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¹ Quoted in Boyd Shafer, *Nationalism: Myth and Reality*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1955, p. 9.

² There are essentially two kinds of nationalism inherent in recent African history: "chronic" and "acute." By "chronic" I mean that rather vague concept that decolonization begins not with independence but rather at the very moment when colonization begins—in other words, colonization forges an identity in the colonized man and provides him with tools to express and exploit that identity. These are the same tools which at a given point become the mainstays of "acute" nationalism.

³ Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, New York, Grove Press, 1967, p. 31.

⁴ For a study of the vicissitudes in the definition and use of the term *Négritude*, see "Négritude: Status or Dynamics?," *L'Esprit Créateur*, X, 3, 1970, pp. 163–81.

⁵ I owe this anecdote to my friend Mohamed-Salah Dembri who got it first-hand from the publisher.

⁶ An example of poetry surpassing the basic artistic talent or commitment of its author is Ait Djafer's "Complainte des mendiants arabes de la Casbah et de la petite Yasmina tuée par son père," *Les Temps Modernes*, 9^e Année, no. 98, January 1954, pp. 1227–52. A long overdue reedition of this work is being prepared by the Oswald publishing house in Honfleur.

Nationalism: Masks and Consciousness

By KOFI AWOONOR

Consciousness of nation, or nationalism, comes in many forms and has many interpretive possibilities. The confusion that surrounds the word deepens when we descend into the "dim regions" of Africa. If we are willing to accept, like Conrad, the fact that in those distant lands all joy is not a yell and a war dance, all pathos not a howl and a ghastly grin of filed teeth, we shall have moved nearer an understanding of the phenomenon of world history and civilization which is nationalism. Baffling and terribly fascinating, a figure in European renaissance barbarism and naïveté, victim of the most brazen form of organized robbery and forced interference in the lives of one people by another since Caesar moved into Britain, the African is the pathetic product of many layers of hypocrisy—Judeo-Christian mythology, Darwinian voodooism, and the latter-day bare-faced arrogance and meddling stupidity that passes for power politics. In literature, certain stated views can and must be identified as propaganda. But literature began as propaganda. I will escape the pitfalls and snares of a debate over the definition of literature by stating that in this paper the term refers to "the written word."

The first features of black consciousness in literature were based on Afro-Cuban culture, the Haitian Revolution of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the African exile condition in the New World, and the temporary exile created by the ambient power of colonialism both in and outside the ancestral homeland. It is what came to be called the gesture, the assertion. Négritude. In Césaire's words, "blackness is not absence, but refusal."

The black homeland in a most unfathomable way became for those who had never known her, for those doomed to walk alien lands for a certain time, the affirmation of imaginary and real black or African virtues. Africa was thought to be a ravishingly beautiful, distant black mother who suckled her exile children from her huge Atlantic breast, while still proudly bearing the scars of the branding iron of the Middle

Passage. Her tenuous umbilical cords unite her to the islands of the Caribbean and the American land-mass.

There was nothing as touching and explosive as the meeting of exiles from the homeland. In this meeting, the various strands of African history merged. For the first time the Afro-Antillean black met his African brother from the ancestral home. The meeting place was France. The time? Before World War II. France offered citizenship to some of the Africans under her tutelage. Aimé Césaire from Martinique stated the exile black man's case in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. The statement was one of cultural revolt against all the gestures of acceptance that Europe made.

My negritude is not a stone, its deafness thrown
against the clamor of the day
My negritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral
it thrusts into the red flesh of the soil
it thrusts into the warm flesh of the sky
it digs under the opaque dejection of its rightful patience.

Césaire's meeting with Léopold Sédar Senghor before the Second World War signaled the beginning of one of those rare literary unions prominent in history. It produced not only a large crop of creative work, but, more important, the theoretical formulations that launched negritude as a literary movement and an important twentieth century phenomenon.

