HYPOTHESIZING LEOPOLD SENGHOR'S POSTULATIONS, REALITY AND MYTH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper provides insights into ideological doctrine of negritude for African socialism. Negritude is rooted in the political philosophy that presupposes collective orientation and spirit of pan Africanism. There is widespread acceptance among intellectual thinkers that negritude offers the front of African unity and drive towards African spirit which offers leverage for African decolonization. Negritude drives collective desire for Africa development. Against this background, this paper examines negritude as model for united Nigeria. The model provides reconstruction of African socialism and root of Nigeria unity. Literature materials for the work were derived from historical archives and official documents. The paper outlined doctrine of negritude as pan Africanism and spirit of collective consciousness for Africa development. Senghor's postulation of negritude was African socialism which found place in African democracy and united Africa. Negritude designated spirit of pan Africanism and it was symbol for political philosophy in Africa. Africa negritude was formed in the mind of Africans and held as belief system. Yet, Nigeria lacked potential for negritude that rallies multi ethnics for united Nigeria. This paper concluded that drive for Nigeria negritude and spirit of collective orientation place Nigeria on the path of balance development. The prerequisite for Nigeria negritude is a drive towards civil nationhood. This cut off doctrine from ethnic nationalism and drives to true nationhood. Negritude for Nigeria should reconstruct the tide of current federalism which skews development.

Keywords: Negritude, Pan Africanism, Multi Ethnic, Nigeria, Development.

Introduction

The writings of Leopold Senghor represent one of the major philosophical content in Africa. There is consensus that Senghor's postulations played major role and rally intellectual thinking in Africa development (Murphy, 2011; Senghor, 1975). Colonialism stretched and gauged modern African thoughts which vehemently sought short and long term recuperation from colonial rule and political independent (Ogunyemi, 2010). Senghor and several contemporary African writers were preoccupied with piece of writing and master class thinking which is rooted in Africa origin. The intention for many contemporary African writers was born out of Africanism and freedom from superiority of colonial imperialism. Africanism was doctrine for intellectual writing which was intended as gateway to self sufficiency, self derived development and propeller for African freedom. Imperialism was an imposition and forced political doctrine which reduced Africa as conquered territory and savagery culture that needed liberation (Paalee, 2017). The Europeanism of Africa was witnessed by African intellectuals as confrontation which undermined African values. It was however impossible for African intellectuals to engage forceful disengagement of colonialism.

The process of decolonization was enforced by African writers through relentless intellectual publication (Ome, 2014). The publication was impetus to African movement and rally for freedom. African philosophy grew in leap and bound which projected Africa culture as wholesale and not subservient to colonial culture (Mwegbi, 2007). Unfortunately, Africa was depicted as savagery culture which needed the help of Europe during enlightenment era (Karolewski, 2011). It was premonition of the European culture to subjugate African culture in the era of industrial and political revolution (Obiorah, 2013). This period although offered opportunities for African to access to European education, it however prepared African scholars for intellectual aggression and freedom for Africa.

Senghor's writing is singled out for African root and Africanism (Mills, 2015). This is important for many reasons. It is the notion of Senghor to postulate African socialism which resembled collective ownership for all and integration of Africans within Africa. The idea reverberated democratic tenet which opposed to European communist fashion that not only negated socialism rooted in dictatorship, it was African ideology that minimized root of capitalism (Senghor, 1975). Senghor's negritude was disposition of African culture surrounded with truth and genuine African culture. It was the culture founded on equality, African socialism and pan African spirit which superseded doctrine of state corruption. The notion of negritude was introduction of ground for African value which placed collective orientation above self orientation. Negritude was intellectual project to propel Africa as superior, capable of self driven growth and independent continent. It was intellectual movement that projected Africa beyond dependency ideology of colonial rulers. Negritude however received international acceptance within Africa and beyond the shore of the continent (Sogolo, 1993). Some post independent African writers adduced continental significance of negritude which projected African movement for independent states (Obiorah, 2013; Ome, 2014 Sogolo, 2000). These writers agreed that Senghor's doctrine of socialism ruled most part of the 20th century Africa, evident in state policies of economic development. Interestingly, Nigeria in the post colonial era was an epitome of economic development and civic nationhood. This period was marked by policies of state ownership and socialism which placed local economy competitive in the global space. The gradual decline of state ownership of enterprises and substitution for Western capitalism decapitated global status of Nigeria economy (Madubuko, 2008). Capitalism was introduced in the later part of 20th century through adoption of structural adjustment (SAP) by Military Administration of Ibrahim Babanginda. Notably, negritude abhors dictatorship; the incursion of military in governance is antithetical and recipe for dictatorship. Unfortunately, Nigeria has continued to grapple with national crisis, ethnic suspicion and poverty which is plundering many citizens. Negritude is a doctrine of liberation and self driven growth for Africa development. Against this backdrop, the paper considers the myth and reality of negritude in the 21st century Nigeria.

