

## Black Domain

The domain of the Negroes, in Africa, lies essentially in the region between the Tropics: the countries of the Sudan, Guinea, Congo, to which must be added the region of the Great Lakes ; countries covered with grassy savannahs or forests. They are warm countries — and damp as one penetrates deeper into the forest ; countries of cattle-raising in the savannahs of the Sudan, on the shores of the lagoons of Guinea and on the plateaux, around the Great Lakes ; countries with crops here and there.

This explains why tropical Africa has been inhabited from the earliest times, since the appearance of man. So does Jean Price-Mars sum up the opinions of anthropologists on the problem. *This would mean therefore that black Africa is the cradle of mankind.* All the required conditions exist there, already existed there for it to be so ; at any rate, warmth and humidity, which are the source of life. And even “mildness of climate” if it is true that *homo sapiens* made his appearance on the high plateaux of the Great Lakes...

... But, perhaps, more than the climate, more than the cosmic forces, more than the sun and the moon, were the effects of the plant and animal life. Hence the importance of the tree and animals in African-Negro mythology, in the creation of totems and themes. African-Negroes went in for agriculture very early, and it is the agricultural medium which explains their society best. The African Negro is a peasant who lives with the soil and of the soil...

... If black Africa is depopulated today, she owes it neither to the poverty of her soil nor to inexperience — even less to the idleness — of her peasants ; she owes it to the *Slave Trade*, which robbed her of some 200 million human lives at the time when Europe was spreading out her tentacles over the other four continents. It is precisely the peasant virtues of the African Negro that were at the origin of the Trade. We may ask the following question : what was Europe in the year four thousand before Jesus Christ, when Egyptian civilization was flourishing — not to mention the Dravidian, which covered India ? Most of her peoples then, if we are to believe the ancient historians, were but nomadic tribes...



... *The Negro is a man of nature.* He is a man of the open air, a man who lives of the earth. And let us take the word in the *cosmic* sense. He is a man with his senses wide open, receptive to all solicitations, to the very waves of nature, without filtering intermediaries — I don't say without relays — between the subject and the object. A thinking man of course, but above all a man of forms and colours, especially smells, sounds and rhythms...

... I have often written that *emotion was Negro.* I have been reproached for it. Wrongly. I do not see any other way to account for our specificity, for this “*negro-ness*,” which is the “totality of cultural values of the black world”, including the Americas, and which Sartre defines as “a certain affective attitude towards the world...”

... As Sartre also writes, “In moments of emotion, consciousness declines and suddenly transforms the known world in which we live into a magical world”. Emotion, under the first effect of a decline in consciousness, is on the contrary, *the accession to a higher state of knowledge.* It is a “consciousness of the world”, “a certain way of apprehending the world”. It is complete knowledge, for “the emotionally moved subject and the emotionally moving object are united in an indissoluble synthesis”, I repeat : in a dance of love. Higher knowledge therefore ; a last proof will suffice : the following reflection of one of the greatest scientific geniuses of the 20th century : “The finest emotion we can experience”, writes Einstein, “is mystic emotion. It is the germ of all art and all true science.” It is precisely the source of African Negro knowledge and art, in which *emotion* is commotion.



African Negro religion is an *agricultural religion.* The African Negro pantheon is one of the richest in the world. It is probable that the pantheons of the Mediterranean religions, particularly that of

Greece, are Negroid in origin, starting with that of Pharaonic Egypt. But it is the agrarian character of the African Negro pantheon that I wish to emphasize here. It will be noted that the gods, more exactly the genii, are but the expression of the stars, natural phenomena — the lightning, rain, wind, epidemics, rivers, mountains, the sea — animals and plants : manifestations of the peasant environment. At the top of the hierarchy, there are, everywhere and always, as the elders of God, the sun or the sky and the earth. It is from this primordial couple that the genii are born. The rain of heaven fertilises the earth mother who gives birth to life. This is the deep significance of all the agrarian rites which set the rhythm of the seasons and the days, the work of the Negro peasants, from the preparation of the seeds up to the harvest. From this come totemism and the cult of the tree.

The ethnologists, Leo Frobenius and Marcel Griaule more than any others, have often stressed the *unity* of the African Negro universe. From the Gods, to the humblest grain of sand, including man on the way, this universe is one and indissoluble. Man as I have said, in his capacity as a *person* is the centre of this universe. More exactly the *family*...

... The family, in black Africa, is the *clan*, and not only as in Europe, "father, mother and baby", It is not the household, but the "whole group of all persons, living or dead, who possess a common ancestor". And as everyone knows the lineage of ancestors goes back to God...

... To return to the family, its chief, the first-born of the living is the link between the living and the dead, really the umbilical cord giving life to its world.

Here then we have the family as centre and source, the hearth I would say, where the flame of life is kept alive, the "vital force", which grows and becomes stronger in so far as it takes up residence in living bodies, in more and more numerous and prosperous living beings. Hence the major roles of the child and the wife in the family.

And first of all the child. The child is not just a little shapeless, noisy larva which disturbs the nights of its parents. This is because African Negro parents raise it in an atmosphere of tenderness and freedom. It is a *se/f*-education which is not an abandonment of responsibilities but a vigilant love. And this lasts until the age of reason, when the boy or girl will have to bow down before the stern disciplines of initiation. He will emerge an accomplished young man — or young woman — ready to face life. This is because the African Negro family is not only turned towards the past, from which it draws fruitful traditions ; it is also turned towards the future : more exactly, the past paves the way for the future.

In black Africa woman occupies first place ; or rather used to occupy first place there, for Arab-Berber influence, then European, the influence of nomadic civilizations has not ceased to diminish her role... In a fairly recent past, which has not completely vanished everywhere, one was a child of one's mother's family ; the family was a *matriarchy*... It is easy to understand then the place occupied by the wife, the mother, in the family, the eminent role she plays there, the respect with which she is treated, the freedom she possesses. The African Negro woman, contrary to general opinion, does not need to be liberated : she has been *free* for thousands of years... An exemplary proof of her freedom is that when she becomes a widow or even if she is only offended by her husband, she returns to her clan with her children and her baggage.



African Negro art is expressed essentially in *image* and *rhythm* : *rhythmed image*.

The African Negro image is a *surrealist* image, rather perhaps a *sub-realist* image ; in the sense that it expresses the reality which *sub-tends* appearances. It is not a rational equation but an *analogical* link, the participation of "two objects of thought", of the signifying and the signified, in the same sub-reality. In this capacity, it is an expression of the mystico-magical world.

But the image does not express the *essential* reality, the sub-reality ; it does not speak to our imagination and our heart, it does not lead to emotion, the *stirring* of our very being, if it is not *rhythmed*... As I was saying, rhythm "is the architecture of being, the internal dynamism which gives it form, the system of waves that it transmits for others, the pure expression of vital force. Rhythm is the vibrational shock, the force which, through the senses, gets at the rest of your being."

However paradoxical it may appear, writers and artists must play, do in fact play a leading role. It is up to them to analyse the *total situation* of their respective peoples and, accordingly, say what must be retained of their traditional civilization — values and institutions — say above all how to give new life to them, thanks to the yeast of exterior contributions.

However, in this confrontation, in this symbiosis, *man* must be the centre of our concern. One does not build a modern state for the pleasure of building. Action is not an end in itself. We shall beware therefore of a desire for power which deifies the State, which crushes man under the State. It is a question, in fact, of situating the black man in a humanity marching towards its *total realization*, in time and space.

*Léopold Sédar Senghor.*

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