

**Race Pride:**

**The Unifying Factor in the Harlem Renaissance Movement**

**(1920s) and Negritude (1930s)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present paper, "Race Pride: The Unifying Factor in The Harlem Renaissance Movement (1920s) and Negritude(1930s)" makes the point that the Harlem Renaissance Movement and The Negritude Movement, though they are from different times( 1920s and 1930s) and from different spaces (USA and France and French-speaking Africa) share the feature of exhibiting a race pride that at times borders on racism. All the four authors studied here, rejected the Western values or part of them and uplifted the African or black traditional norms.

The West Indian Claude MacKay for instance would reject the idea of writing without showing his blackness in his poetry. Rather everything black, for him is worthy to be exalted, included the deprived life of the Blacks in Harlem.

Langston Hughes would depend on the Blacks' culture for everything. He would rely on the life of the poor Blacks for inspiration. The subject matter of his writings is the difficult conditions of the life of the American Negro. For most of his poetry he would use the rhythm of Jazz music, Negro Spirituals, and the gospel music.

The Senegalese scholar and president, Leopold Sedar Senghor, just like the Caribbean scholar and politician Aime Cesaire rejected the Western culture, especially the faculty of reasoning to which they oppose the simple and natural life in harmony with nature. They revered on past glories of the African past as the cradle of civilization and human life.

## **Race Pride: The Unifying Factor in The Harlem Renaissance Movement (1920s) and Negritude(1930s)**

The Harlem Renaissance Movement as well as Negritude evolved as a result of the idea of the inferiority of the black race, especially with regard to the white race. In the US anything black then was rated second best and the black people themselves were considered as second class citizens. In Africa the Africans were considered incapable of governing their states, and so had to be colonized by the white people who are members of the superior race. Toni Morrison refreshed our mind of some of the then held ideas when she said in her inaugural speech upon receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature referring to the slave narratives written by the slaves themselves.

One has to remember that the climate in which they wrote reflected not only the Age of Enlightenment but its twin, born at the same time, the Age of Scientific Racism. David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Thomas Jefferson, to mention only a few, had documented their conclusions that blacks were incapable of intelligence. Frederick Douglass knew otherwise, and he wrote refutations of what Jefferson said in "Notes on the State of Virginia": "Never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration, never see even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture"--a sentence that I have always thought ought to be engraved at the door to the Rockefeller Collection of African Art. Hegel, in 1813, had said that Africans had no "history" and couldn't write in modern languages. Kant disregarded a perceptive observation by a black man by saying, "This fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid."

These negative ideas have managed to create a kind of inferiority complex in the black people, some of them ending in hating themselves for being black. Zora Neale Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* gave us a perfect illustration of this idea. The character Mrs Turner believed strongly that she could be ill-treated by Janie because this latter is lighter-skinned than herself. By contrast Janie should not marry Tea Cake who was blacker than Janie. All through the novel she tried to convince Janie to leave her husband for somebody like her brother-in-law who was also light-skinned. Toni Morrison's quotation here in addition to reminding the reader of the situation of the black people in those days, can be a good transition to the subject of this chapter. Some black people, the authors of the slave narratives, for instance proved those upholding the white superiority notion wrong. The writers of the Harlem Renaissance were conscious that they were capable of achieving equally well as the white people and could not understand why they should be ashamed of being themselves, that is, being black even in their art. The example of Claude McKay is illuminating here. When he freshly came to the US in search of a wider acclaim for his art., and the great William Stanley Braithwaite published one of his poems, but warned him about not writing too black if he wanted to be published again. He could not understand the advice of his senior and when turning the whole matter in her mind, he thought:

I felt more confidence in my own way because, of all the poets I admire, major and minor, Byron Shelley, Keats, Blake, Burns, Whitman, Heine, Beaudelaire, Verlaine and Rimbaud, and the rest -it seemed to me that when I read them- in their poetry I could feel their race, their class, their roots in the soil, growing into plants, spreading and forming the backgrounds against which they were silhouetted. I could not feel the reality of them without that. So likewise I could not realize myself writing without conviction. (See Mackay1969:p28).

