the charge that Negritude is but an endorsement of the colonial discourse simply obscures a phenomenon that is after all normal and universal. "Throughout history," notes Claude Wauthier, "the demand for national independence has gone hand in hand with cultural revival."⁷⁸ This revival did more than claim the past; it rehabilitated it by inverting the disparaging representation of the colonizer. Given that the purpose of the colonial discourse was to weaken resistance and clear the way for Westernization, its refutation required nothing less than the transformation of the colonial scorn for indigenous characteristics into positive distinguishing features. Critics overlook that the glory of power and force in the Roman Empire was first defeated by the reverse proposal to turn the other cheek.

Negritude is in keeping with the rule of repossession and redefinition of identity. Although Western statements suggest important elements of its vision, they do not determine Negritude's appropriation and its resulting redefinition of identity. The colonial notion of Africa aimed at inculcating the desire for acculturation; by turning the notion into the idea of African otherness, Negritude aimed at inducing the will to resist assimilation, even if, it is true, its success has been limited. All the same, any inquiry into the causes of its nonsuccess cannot begin unless there is prior agreement on the genuineness of its attempt.

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