Objective of the paper

This paper is aimed to identify and project the doctrine of negritude for reconstruction in the Nigeria context. Negritude is political doctrine which preached root of African socialism. The specific task in this work is to develop model of similar doctrine in the Nigeria case. The paper relies on secondary sources of data derived from historical records, archives and official documents. These sources provide literature materials of the work.

Theoretical framework

The idea projected by Senghor is discrete nationalism of African society. Nationalism is a multidimensional social construction reflected in the communal identification with one's nation. It is a political ideology oriented towards gaining and maintaining self-governance, or full sovereignty, over a territory of historical significance to the group (such as its homeland). Nationalism therefore holds that a nation should govern itself, free from unwanted outside interference, and is linked to the concept of self- determination. Nationalism is further oriented towards developing and maintaining a national identity based on shared characteristics such as culture, language, race, religion, political goals or a belief in a common ancestry (Jaskulowski, 2010; Calhoun, 2013). Nationalism therefore seeks to preserve the nation's culture. It often also involves a sense of pride in the nation's achievements, and is closely linked to the concept of patriotism. In these terms, nationalism can be considered positive or negative. In some cases, nationalism referred to the belief that a nation should be able to control the government and all means of production.

Gellner's theory of nationalism was developed by Ernest Gellner (Grosby, 2005). From a political or sociological outlook, there are three main paradigms for understanding the origin and basis of nationalism. The first, known as primordialism or perennialism, sees nationalism as a natural phenomenon. It holds that, although the concept of nationhood may be recent, nations have always existed (Grosby, 2005). The second paradigm is ethno-symbolism, which is a complex perspective seeking to explain nationalism by contextualizing it throughout history as a dynamic, evolutionary phenomenon and by further examining the strength of nationalism as a result of the nation's subjective ties to national symbols imbued with historical meaning. The third and most dominant paradigm is modernism, which sees nationalism as a recent phenomenon that needs the structural conditions of modern society in order to exist (Calhoun, 2013).

There are various definitions for what constitutes a nation, however, which leads to several different stands of nationalism. It can be a belief that citizenship in a state should be limited to one ethnic, cultural, religious, or identity group, or that multi-nationality in a single state should necessarily comprise the right to express and exercise national identity even by minorities. The adoption of national identity in terms of historical development has commonly been the result of a response by influential groups unsatisfied with traditional identities due to inconsistency between their defined social order and the experience of that social order by its members, resulting in a situation of anomie that nationalists seek to resolve. This anomie results in a society or societies reinterpreting identity, retaining elements that are deemed acceptable and removing elements deemed unacceptable, in order to create a unified community (Greendfield, 2012). This development may be the result of internal structural issues or the result of resentment by an existing group or groups towards other communities, especially foreign powers that are or are deemed to be controlling them. Nationalism means devotion for the nation. It is a sentiment that binds the people together. National symbols and flags, national anthems, national languages, national myths and other symbols of national identity are highly important in nationalism. Negritude is a push for ideological African nationalism which presupposes Africa as spirit of unity for African and equality to access Africa resources. It is nationalism of collective conscience.

Pan Africanism

Before the Senghor's Negritude hit the African soil, the idea of Pan-Africanism existed. Pan-Africanism is an ideology consisting of two key elements: the common heritage of people of African descent all over the world and the incumbency of African people to work for the interests and the well-being of one another everywhere. It embodies the unity of all people of African descent, had its origins outside Africa (Breuilly, 2005). It was unfortunate that in the United States, the Pan-African movement was marked by intense and bitter rivalry among its founders. This is a contradiction to the very agenda they seek. The disagreements on the basic premise of their struggle; namely, that the lack of racial pride among black people was one key ingredient missing in the struggle for racial equality, led to its disintegration. Though its members increased to become a powerful mass movement, with the aim of returning to Africa and to establish an African kingdom – this reveals the political agenda of the Pan-Africanists of which Kwame Nkrumah was part of.

Yet, it is undeniable that, in a number of ways, Negritude could be seen as equivalent to Pan-Africanism in the Francophone world. This is because both had connections and participation from members of the black diaspora. Unlike Pan-Africanism therefore, Negritude was primarily a cultural movement with political aspects being indirect and secondary. It was devoted to defining and expressing the special, distinctive, cultural characteristics of black people and then to asserting the worth of those distinctive characteristics. Though Pan-Africanism, while having some of these same features of assertion, was always directed towards politics and the acquisition of greater rights and freedoms in civil and political areas. Negritude has a cultural origin, which extends not only pan Africanism, but also promotes political ideology for Africa.