As a literary movement, negritude derived much from French intellectualism and from the residues of Marxist philosophy after it had filtered through the peculiar French political genius. But its power lies in its emotiveness. "To return symbolically to the source, to abnegate the loss, the alienation, the confusion, will be the prime intention and motive of the negritude poets, as they search through their single selves for a communal African authenticity!"¹ For the founding fathers of negritude, this African authenticity lies in the labyrinthine folds of French symbolism—Breton and Mallarmé had some vague connection with it, as did Cartesian philosophy and Roman Catholicism—of the kind prescribed now and then by Madame de Gaulle and found in classical scholarship. Through it Senghor arrived at a universal nationalism.

"So for us, man is not without a homeland. He is not a man without color or history or country or civilization. . . . humiliated less perhaps in his hunger and nakedness than in his color and his civilization, in his dignity as incarnate man."² So those who through image and rhythm possess a new vision of God belong to the world of a mystical communion, peopled by demons, ancestors, gods. It is only through the evocation of this vision that assertion becomes important.

C'est pour la faim universelle
pour la soif universelle
la sommer libre enfin
de produire en son intimité close
la succulence des fruits

In this lies what Sartre refers to as "a certain effective attitude towards the world." This is the celebration of mankind's festival, called for by the negritude poets out of the anguish of alienation and dispossession. As Cartey puts it, "The black mask and the black woman, the past and the present are comingled in timelessness through the

poet's celebration." The festival totem is the black man, in the naive yet poignant assertions of Césaire:

for beauty is Black
and wisdom is Black
for endurance is Black
for life is Black

Black is the mutated symbol of sorrow and suffering; it is the color of humiliation and degradation, and in that order and triumph the talisman of hope for the festival to come. The anguish comes from Léon Damas:

Les jours inexorablement
tristes
Jamais non't cessé d'être
à la memoire
de ce que fut
ma vie tronquée.

Senghor is the main voice of negritude. He is also its despair, for in him negritude had its first opportunity to return home. And it is in this journey back home that it becomes clogged with built-in contradictions. Transcendentalism and self-abandonment as mystico-philosophical creeds share in a certain pathetic resignation which underlies the anguish and the hunger of the twentieth century. Negritude is the opiate of the African intellectual. The heady joys of soul are stupendous alibis for self-negation and even sloth. The apostles of negritude, alas, are worshipping at new shrines. Senghor's apology is simple:

You know that I have made friends with the
outlawed princes of the intellect, with the
princes of form
That I have eaten the bread which makes hungry
the innumerable army of workers and those without
work
That I have dreamt of a sunlit world in the
fellowship of my blue-eyed brothers

Senghor's poetry, leaping from the Afro-Cuban ancestry of negritude into the neo-symbolism and surrealism of French literary style, becomes the eternal exile's designation, a no-man's-land of contradictory sermons. Its emotional self-centeredness becomes the negation of other powerful and more relevant features of "la condition nègre." The poet caught in his role as a visionary and a rationalist philosopher tends to create false images in order to conveniently foist them upon the black world. Being the warning radar system in an eclectically imminent doom, he cannot escape responsibility for redeeming the pledges he made. The vertical and horizontal communities of Africa which Senghor tells about are breaking down. In spite of the Catholic pardon, in spite of the diverse ancestry that Senghor claims, his poetry becomes the summing up of an era, only the era of total shame.

I must hide in the intimate depths of my veins
The ancestors storm-dark skinned, shot with
lightning and thunder
And my guardian animal, I must hide him
Lest I thrash through the boom of scandal.

From this shame of “totem” to the assertions of *Prayer to Masks*, Senghor’s poetry moves through a one-dimensional stereotyped intellectual black cry:

For who would teach rhythm to a dead world of
machines and guns?
Who would give the cry of joy to wake the dead
and the bereaved at dawn?
Say, who would give back the memory of life to
the man whose hopes are smashed?
They call us men of coffee cotton oil
They call us men of death.
We are men of the dance whose feet draw new
strength pounding the hardened earth.