Like McKay thought it, that he could not feel comfortable with anything that does not reflect himself, the writers of the Harlem Renaissance decided not to feel any shame about themselves, but rather would make use of only themselves, to sing of themselves and to use their own cultures already beautiful to

create beauty. Africa that used to be despised took on a new particular beauty with Countee Cullen's poem "Heritage"

What is Africa to me:/Copper sun, a scarlet sea,/Junglestar and jungle track,/Strong bronzed men  
and regal black/ Women from whose loins I sprang/When the birds of Eden sang?/One three  
centuries removed/ From the scenes his fathers loved/ Spicy grove and banyan tree,/ What is  
*Africa to me?* [See Locke(ed)1997: p.250.]

The present paper sets about showing that, though the Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude are different literary movements; the former developed in the US in the years 1920s and the latter started in France in the years 1930s; both movements shared the common preoccupation of uplifting the black race. The paper has two parts to it: the first part shows how the writers of the Harlem Renaissance contributed in making the Blacks and the African continent a subject of praise. The second part deals with the African writers of the Negritude movement and how they managed to portray the continent and its population in flying colors.

In the US, the major proponents of this black aesthetics include: Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston who are the subject matter of the present study. McKay seems to be completely subjugated by this race pride. It was as if all his life he has been under the spell of it. In his autobiography, *McKay : A Long Way From Home*, he made the bold statement that:

It seems to me that every European white lover of lyric and amatory poetry should be informed that one of the greatest, poets of love, was a Negro named Antar. And that European or white man's love poetry today probably owes much of its inspiration to Antar, who was the son of a Negro woman and an Arabian chieftain. (See Mckay1969: p.88.)

This statement is doubly challenging, first because the name Antar admittedly cannot be found in any of the ordinary writings about literature since classicism to today. McKay himself acknowledges this fact,

that is why he referred the reader to get information. The other challenging aspect of this statement is that the idea was well spread by very knowledgeable humanists like David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Thomas Jefferson, just cited above that the black people did not have any culture, that they did not have the capacity of thinking. Who McKay was to make such pronouncements that challenge these great names of philosophy? However He would not stop there in his adulation for the blackness. When he travelled to Russia, was entertained like a king by the Russian authorities who made him to eat in the best restaurants and sleep in fashionable hotels and meet well-known people and whose probable aim was to seduce him to accept socialism as the way out for the black masses. After all these treats McKay responded in a weird way, he did not yield to the socialist ideology, but rejoiced openly that the Russians in treating him in such a way were showing gratitude to the fact of his being a black person, as if being black means anything at all for the Russians. He wrote in the autobiography:

Never in my life did I feel prouder to be an African, a black and no mistake about it.

Unforgettable that first occasion I was physically uplifted. I had not yet seen it done to anybody, nor did I know that it was a Russian custom. The Moscow streets were filled with eager crowds before the Congress started. As I tried to get through along the Tverskaya I was suddenly surrounded with a crowd, tossed into the air, and caught a number of times and carried a bloc on their friendly shoulders.(See Mckay1969:p.168.)

This enthusiasm from McKay because of his being black could not be justified, because it was the time when the Russians were busy trying to recruit the black everywhere in the world to the socialist ideology. The black people then constituted a ready ground because they were dissatisfied with the colonialist West and already some African countries have started agitating for autonomy from their colonizers. McKay himself referred later in his book, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* of Russian women who married Africans to keep them in line with the party and that if they happen to leave the party, they were running the high risk of losing their family members for the Russian women would divorce them and leave with their children to Russian. This same race pride made the author of *McKay: A Long Way From Home* to disqualify any

non-Black person who is involved in writing about the race upon the argument that they could not understand the black people's predicament because they have never been black. He held that

Only super souls among the whites can maintain intimate association with colored people against the insults and insinuations of the general white people, and even the colored public.

Yet no white person, however sympathetic, can feel fully the corroding bitterness of color discrimination. Only the black victim can. (See McKay 1969: p.135.)

