

A Study of Negritude in Anglophone African Poetry

JUSTINE BAKUURO

Abstract: This write-up takes a cursory look at negritude, a literary movement and an ideology among the French-speaking black writers and intellectual society both in France's colonies in Africa and the Caribbean, in the 1930s and how this French literary ideology permeates the works of Anglophone African poets. It examines the background and function of this Pan-African movement and how Anglophone African poets espouse this ideology poetically. Negritude forms part of the protest literature of Africa. This piece selects poems from a total of ten (10) Anglophone African poets-Wole Soyinka, David Rubadiri, David Diop, Dennis Brutus, Kwesi Brew, Lenrie Peters, Abioseh Nicol, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Christopher Okigbo and Dennis Osadebe. In each poem, excerpts which portray negritude are identified and summarily explained. From this study, it is abundantly obvious that negritude has been widely imbibed by Anglophone African writers, particularly of poetry. The paper underscores the fact that Negritude is one of the major underlying themes of poetry in Anglophone African poetics.

Keywords: Anglophone African writers, negritude.

1. HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF NEGRITUDE

- ✚ A literary movement
- ✚ A Pan-Africanist movement
- ✚ A protest literature
- ✚ Born out of the Paris intellectual society of the 1930s and 1940s
- ✚ A product of black writers joining via the French language to assert their cultural identity
- ✚ A framework of critique and literary theory developed by the francophone intellectuals, writers, politicians of the African diaspora in the 1930s
- ✚ Initiators: Aime Cesaire , Leopold Sedar Senghor and Leon Damas
- ✚ Negritude was influenced by the Harlem Renaissance/New Negro Renaissance (a literary artistic movement among black thinkers and artists in New York City in the 1920s)
- ✚ Marked by rejection of European colonization
- ✚ Popular Negritude poems:
 - Cesaire's *Cahier*
 - Damas' *pigments*
 - Senghor's *Hosties noire & Chants d'ombre*



Negritude Painting, "La Jungla" by Cuban-born Afro-Chinese Painter Wilfredo Lam. Image Ownership: Public Domain

2. BACKGROUND OF ANGLOPHONE AFRICAN POETS AND

NEGRITUDE IN THEIR WORKS

Among other things, Negritude poets favoured the **theme of glorification of Africa**. They worshipped anything African in scintillating rhymes. Anger at injustice meted out to the colonized Africa is also one of the often-repeated themes of their poetry.

a) Wole Soyinka

BACKGROUND:

Akinwande Oluwole (Wole Soyinka), born 13 July 1934, is a Nigerian playwright and poet. He was awarded the 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature, the first African to be honoured in that category.

Soyinka was born into a Yoruba family in Abeokuta. After studying in Nigeria and the UK, he worked with the Royal Court Theatre in London. He went on to write plays that were produced in both countries, in theatres and on radio. He took an active role in Nigeria's political history and its struggle for independence from Great Britain. In 1965, he seized the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service studio and broadcast a demand for the cancellation of the Western Nigeria Regional Elections. In 1967 during the Nigerian Civil War, he was arrested by the federal government of General Yakubu Gowon and put in solitary confinement for two years.

Soyinka has been a strong critic of successive Nigerian governments, especially the country's many military dictators, as well as other political tyrannies, including the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe. Much of his writing has been concerned with "the oppressive boot and the irrelevance of the colour of the foot that wears it". During the regime of General Sani Abacha (1993–98), Soyinka escaped from Nigeria on a motorcycle via the "NADECO Route." Abacha later proclaimed a death sentence against him "in absentia." With civilian rule restored to Nigeria in 1999, Soyinka returned to his nation.

In Nigeria, Soyinka was a Professor of Comparative Literature (1975 to 1999) at the Obafemi Awolowo University, then called the University of Ife. With civilian rule restored to Nigeria in 1999, he was made professor emeritus. While in the United States, he first taught at Cornell University as Goldwin Smith professor for African Studies and Theatre Arts from



Soyinka in 2015

1988-1991 and then at Emory University where in 1996 he was appointed Robert W. Woodruff Professor of the Arts. Soyinka has been a Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and has served as scholar-in-residence at NYU's Institute of African American Affairs and at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California, US .He has also taught at the universities of Oxford, Harvard and Yale.