Leopold Senghor and African Negritude

The question of identity has been at the heart of African thought for the greater part of the last century. Senghor is cast as the product and occasionally the victim of his French intellectual training, constantly striving through countless essays to erect Negritude into a coherent philosophy of culture. It is therefore necessary to examine Senghor's writings on the metaphysical and romantic explorations of the "black soul" and the quest for an authentic black identity, or the struggle for meaning says Murphy (2011), remains a struggle for identity.

The concept of Negritude emerged as the expression of a revolt against the historical situation of French colonialism and racism. It was a product of the encounter of three black students, Aime Cesaire, Leon Damas and Leopold Senghor, in Paris, in the late 1920s. Being colonial subjects, they were seen as uncivilized; and thus naturally in need of education and guidance from Europe (Murphy, 2011). This idea Senghor in particular refused to accept. For him, the European education was not building any Christianity or civilization in his soul, Just like J. S. Mbiti, he held firmly that Africans are notoriously religious. This is an expression of black pride, a consciousness of one's culture and an affirmation of a distinct identity that was in sharp contrast with the Europeans. At that early stage, these young intellectuals are gradually provoking attention of scholars towards Africa and raising the importance of a return to Africa values -which stems from their common origin. It is providential that among the three, Paalee (2017) wrote that Senghor became a powerful voice of post war black cultural pride and self-determination. A leading proponent of Negritude, a literary movement based on the

repudiation of Western imperialism and the reclamation of Pan-African heritage, Senghor was instrumental in the cultivation of postcolonial aesthetics and black racial consciousness. His profound writings celebrate the cultural legacy of Africa while attempting to reconcile his affinity for European civilization with the devastating effects of its colonial policies. Right from beginning, Senghor was often accused of being a racist and negritude was declared to be a form of racism (Paalee, 2017; Senghor, 1964). Superficially, there are some similarities with some Africanist strains of Pan-Africanism. However, the African uniqueness that Senghor was claiming was cultural, philosophical or ontological, not racial. In response to this in his article "Negritude: A humanism of the twentieth century", Senghor answers the charge of racism and went further to provide a definition for that concept. He puts it beautifully thus: "Negritude is neither racialism nor self-negation. Yet it is not just affirmation; it is rooting oneself in oneself, and self-confirmation: confirmation of one's being. It is nothing more or less than what some English-speaking Africans have called the African personality.

In the writings of Mills (2015) one might discover that, Senghor, by developing the notion more closely, the creators of the term, such as him, had made it a weapon for liberation and a contribution to humanism in the twentieth century. Thus, for Senghor, African understanding of who they are and what they are involves this much more holistic view of the universe. Consequently, existence must be perceived to be much more than physical, material life. Senghor claims that Negritude is the embodiment of African cosmological approaches; these African approaches, he argues, are inherently holistic and integrative. They do not make artificial divisions between the material and spiritual worlds but see them as a continuous whole. Even things that the West view as inanimate-stones, streams -or totally material-trees, shrubs: herbs and lower animals-also embody elements of the 'spiritual' or supernatural. For instance, African religion and African medicine try to use these supernatural or 'spiritual' elements. This was taken as the contribution that negritude and Africa can make in the search for a new humanism for the twentieth century.

There is no doubt, Senghor's negritude follows from his view on socialism which he espoused in his book titled On African Socialism. In this book, Senghor tries to defend the idea that Africans have their own version of socialism which is distinct from the scientific socialism of Karl Marx and Friederich Engels whose ideas are so acclaimed in the western world. According to Paalee (2017) Senghor developed an idea of socialism which revolves around the collectivist character of traditional Africa, its humanist character and the egalitarianism which characterized the social segment of traditional Africa. Senghor (1964) wrote:

"Negro African society is collectivist, or more exactly, communal because it is rather a communion of souls rather than an aggregate of individuals. Africa had already realised socialism before the coming of the Europeans. But we must renew it by helping to regain its spiritual dimension" (p.34). With his (Senghor's) acknowledgement of the vital connection between the material and the spiritual world, an idea which stems from the general view on African metaphysics that saw everything as having both material and spiritual implications, he holds apology for that view that acclaims the material world as the only existent. Consequently, Senghor (1964) went further to reject Marx's materialism, but he accepted Marx's rejection of the capitalist mode of production.