McKay's point here can be highly controversial. History has recorded cases when people who have nothing to do with some causes have fought and died for them. The first example that can come to mind is that of the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe whose book made such an impact on the American public that President Abraham Lincoln said of her that that little woman started the big war, referring to the American Civil War. Mrs Stowe was not a black writer but she did take to her heart to help stop slavery using her pen. And going by Lincoln's comment, there is no doubt that she was successful and very few are the Americans who did not read and cried on her book. The following is what McKay expected from the Harlem Renaissance Movement:

My idea of a renaissance was one of talented persons of an ethnic group working individually or collectively in a common purpose and creating things that would be typical of their group. I was surprised when I discovered that many of the talented Negroes regarded their renaissance more as an uplift organization or vehicle to accelerate the pace and progress of smart Negro society. (See Mckay1969: p. 321.)

Equally controversial is his acknowledgement of feeling at home in Morocco. He wrote that Morocco was the only place he visited in the world where he felt at home. That is, where he did not feel or people did not make him to feel the humiliations of segregation like in Europe or in the US. He wrote with much lyricism in his poem "A Farewell to Morocco": << Mysterious atmosphere whose elements,/Like hands

inspired by a magnetic force,/Touched so caressingly my inmost chords,/How strangely I was brought  
beneath your spell!/But willingly/A captive I/Remained to be.>>(See Eastman 1953: p.88.) This  
statement seems to be inconsistent with what he himself wrote in his autobiography, *McKay: A Long Way  
From Home*. In the book he wrote about his own disappointment because the presence of the Western  
countries there. Actually the persons originating from Western countries and who resided in Morocco  
were under the legislation of their own countries while the Morocco people were under the Sultan. This  
situation is nothing different from what existed in the US. The only change was that in Morocco he found  
himself in the position of the privileged. It is not the America of “If We Must Die” where the Blacks had  
to face the white “enemy”:<< If we must die, let it not be like hogs/Hunted and penned in an inglorious  
spot,/While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,/Making their mock at our accursed lot.>> Morocco  
did not prove a “tiger” to McKay and the Blacks like the America of “Tiger” : << The white man is a  
tiger at my throat, Drinking my blood as my life ebbs away,/And muttering that his terrible stripped coat/  
Is freedom’s and portends the Light of Day.>>(See Eastman 1953:p. 47.) Besides, it should be  
remembered that McKay immigrated to the US because he wanted to meet with a greater fame than  
would be the case if he had stayed in his native Jamaica. Ostensibly Morocco does not seem a greater  
place than Jamaica and very far behind the US. James R. Giles is probably right when he wrote in his  
biography of McKay, *Claude McKay* that:

It was inevitable that McKay would try to find a “home” in Africa – the exponent of art based  
upon black consciousness was simply looking back to the mother continent. But, even while  
he responded to the “magical barbaric” Moroccans, he was, by education and profession,  
dependent upon that white “civilization” of America which refused to treat him as an equal  
human being. Thus McKay, like (Richard) Wright and (James) Baldwin after him, found that  
Africa was not to be the answer to the tragic “duality” implicit in the Afro-american heritage.  
(See Giles 1976: p.140.)

Langston Hughes is another adherent to the race pride and who espoused fully the rules that must inform the black renaissance as laid down by Locke. This latter declared that their writers of poetry are no more talking for the Negro- they talk as Negroes. In the places where they talk to others before and endeavored to explain, today they talk to their people and endeavored to articulate. They have renounced to be a model, because they are not far from the accomplishment of self-assurance. (See Dickinson 1972) Hughes would then from there elaborate his own motto that goes:

We younger artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too... We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (See Dickinson 1972:p.34).

Hughes mainly in his career as a poet made the choice to rely only on black aesthetics. For inspiration he relies on the people's daily experience. For subject matter he turned to how difficult life proved for the African-Americans, especially in Harlem. In terms of rhythm Hughes turned to the jazz, blues, spirituals and gospels.