Telephone Conversation:

The price seemed reasonable, location
 Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
 Off premises. Nothing remained
 But self-confession. "Madam" , I warned,
 "I hate a wasted journey - I am African." 5
 Silence. Silenced transmission of pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
 Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
 Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully.
 "HOW DARK?" ...I had not misheard...."ARE YOU LIGHT OR VERY DARK?" Button B. Button A. Stench 10
 Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.
 Red booth. Red pillar-box. Red double-tiered
 Omnibus squelching tar.
 It was real! Shamed
 By ill-mannered silence, surrender 15
 Pushed dumbfoundment to beg simplification.
 Considerate she was, varying the emphasis-
 "ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT" Revelation came
 "You mean- like plain or milk chocolate?"
 Her accent was clinical, crushing in its light 20
 Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted
 I chose. "West African sepia" _ and as afterthought.
 "Down in my passport." Silence for spectroscopic
 Flight of fancy, till truthfulness changed her accent
 Hard on the mouthpiece "WHAT'S THAT?" conceding "DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS." 25
 "Like brunette."
 "THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?"
 "Not altogether.
 Facially, I am brunette, but madam you should see the rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet. 30
 Are a peroxide blonde. Friction, caused-
 Foolishly madam- by sitting down, has turned
 My bottom raven black- One moment madam! - sensing
 Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap
 About my ears- "Madam, " I pleaded, "wouldn't you rather 35
 See for yourself?"

NEGRITUDE IN TELEPHONE CONVERSATION:

✓ Nigerian poet , the Nobel laureate **Wole Soyinka's** masterful irony skillfully conceals anger at the racist attitude in his famous poem, "Telephone Conversation." After negotiating for a house on rent on telephone, he tells the landlady of his being a black African. He was rudely shocked when he was 'caught...foully' by the lady's query regarding his darkness thus:

*" HOW DARK...?" I had not misheard... "Are you light
 OR VERY DARK... (line 9)*

The "ill- mannered silence" between the two is filled with images such as 'stench of rancid breath of public- hide-and-speak, Red booth, Red- Pillar-box, Red double-tiered Omnibus squelching tar' (line 11-13) that subsume the age-old and

still hopeless and violent colour- conflict. The poem conspicuously exploits the theme of racism against the 'dark skinned' from stanza one to the last stanza (all lines).

b) David Rubadiri:

BACKGROUND:

James David Rubadiri (born 19 July 1930 in Liuli) is a Malawian diplomat, academic and poet, playwright and novelist. Rubadiri is ranked as one of Africa's most widely anthologized and celebrated poets to emerge after independence.

Rubadiri attended King's College, Budo in Uganda from 1941 to 1950 then Makerere University in Kampala (1952-56), where he graduated from with a bachelor's degree in English literature and History. He later studied Literature at King's College, Cambridge. He went on to receive a Diploma in Education from the University of Bristol.

At Malawi's independence in 1964, Rubadiri was appointed Malawi's first ambassador to the United States and the United Nations. When he presented his credentials to President Lyndon B. Johnson at the White House on 18 August 1964, he expressed the hope that his newly independent country would get more aid from the USA; he said that Malawi needed help to build its democratic institutions and noted that Malawi was already receiving US economic and technical help.

That same year Rubadiri appeared on the National Educational Television (New York City) series *African Writers of Today*.

Rubadiri left the Malawian government in 1965 when he broke with President Hastings Banda. As an exile, he taught at Makerere University (1968–75), but he was again exiled during the Idi Amin years. Rubadiri subsequently taught at the University of Nairobi, Kenya (1976–84), and was also briefly, along with Okot p'Bitek, at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, at the invitation of Wole Soyinka. Between 1975 and 1980 he was a member of the Executive Committee of the National Theater of Kenya. From 1984 to 1997 he taught at the University of Botswana (1984–97), where he was dean of the Language and Social Sciences Education Department.