In line with the above, Paalee (2017) affirmed that "on African socialism", Senghor argues that prior to the European advent on African soil whose mission it was to colonize and civilize "the savage tribes," Africa had already devised an ideology called socialism. Hence, African socialism predates the coming of the Europeans. The above assertion reminds us of Julius Nyerere's view that the African is by nature socialist, and so socialism is an attitude of the African, he does not need to be taught in order to comprehend its tenets. The implication of these two related views implies that a logical conclusion can be drawn that the African does not need to be taught socialism, because it is his very nature to live with and die by it. In brief, it is his genetic trait. For Sogolo (1999), the collectivist aspect of African socialism, Senghor is of the view that African socialism is humanist in form since it aims at the material welfare and well-being of man, the improvement of production for the satisfaction of all people as well as the equitable distribution of resources.

Senghor dismissed the Marxian socialism. For him, it is atheistic in content. It does not capture the African spiritual values. Senghor was very critical of Marxism because he felt that its principles could only be applied to the Europe of the nineteenth century and do not reflect the reality and experience of African people. Seeking to distinguish African socialism from Marxian socialism, Senghor (1964) indicates: 'Our socialism can no be *exactly* Marx and Engels which was elaborated about a hundred years ago according to the scientific methods and circumstances of the nineteenth century and Western Europe...... Our socialism then would be elaborated not the dependence but in the autonomy of our thought and it will choose the most scientific, up-to-date and above all the most efficient methods and institutions and techniques of the western world and here. But in the final analysis, they will be efficient only if adapted to the African situation... to our geography, culture and psychology"

The above extract notwithstanding, Sologolo, (2000) pinpointed that unlike Nyerere who advocates a complete ideological separation from the West, Senghor advocates that, certain positive elements of the West such as scientific development, educational advancement and technological ideas can be borrowed and adapted to suit African conditions. "Rejecting the notion of European supremacy and the forced assimilation of Western culture among colonized Africans, Senghor and other negritude writers, mainly French-speaking African and Caribbean writers, sought to inspire renewed pride in the rich history and cultural tradition of Africa".

Therefore, Leopold Senghor's Negritude owes its genesis to his ideas on socialism. According to Ogunyemi (2013), Negritude underscores the love for everything African whether the thing is "ugly" or "beautiful". It is seen as the awareness, defense and development of African cultural values. Negritude emphasizes and underscores "self- consciousness" and the elevation of African traditions, cultures, and norms in Africa. It is the simple recognition of the fact of being black and the acceptance of this fact, of our destiny as black people, of our history, and our culture." Negritude therefore celebrates the cultural, historical, religious and racial pride of the Africans.

According to Mgwebi (2008), the Black consciousness of the mid-sixties put more emphasis on the word "Blackness". Blackness according to them did not note the pigmentation of one's skin but it was an attitude, a state of mind and that body who identifies himself with the Black

man's struggle is black. Blackness is synonymous to being oppressed. The Black Consciousness concept borrowed much from Negritude. The Negritude notion played a vital role in the pre-independence political struggles in Africa. Thus, for him, Negritude established set of norms drawn up and motivated by white society but the creation of a new type of society embodying new values".

For the masses therefore, Negritude did not bring anything new - since what it demands are already innate. These are core African values which have been distorted by the colonial presence. All it calls for was an emotional renaissance. Therefore, Negritude was emotional to the masses and intellectual to more sophisticated Africans. It was a struggle and it keeps alive and sustains the African spirit in a historical fight. Thus, its influence is in the mind and felt in the culture. Hence, Negritude was a reality and it had an impact on African Nationalism. It affected people's lives through-out the whole of Africa and brought to light the unique soul of the African man and the collective spirit of the black race.

It is important to note that though as an ideology, Negritude was earlier concerned with the fight against the growing racial discrimination and the injustices meted on the black race, but after independence, its racial reaction lost its appeal as new programmes had to be coined out in order to meet the post-independence challenges which primarily is the desire and demand for nation building. Through the toils of the earlier African nationalists, and in particular Leopold Senghor, an apostle of negritude, the spirit of brotherhood among Africans at home and in Diaspora were gradually rekindled. Thus, there was a gradual movement from the reconstruction of black identity to the realization of African nationhood. Nationhood is the root of nationalism. It rekindles collective gains and struggle African development. Negritude is the spirit of nationhood which subsists in the collective orientation.