Early at the beginning of his career as a poet, Hughes made it clear that what he was going to write about was the black people who are miserable because of the American racial society. The white Americans deliberately were doing everything to frustrate its black population. This is seen in all the spheres of their life. A distinctive feature of Harlem, especially where the Blacks lived, was its crowdedness. It could not be otherwise, accommodation there was expensive and for the poor Blacks to afford this, they had to get together to be able to pay these high rents. It thus follows that all the problems inherent to overcrowded areas are found in the blackbelt of Harlem. Name it, poverty? It was there : "Sure I know you!/You're a White Man./I'm a Negro./You take all the best jobs/ And leave us the garbage cans to empty/and/The halls to clean./You have a good time in a big house at .[See Tidewell and Ragard (ed)2007: p.141.] Abundance of night life, and bars, and drinking parlors? It was there : "In a Harlem cabaret/ Six long-

headed jazzers play./A dancing girl whose eyes are bold/Lift high a dress of silken gold./Oh singing tree!/Oh shining rivers of the soul!” .(See Dickinson 1972:p.37). Prostitution? It was there : “ Natcha, offering love./For ten shillings offering love./Offering: a night with me honey./ A long, sweet night with me./ Come, drink palm wine./ Come, drink kisses./Along, dream night with me.” .(See Dickinson 1972:p.38). Actually the ideal reaction for anyone that has concern for the well-being of the Blacks could not help being moved by the degrading and shameful conditions that Hughes described in the poems just cited above. That feeling can constitute a spur for exposing these situations and even take actions to better them. To remain unmoved after witnessing what the poet saw in Harlem might be considered as an approval of what was going on or act an act of cowardice. This partly explains why the writers of the Harlem Renaissance disagreed with the older generation of black writers who did not highlight these degrading features of life in Harlem. By contrast, Hughes did not feel any shame about them , he turned all these negative situations into poems for the enjoyment of the reader, an artistic creation. He himself confesses that:

Certainly there is for the American Negro artist who can escape the restrictions the more advanced in his own group would put upon him, a great field of unused material ready for his art. Without going outside of his race, and even among the better classes with their “white” culture and conscious American manners, but still Negro enough to be different, there is sufficient matter to furnish a black artist with a lifetime of creative work. (See Dickinson 1972:p.43.)

Hughes just like he mentioned it in the above excerpt, is going to rely mainly on the life of the Blacks for subject matters of his literary creations. According to Laurie F. Leach, Hughes widely praises the ” low down” that constitute the greatest part of the African-Americans. These men did not misspend their time trying to look like the white people or did not have any shame about their personality. They embrace life with a lot of passion. They cling to their being black, black music and black wit. A genuine black artist would probably originate from these groups and/or take his materials from their experiences than from the

middle class African-Americans who are bent on looking respectable and behaving like white people. (See Leach 2004:p.37.)

Hughes sounds well justified here. Actually if the Blacks themselves did not talk about how they feel about their situation, who will tell about this? It is difficult for an outsider to tell accurately how others feel. This probably explains why Claude McKay went to the extreme of arguing that the white people could not talk about the racial issue in America because they had never felt the humiliations of being despicably treated by the white people. For instance the following verses of McKay's poem "If We Must Die": << If we must die, let it not be like hogs/Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,/...Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,/Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting.>> is the response to the famous series of lynching of Blacks in Chicago, that the Blacks are not happy and that they should take actions.

Besides if the Blacks kept silent about what they daily faced, they might be supposed to be contented and nothing might change about their degrading lot. Also the white humanitarians who fought together with the Blacks for the improvement of their conditions might not be aware of what the Blacks were passing through. The members of the Abolitionist movements in the heydays of slavery in America understood the importance of making the Blacks who ran away from slavery to write their stories. Consequently there developed a whole literature of slave narratives that ultimately rallied a greater number of the Northerners to the cause of the abolitionist movement and the ensuing ending of slavery in America.

The last black aesthetics that Hughes made use of in his poems are the blues, the jazz music and the Negro spirituals. In the words of Cheryl A. Wall, that Hughes was able to embrace with one arm the spirituals and gospel music and the other arm with blues at the same time would appear wonderful, even blasphemous, for some people, basically the Christians, who might consider blues as "the Devil's music." However, Hughes used both of them together in his writing and his ethos. [See Trotman and Wimbish,Jr (ed) 1995: p.53.]

Dickinson corroborates this view when he wrote that *Fine Clothes to the Jew* which was published midway through Hughes's college career, had concentrated on Negro folk music. As Charles S. Johnson had observed, the poems in *Fine Clothes to the Jew* had been a departure from those in *The Weary Blues* since the book "marked a final, frank turning to the folk life of the Negro, striving to catch and give back to the world the strange music of the unlettered Negro –his 'Blues'." (See Dickinson 1972: p.47.)