In 1997, after Banda's death, Rubadiri was reappointed Malawi's ambassador to the United Nations, and he was named vice-chancellor of the University of Malawi in 2000. He received an honorary doctorate from the University of Strathclyde in 2005.

An African Thunderstorm:

From the west
 Clouds come hurrying with the wind
 Turning sharply
 Here and there
 Like a plague of locusts 5
 Whirling,
 Tossing up things on its tail
 Like a madman chasing nothing.
 Pregnant clouds
 Ride stately on its back, 10
 Gathering to perch on hills
 Like sinister dark wings;
 The wind whistles by
 And trees bend to let it pass.
 In the village 15
 Screams of delighted children,
 Toss and turn
 In the din of the whirling wind,
 Women,
 Babies clinging on their backs 20
 Dart about
 In and out

Madly;
 The wind whistles by
 Whilst trees bend to let it pass. 25
 Clothes wave like tattered flags
 Flying off
 To expose dangling breasts
 As jagged blinding flashes
 Rumble, tremble and crack 30
 Amidst the smell of fired smoke
 And the pelting march of the storm.

NEGRITUDE IN AN AFRICAN THUNDERSTORM:

This poem is basically a glorification of Africa. The natural beauty of culture in Africa is vividly conveyed using powerful imageries (the most dominant), personification and similes in the poem. He paints the lifestyle in a typical African setting as beautiful, using a thunderstorm as the catalyst.

Imageries- Lines 1-8, 15-25 & 26-32.

Personification- Lines 2, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 24.

Similes- Lines 5, 8, 12, 26, 27

C) David Diop:

BACKGROUND:

David Mandessi Diop (July 9, 1927 – August 29, 1960)^[1] was one of the most promising French West African poets known for his contribution to the Négritude literary movement. His work reflects his anti-colonial stance and his hope for an independent Africa.^[2]

David Diop was born in Bordeaux, France, of a Senegalese father and a Cameroonian mother. He had his primary education in Senegal. He started writing poems while he was still in school, and his poems started appearing in *Présence Africaine* since he was just 15.^[3] Several of his poems were published in Léopold Senghor's famous anthology, which became a landmark of modern black writing in French.^[4] He died in the crash of Air France Flight 343 in the Atlantic Ocean off Dakar, Senegal, at the age of 33 on August 29, 1960.^{[1][5]} His one small collection of poetry, *Coups de pilon*, came out from *Présence Africaine* in 1956; it was posthumously published in English as *Hammer Blows*, translated and edited by Simon Mondo and Frank Jones (African Writers Series, 1975).



David Diop in 1955

Africa:

Africa, my Africa
Africa of proud warriors in ancestral savannahs....
Is this you, this back that is bent
This back that breaks under the weight of humiliation
This back trembling with red scars 5
And saying yes to the whip under the midday sun.....
That is Africa your Africa
That grows again patiently obstinately
And its fruit gradually acquires
The bitter taste of liberty. (Narasimhaiah, 153) 10

NEGRITUDE IN AFRICA:

Like other negritude authors, David Diop exhorts Africa in this poem. He portrays Africa as an abode of 'proud warriors' (line 2). He proudly associates himself with Africa in the opening line 'África, my Africa'. He bemoans the 'humiliation'

that has been and is still being meted out to his beloved homeland, Africa (lines 3, 4, 5, 6). Line 7-10 however reassures of the liberation of Africa, though ‘.....patiently obstinately’(line 8) and ‘.... gradually...’(line 9).

d) Dennis Brutus:

BACKGROUND:

Dennis Vincent Brutus (28 November 1924 – 26 December 2009) was a South African activist, educator, journalist and poet best known for his campaign to have apartheid South Africa banned from the Olympic Games.