The Struggle for African Identity: Myth and Reality of Negritude

According to Orne (2014), the importance and lasting influence of Negritude is best seen with the post-independence struggles of the black man. Its aim and objectives are the same as those pursued by the black African since independence, namely, the truth of his being and culture as well as the full mastery of his own environment. It is rooting one's self in one's world, the confirmation and assertion of one's being. Negritude is indeed nothing more than the black man's attempt to regain what Sartre calls an "original purity of existence" (Mgwebi, 2008)

Therefore, the collective will to live, to be true to oneself and be proud of one's colour and culture has become a ceaseless struggle for the black man since his independence. This is an eternal cause for the blacks. It is "the affirmation of Africa's dignity" for generations to come. In his book, "the struggle continues", Kwame Nkrumah, gives us an idea of this struggle, a fight to the death against oppression, racism, and exploitation (Kanu, 2013). For him, among its many contributions to the black struggle is the fact that it "heralds the long-awaited day of liberation from the shadows of obscurity. We take our place among the people of the world without hate or apologies, with confidence and with goodwill towards all men". For Gowon (1973), "the freedom and dignity of the African and indeed of the black man everywhere is an issue of which there can be no compromise", Black power, for Egbuna (1978), takes on the character of cultural identity and self-mastery in s self-controlled world.

Ome (2014) opined that the post-independence achievements of the black man in his social, political, and particularly cultural aspirations are the fruits and a fulfillment of dreams of the founders of negritude. In line with Sartre ideas, Negritude inserts itself with its past and its future in the universal history; it is no more a State, neither even an existential attitude, rather it is a becoming (Mgwebi, 2008). Negritude is pregnant of a future. It is worthy to note at this juncture that the thirst for negritude arose from the same need the black man has today, namely; to assert his personality in the world and to find his essence in the wells of his soul. This manifests an important dimension of negritude as a philosophy of social action. Again, the present black man's struggles are the extension of those which gave birth to negritude. This collective struggle serves the affirmation of African's unity and dignity and its place in the world. However, though Leopold Senghor's philosophy of Negritude has received wide attention and criticisms, it is undeniable that through Negritude, however, the black men found a way to his true self and the collective basis to fight against the social environment which denied them of their humanity. At the post-independent era, Negritude became a source of black power, black pride, black survival and consequently black nation. Negritude is rebirth of collective push for greater future. The future breeds from today action. Africa has metamorphosed evidence of negritude. The establishment of African Union (AU) is a symbol of scramble for spirit of unity. AU is a front for African power and global negotiation. Across regions of Africa, there are regional organizations such as Economic Community for West African State (ECOWAS). The fundamental goal of African organisations is prerequisite for common front in international community. This is projection of negritude for pan Africanism.

Negritude: Reconstructing Ideological Root for Nigeria

The socio-political space of Nigeria is replica of factors that premeditated Senghor's intention. Negritude is ideological disposition which returns African root of socialism. It builds the spirit of collectiveness and social bond of Africanism. The ideology thrived optimism that African unity is capable to strengthen African culture and value. There is intention which establishes negritude for Africa as household consumption and way of life. This is protrusion of African way of life which is displayed among Africans and for Africa. Interestingly, negritude is extrapolation of Africa culture that is argued on the doctrine of socialism. Senghor mentioned that Africa cannot be thought socialism as preached by the Western colonialists. The doctrine resided in Africa long before European occupation. Africa socialism is therefore superior and allowed for grounded collectivism.

Hypothetically, negritude is an ideal in Nigeria state. It is drive towards monoculture doctrine in multi ethnic society like Nigeria. The doctrine bridges gap for universal African citizens which offers lifeline for unity and development of African society. Negritude offers African spirit of oneness, African spirit of common front against racism and superiority of colonial rulers; it offers spirit of united Africa. Nigeria is a multi ethnic nation-state which is bedeviled with divided loyalty and ethnic nationhood. Ethnic spirit brings people together and it is fastest means loyalty. State loyalty is a pretense and this is evident in political history, social conflict and governance in Nigeria. The post independent Nigeria is synonymous to ethnic rationality. This significantly hampered development and social transformation of Nigeria society. However, Nigeria like Africa is a postulate of negritude. The doctrine offers hypothetical model which builds around united Nigeria. Negritude offers hybrid of Africa unity and pan Africanism in the multiplicity of African population. Evidence from socio-

political upheavals in Nigeria attested to shred and divided loyalty. The numerous civil conflicts which pitched ethnic groups against one another resonates escalation of divided loyalty and de-nationalism of Nigerian peoples. There is however ground for negritude of Nigerian nation.

This paper projects the following model:

- 1. Nigeria must drive towards civic nationalism rather than ethnic nationalism. Nationhood should be built around collective orientation for national development.
- 2. Ethnic nationality should be de-emphasized to uphold true nationalism. The prerequisite for this is to drive towards regional autonomy or restructuring which builds sense of integration and confederal state. Nigeria is in the brink of ethnic war and must be recalibrated to sustain national unity.

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