Hughes's deliberate choice of bringing the Black's folk music to his poetry might also be a political statement against the European racist humanists who spread the idea that the African people had no civilization. If the Africans did not have any civilization, from where come the Blues, for instance? Let it be known here that there is no clear indication in Hughes's work that he was reacting to the humanists' false allegations. Rather what is clear is that he advocated for a Black's way of life and writing which this paper understands as race pride. Especially since Hughes himself would later abandon his black militancy because of the Great Depression that followed the Black Renaissance Movement, and which would change the features of American Life. The following quotation from Christopher C. De Santis sheds more light on Hughes's motives:

Hughes believes that a vast storehouse of largely untapped artistic material resided within the culture of the African American working masses. Jazz, the spirituals, and the blues offered the artist a wealth of resources for the creation of a distinct black aesthetic, and the often conflicted relations between black and white people in the United States furnished "an inexhaustible supply of themes" for the writer and dramatist (CW 9:33). In utilizing these resources, the black artist could –indeed must- begin to challenge and overturn dominant white standards of beauty that limited the representation of blackness to minstrel-show stereotypes.

[See Tidwel and Ragard (ed) 2007: p.288.]

The Negritude movement, ten years younger than the Harlem Renaissance Movement came into being in almost the same conditions as the Harlem Renaissance Movement. A number of black people from Africa and the Caribbean were given scholarships by France to go and study the great Louis Le Grand of Paris. There, these Blacks realized that their other mates of white skin would not interact with them as equals, rather they would not miss any chance to despise them, treating them as if they were of inferior intelligence. These students from African descent thus decided to get united and to show their white mates that they were not of inferior stock.

Jacques Louis Hymans wrote that, it had been the Negro poet and novelist from Jamaica, Claude McKay, who had finally swept away Senghor's complexes about African civilization. McKay, a member of the New Negro movement (Harlem Renaissance Movement) in the 1920s, had written in his novel *Banjo* : 'To plunge to the roots of our race and to build on our own foundations is not returning to a state of savagery', and had concluded: 'it is culture itself'. McKay had had helped the French West Indians behind the *Revue du Monde Noir* turn to African history and anthropology. In America for many years the New Negroes had had studied the history and characteristics of their race in order to rehabilitate it in the eyes of the world. For this reason, Senghor had written that 'Claude McKay can be considered...as the veritable inventor of negritude...not of the word...but of the values of negritude'.(See Hymans 1971:p.54).

So the Negritude movement, just like the Harlem Renaissance, sets about presenting the Africans and their cultures as the best ones in the world. That is why the paper refers to the phrase "race pride" to describe what these writers were involved in, "an anti-racist racism" to use the term of Jean Paul Sartre. Leopold Sedar Senghor, and Aime Cesaire , are two prominent exponents of the Negritude philosophy, that this work endeavors to study.

According to Hymans, though he ended up with racism by 1935, racial pride proved a permanent feature of Senghor's writing: 'In the hours of grave difficulties, in the hours of discouragement and doubt, we only have to think of Pharaonic Egypt to convince ourselves that Africa played a primordial role in the elaboration of civilization'. And again: 'Africa, cradle of the Negro, indeed of *Homo Sapiens*.' (See Hymans 1971: p.71).

<<Je marcherai par la terre non oriental, par l'Egypte/ des temples et des pyramides/ Mais je vous laisse Pharaon qui m'a assis a sa droite et mon/ arriere grand-pere aus oreilles rouges.>> (See Dioum 2010: p.57)

(I will walk by the non-oriental land, by Egypt/temples and pyramids/ But I left you with Pharaoh who sat me on his right and my/ red ears fore forefathers.)

<< (The First International Congress of paleontology held in Nice) a confirme que l'homme avait emerge de l'animal en Afrique, il ya quelque 2 500 000 ans et que depuis lors, ce continent etait reste aux avant-postes de la civilization...jusqu'a l'invention de la premiere ecriture par les Egyptiens au IVe millenaire de notre ere.>> (See Dioum 2010:p56)

[(The First International Congress of paleontology held in Nice)confirmed that man had evolved from animal in Africa, some 2, 500,000 years ago and that since then this continent has remained prominent civilization...until the first writing by the Egyptians in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium of our era.)