Born in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia to South African parents, Brutus was of indigenous Khoi, Dutch, French, English, German and Malaysian ancestry. His parents moved back home to Port Elizabeth when he was aged four, and young Brutus was classified under South Africa's apartheid racial code as "coloured".



Dennis Brutus during a press conference at Schiphol Airport, 1967

Brutus was a graduate of the University of Fort Hare (BA, 1946) and of the University of the Witwatersrand, where he studied law. He taught English and Afrikaans at several high schools in South Africa after 1948, but was eventually dismissed for his vocal criticism of apartheid. He served on the faculty of the University of Denver, Northwestern University and University of Pittsburgh, and was a Professor Emeritus from the last institution.

In 2008, Brutus was awarded the Lifetime Honorary Award by the South African Department of Arts and Culture for his lifelong dedication to African and world poetry and literary arts.

A TROUBADOUR I TRAVERSE...

A troubadour, I traverse all my land
exploring all her wide flung parts with zest
probing in motion sweeter far than rest
her secret thickets with an amorous hand:
5 and I have laughed disdaining those who banned
enquiry and movement, delighting in the test
of wills when doomed by Saracened arrest,
choosing, like unarmed thumb, simply to stand.

Thus, quixoting till a cast-off of my land
10 I sing and fare, person to loved-one pressed
braced for this pressure and the captor's hand
that snaps off service like a weathered strand:
– no mistress-favor has adorned my breast
only the shadow of an arrow-brand.

NEGRITUDE IN A TROUBADOUR I TRAVERSE...

“**A troubadour I traverse...**” is a poem written on chivalrous themes. In this network of chivalrous themes is racism as the poem reviews apartheid critically. His critique of apartheid is negritudinal in outlook as he dwells purely on the ills of an African society in which the African is the victim.

It is a Petrarchan (Italian) sonnet, made of a full octave (rhyming abbaabba) and a sestet (rhyming abaaba). First off, a troubadour is a medieval European poet-knight whose duty it was to ride alongside and defend a mistress. Until the troubadour retires from service, his duty is to die defending her. And he often praised her high unattainable love in his lyrics.

But Brutus is a troubadour for his homeland, seeing South Africa as a mistress for whom he must live and die. In the title and first four lines, Brutus talks about his romantic traverse (or travel – line 1) across the land, exploring its wide-flung, spread-out or exposed parts in a movement that is sweeter than any other that he knows. He does so with zeal and with his “amorous hand” (line 4). And in this ecstasy, he has laughed at all those who have sought to stop or question him even

though he knew that a crusade in the name of love for South Africa under apartheid meant that he will die protecting her or be doomed to Saracened arrest (line 7). Saracens were Muslim Arabs against whom Christian knights fought the wars of the Crusade. Significantly, South African police armoured cars were also called Saracens. And in the face of this threat of arrest, he chose only "simply to stand" (line8) unarmed.

So he continues the protest, enjoying the romance with his land while tempting the apartheid regime for an arrest, quixoting till he is cast-off from his land (infer line 9). Don Quixote was the protagonist of the Spanish novelist Cervantes' book and he spent his life fighting imaginary monsters and enemies, earning him a laughable reputation. So Brutus makes himself a quixotic fool for his homeland by a love that presses him (line 10) and which makes him prepare for an imminent arrest (captor's hand – line 11) till he is snapped off service (line 12 – killed for his mistress South Africa or made incapable by detention). No mistress-favour or emblem of service adorns his breast as is usual for a troubadour but only the shadow of an arrow-brand (lines 13 and 14). The arrow-brand is the standard British symbol for a convict and Brutus' reference to an arrow-brand could be the scar he keeps on his back from a gunshot for trying to flee from detention.

It is amazing how romance, the story of a man's life and apartheid themes can be merged into this one poem of fourteen lines. Brutus is an African hero for giving us a chronicle of the fight against apartheid through the eyes of an African poet.

e) Kwesi Brew:

BACKGROUND:

Osborne Henry Kwesi Brew (27 May 1928 – 30 July 2007) was a Ghanaian poet and diplomat.