The memories of slavery, however distant, become the acerbic fuel that feeds this dream of Africa. The emotional response of black people everywhere does not represent the historical reaction that time imposes on them. For color and race remain the badge of nationalism; the problem of the color line remains the problem of the twentieth century. The process of maturation from the naïveté of negritude passes through the nightmare of the brutal denial of common humanity to the black person. And in this the long history of our conquerors is our reference.

While Senghor and his negritudinist friends sing of Africa’s passing beauty and luxuriate in a world consciousness of their warm Frenchified intellectual souls, new voices are being raised in new songs across the struggling black consciousness of Africa.

Tchicaya U’Tamsi, whom Senghor describes as bearing witness to negritude, is the poet of old landscapes and old sensibilities. Tchicaya seems to have returned to the primary revelations imposed in search of self and nation. The horrendous experiences incurred by our first false steps in modern Africa become the focus of the anguish of Christopher Okigbo, who died in the uniform of a Biafran Major. Achebe’s ancestors, like mine and U’Tamsi’s, committed impieties and unwarranted crimes in the name of gods. Headstrong, proud, arrogant, they were the loins from which the heroic personages of our literature come. Praise of nation, race, and color—a feature of the early literary efforts—has given way to an austere critical appraisal of the black man’s estate.

For Christopher Okigbo, a personal vision was forged out of the African reality and nightmare.

So would I to the hills
So would I
to where springs the fountain
there to draw from
And to hill top clamber
body and soul
whitewashed in the moon dew
There to see from.

His apocalypse is a personal one, for he was “the sole witness” when “death lay in ambush / that evening in that island” and

The arrows of God tremble at the gates of life
The drums of curfew pander to a dance of death

and the secret thing in its heaving
Threatens with iron mask
The last lighted torch of a century.

This is a far cry from the sincere evangelical assertions of the negritude writers. Something unites the younger African writers, something strong, intangible and disturbingly reminiscent of all past renascent eras. The euphoria of self-assertion and self-praise, helped along by others' frenetic guilt feelings yields to a healthy period of self-criticism and an inspired sense of inadequacy and nonfulfillment. We are achieving for ourselves feats of dislocation which are part of our intellectual growth; this dislocation is like breaking a malformed limb in order to reset it for a healthier, shapelier growth. The process is brutal and bloody, for we are aware without much rhetorical proclamation and chest-thumping that we've lived too long on history's garbage heap. We were created and are not creators; recipients, at the point of a gun, not givers, at the point of an assegai:

My deaths, my bitter stream, my jourdain, my savannah
So remake his bed by day the day delivers the soul
What colour the curtains I shall choose for my sleep
I die at Kinshasa without fire or soiled clothes

There's been enough scandal in my life
I will not see my blood upon these hands
I forget to be negro so as to forgive that to the world
If they will just let me be Congolese in peace.*

SUNY at Stony Brook

The Soviet Dream versus East European Reality

By E. J. CZERWINSKI

Today only small countries can afford the luxury of being unashamedly nationalistic. The superpowers, like China, the United States, and the Soviet Union, find themselves in the awkward position of having to pursue their dreams of unity through nationalism by way of an invented, if not false, ideal in order to attain their highly pragmatic goal. What the superpowers have to contend with is the simple fact that only countries fighting for existence, for basic freedoms and their economic security, have nothing to fall back on except God and Country. Since communism has almost succeeded in making religion an effete battle cry in East Europe, these small countries have one last refuge—their homeland.

This spirit of nationalism is a natural phenomenon. Even in emigrants the feeling of belonging to their native country, no matter how distasteful that country's political orientation, dies hard. Consequently, past events in Czechoslovakia and recent ones

* For further discussion of recent African literature, consult our Africa issue (see *BA* 44:3, pp. 373–407).