<<Les premiers colons des vallees orientales sont des negroides originaires des regions indo-africaines, chasses vers le Nord par la transformation des forets en savanes, puis en steppes. Nous avons vu qu'ils ont peuple l'Europe meridionale et occidentale et cree l'outillage aurignacien.>> (See Dioum 2010:p.p.56-57).

(The first settlers of the oriental valleys were negroids from indo-african regions, driven away northward by the transformation of forests into savannahs, then into steppes. We noticed that they settled in southern and western Europe and created the equipment by Alderney .)

Senghor's return to the past appears quite legitimate. Actually they were taught to become Frenchmen, now that they have come to France to further their education, they were made to feel inferior on the assumption that they come from Africa. Africa for them was that land where there was no civilization and the Africans did not contribute anything to the world civilization. This return in the past might have a double significance. In the first place it would help teaching those who believed in the constructed idea of Africa as a land without civilization, to realize that they were wrong, and thus start looking at them in a different light. In the other hand going back to that idea of a glorious past might play a cathartic role for their repressed emotion. They were treated unfairly, but they were not in position to complain or to fight back. This explains why Senghor said when they were down, they remembered those glorious days of their forefathers.

Like any other participant to the Negritude movement, Senghor did despise the West. According to Hymans, Senghor's anti-Western attitude was of a short duration. In 1930 he 'hipnotized himself' to the point that all white women looked ugly for him: 'All that belonged to white Europe was insipid to us: its reason, its art, its women.' (See Hymans 1971:p.72).

<< Princesse de quatre coudées! Au visage d'ombre autour de/ ta bouche de lumière/comme le soleil sur la plage de galets noirs/ Tu es ton peuple./ La terre sombre de ta peau et féconde, généreusement il/l'arrose de la tornade seminale. >>.( See Dioum 2010: p. 39)

(Four elbows princess! With shadow face round/your mouth of light/like the sun on the black pebbles beach/ You are your people./ The dark land of your skin and fecund, generously, it/ showers it with

seminal tornado.)

Finally Senghor could not resist the move of returning to the Africa of his youth that was almost perfect,

but at least better than what is found in the West. Hymans wrote that:

The Afro-American poets, affirms Senghor, 'have a completely romantic idea of Africa: it is a refuge from the ugliness and the inhumanity of the American world; it is a bath from primitive life cleaning away the sophistication of white culture'. Senghor describes the Africa of Hughes: 'Africa is a land of innocence, a sort of earthly paradise before original sin'. This idealization of Africa was absorbed by Senghor in the 1930s; he envisioned Africa in the same way as those Negroes who had never set foot on the Dark Continent. When he wrote of Africa, it was a distant, abstract, strongly idealized continent. (See Hymans 1971: p.57).

<< Ou vous en allez vous?/ Ou vous en allez vous?/ A quell paradis?Je dis: paradis,/Clartes premieres de Mon enfance/ Jamais retrouvees.>>( See Dioum 2010: p.48)

(Where are you going?/Where are you going?/ To which paradise? I said: paradise,/First lights of my Infancy/ Never retrieved.)

<< Dans mes poems, je parle souvent du 'Royaume d'Enfance'. C'etait un royaume d'innocence et de bonheur: il n'y avait pas de frontier entre la realite et la fiction, entre le present , le passe, et l'avenir.>>

(See Dioum 2010: p,49)

(In my poems, I often talk about "Infancy Kingdom". It was a kingdom of innocence and happiness: there was no boundary between reality and fiction, between the present, the past, and the future.)

Aime Cesaire was engaged in the same literary project as Senghor . He too was involved in returning to pre-historic Africa to revel in the achievements by black men in the past. During an interview by Rene Depestre, Cesaire gave his own definition of Negritude that goes:

If somebody asks me what my conception of Negritude is, I answer that above all it is a concrete rather than an abstract coming to consciousness. What I have been telling you about-the atmosphere in which we lived, an atmosphere of assimilation in which Negro people were ashamed of themselves- has great importance. We lived in an atmosphere of rejection, and we developed an inferiority complex. I have always thought that the black man was searching for his identity. And it seemed to me that if what we want is to establish that identity, then we must have a concrete consciousness of what we are- that is, the first fact of our lives: that we are black; that we were black and we have history, a history that contains certain cultural elements of great value; and that Negroes were not, as you put it, born yesterday, because there have been beautiful and important black civilizations. At the time we began to write, people could write a history of world civilization without devoting a single chapter to Africa, as if Africa had made no contributions to the world. Therefore we affirmed that we were Negroes and that we were proud of it.(Cesaire2000:p.p. 91-92)

Also Robin D.G. Kelly in his paper “A Poetics of Anticolonialism” pointed out that *Discourse* (“Discourse

On Colonialism”) had not been the first place Cesaire made the case for the barbaric West following the path of the civilized African. In his introduction to Schoelcher’s *Esclavage et Colonisation* he had written

that the men they bought from Africa could build houses, manage empires, build towns, till farms,

extract metal from the land, produce cotton, wield steel. Their way of worship retains its own beauty, grounded on mystical relations with the founder of the town. Their mores were enjoyable, founded on unity, generosity, reverence for oldness. No force, only reciprocal solidarity, the happiness of being alive, a willing agreement to discipline. (See Cesaire 2000:p.p.21-22).

Aime Cesaire in addition to his interest in the past of the black people, developed a strong anti-Western position especially in his “Discourse On Colonialism”. Hymans underscores the fact that he had taken this theme ( from Senghor, no dialogue was then possible with Europe): ‘Because we hate you and your reason, we claim the precocious insanity, the flaming folly of tenacious cannibalism’. Senghor and Cesaire had waged war on civilization: ‘Yes, I attacked Descartes with a machete and upheld, with a barbarian passion, intuitive reason against discursive reason’. (See Hymans 1971: P.72 ).

However the most violent criticism of the West by Cesaire is found in his essay, “Discourse on Colonialism”:

In other words, the essential thing here is to see clearly, to think clearly-that is, dangerously- and to answer clearly the innocent question: what, fundamentally, is colonization? To agree on what it is not: neither evangelization, nor philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of Ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. To admit once and for all, without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point of its history, finds

itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies. (See Césaire 2000: p.p.32-33).

Just like in the case of the Harlem Renaissance movement, Negritude as a literary movement did not last long. Very soon Senghor would abandon his bitter tone for a conciliatory development of his theme of cultural mixing (*metissage culturel*), holding that two different cultures when they enter into contact should take the best of each part and build a better and more efficient culture. Césaire would be busy with his communist party activities.

Throughout this paper, the point is made that, the Harlem Renaissance movement in the 1920s, in this paper represented by Claude McKay and Langston Hughes, did give in to race pride. For McKay, because he was black he should write about black people in what they are in good as well as in bad. As far as Langston Hughes is concerned, he relied exclusively on the black milieu for inspiration, subject matters and jazz, blues and gospels for rhythm.

The Negritude movement in the 1930's, embodied in this paper by Leopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire also sang praise for the black race. Both of them used to refer to prehistoric glorious Africa with the Egyptian culture for instance or as a cradle for humanity. Both of them also developed an anti Western discourse concerning the European values. Senghor in addition to this used to refer to the Africa of his infancy as a kind of paradise. The following comment by Senghor can summarize the attitude of the four writers/poets discussed in the paper:

Relying on the works of anthropologists, pre-historians, ethnologists-paradoxically white-we proclaimed ourselves, along with Aimé Césaire, "The Eldest sons of the Earth". Did we not dominate the world, up to and including the Neolithic period, fertilize the civilizations of the Nile and of the Euphrates before they became the innocent victims of white barbarians, nomads melting out of their Eurasian plateau? I confess it, our pride

turned quickly into racism. Even Nazism was accepted to reinforce our refusal to cooperate...We then had the sincerity of youth And passion.(See Hymans 1971: P.71).

It is that “racism” that Senghor referred to, that this paper calls race pride. It appears to be more of a spontaneous rebellious movement against the European racists’ ideas about the Blacks and Africa. What though is important here for the paper is that these writers/poets in the years 1920s and 1930s have already developed an anti-colonial discourse. Hence the suggestion that, these writers/poets might be regarded as the first proponents of Postcolonialism as a literary theory that was developed in the late 1990s.

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