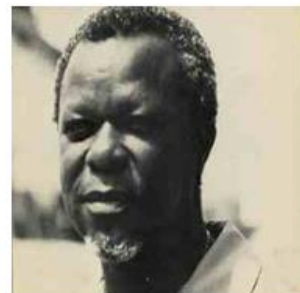
Brew was born in Cape Coast, Ghana, to a Fante family in 1928. He was brought up by a British guardian—education officer, K. J. Dickens—after his parents died.

He was one of the first graduates from the University College of the Gold Coast in 1951. While still a student, Brew participated in college literary activities and experimented with prose, poetry, and drama. After graduation he won a British Council poetry competition in Accra, and his poems appeared in the Ghanaian literary journal *Okyeame*, as well as several important African anthologies. *Shadows of Laughter* (1968), a collection of his best early poems, reveals a thematic interest unusual for an African poet: the value of the individual compared with that of society as a whole. In poems such as "The Executioner's Dream", which views with something like horror some of the rituals of traditional African life, he suggests that society, in an attempt to purge itself of the ills of life, robs the individual of dignity. *African Panorama and Other Poems* (1981) draws upon the sights and sounds of rural and urban Africa. In his collection *Return of No Return* (1995), he pays tribute to the American writer Maya Angelou and to Ghanaians who may have helped reshape his Eurocentric views into Afrocentric ones.

Brew was published in *Okyeame*, and four of his poems were included in the 1958 anthology *Voices of Ghana*. His first published collection, *The Shadows of Laughter* (1968), was divided into five thematic sections: "Passing Souls" (on death); "Today, We Look at Each Other"; "The Moment of Our Life" (nature); "A Plea for Mercy" (the supernatural); and "Questions of Our Time". His poetry has been characterized as "the poetry of statement and situation".

A Sandal On The Head

The broken bones cannot be made whole!
 The strong had sheltered in their strength
 The swift had sought life in their speed,
 The crippled and the tired heaped out of the way
 Onto the ant hills
 Had been bit by bit, half-eaten by termites.
 The rough and ready were beginning
 To tire of dancing to that one



Osborne Henry Kwesi Brew was a Ghanaian poet and diplomat.

Born: 1928, Cape Coast Died: July 30, 2007

Strange unfamiliar tune.
 The Master of the House cracked his whip 10
 In the realm of laughter and light,
 And mopped his brow with a silken cloth
 It is only the gods who know
 Why the bones were broken;
 It's only the old who know why 15
 The goats skip homeward at evening
 And the Master of the House
 Now Master of Rags
 Stays behind on the rocks
 To rummage in the rubbish heap 20
 For cast-away morsels of power!

NEGRITUDE IN A SANDAL ON THE HEAD?

Yes, there is negritude in this poem to the extent that the overriding theme of 'a master turned social outcast' metaphorically relates Africa to how the colonialists treated it. Africans were strangers in their own backyard and seen as undeserving of the good things that belonged to them. President Nkrumah (an African par excellence), is represented here by Africa, making the poem a metaphor of colonial indignation in Africa. This theme runs through all lines in the poem (line 1-21).

Superficially however, this poem is about the overthrow of Ghana's premier President Kwame Nkrumah in February 1966 and his exile in Guinea. The poem does not mention the President by name rather it uses certain character traits such as "Master of the House" and "Master of Rags". The breakdown and emotional disappointment felt by the President's supporters before his fall are depicted in the poem.

f) **Lenrie Peters:**

BACKGROUND:

Lenrie Peters was born (1st September 1932) Lenrie Leopold Wilfred Peters in Gambia to a Sierra Leonean Creole of West Indian or black American origin and a Gambian Creole mother of Sierra Leonean Creole origins. He schooled in Sierra Leone where he gained his Higher School certificates and then went on to a BSc. from Trinity College, Cambridge. He was awarded a Medical and Surgery diploma from Cambridge in 1959 and then he worked for the BBC on their Africa programmes from 1955 to 1968.

At Cambridge, Peters baptised himself in Pan-Africanist politics and became the president of the African Students' Union. He also started work on his only novel, *The Second Round*, which he later published in 1965. Among other medical and professional associations including the Commonwealth Writers Prize Selection Committee 1996 and the Africa Region of the Commonwealth Prize for fiction, judge 1995, he served as the head of the West African Examinations Council from 1985 to 1991.

Peters is considered one of the most original voices of modern African poetry. He is a member of the African founding generation writing in English and has shown extensive pan-Africanism in his three volumes of poetry although his single novel received critique as being more British, accusing of African cultural decline and less African overall. His poetry was mixed with medical terms sometimes and his later works were angrier at the state of Africa than his first volume of poetry.

Peters passed away in 2009.

We Have Come Home

We have come home
 From the bloodless wars
 With sunken hearts
 Our booths full of pride-
 From the true massacre of the soul
 When we have asked

'What does it cost
To be loved and left alone'

We have come home
Bringing the pledge
Which is written in rainbow colours
Across the sky-for burial
But is not the time
To lay wreaths
For yesterday's crimes,
Night threatens
Time dissolves
And there is no acquaintance
With tomorrow

The gurgling drums
Echo the stars
The forest howls
And between the trees
The dark sun appears.

We have come home
When the dawn falters
Singing songs of other lands
The death march
Violating our ears
Knowing all our loves and tears
Determined by the spinning coin

We have come home
To the green foothills
To drink from the cup
Of warm and mellow birdsong
'To the hot beaches
Where the boats go out to sea
Threshing the ocean's harvest
And the hovering, plunging
Gliding gulls shower kisses on the waves

We have come home
Where through the lightening flash
And the thundering rain
The famine the drought,
The sudden spirit
Lingers on the road
Supporting the tortured remnants
of the flesh
That spirit which asks no favour
of the world
But to have dignity.

NEGRITUDE IN WE HAVE COME HOME:

The first stanza is an announcement by Peters that some people he refers to as "We", have come home and have come with questions from a war. I will attempt it this way: they came from a bloodless war (line 2) and this could have been the

“war” of colonialism where slaves were exchanged for goods in places with no actual guns fired. This will give line 5 more meaning when he says they have returned from “the true massacre of the soul”, for what will be more demeaning to a man than the cheapening of his soul and the sale of that into slavery.

If this is it, then Peters is talking about a return of some black people to their homeland. If this is true too, then it is morose for him to ask in the end of the stanza ‘What does it cost/ To be loved and left alone’. We may make further deductions from this question. The slaves cost gunpowder, wine and sugar. Lives were traded for this base offering and Peters will question this. How deep is the love that gave them away? Their return is with sunken hearts and only their booths (line 4) – inner enclosures of their beings- can reserve any pride. The pride is what they feel when Africans return home. But this time, the feelings are mixed, since pride and massacre cannot dwell in one soul and bode well. We read on.

Peters says that they bring with them ‘the pledge / Which is written in rainbow colours’ (line 10-11) for burial. Let’s go south to understand this: in comparison, South Africa is called a rainbow nation since it is a country that is bona fide home to all the different colours of people as the world can offer. Their dwelling together as co-owners makes them a rainbow people, representing oneness and diversity as with the colours of the rainbow. The rainbow is a symbol of equality.

Suddenly he gives up!! ‘it is not the time /To lay wreaths /For yesterday’s crimes’ and Peters seems ready to forget the misbehaviours of his people who may have sold their kith out. His reasons are clear, that tomorrow doesn’t promise anything positive or otherwise, time is an alien and even night will not permit the slackening upon the midnight dreaming. Dreaming upon the wasted years. Drums may have welcomed them home but he calls their coherent African rhythm a gurgle (line 20), a bubbling sound, empty, confused, maybe hypocrite. But they echo the stars and may be a claim for hope. He brings in his Britishness unconsciously in lines 22-24 as he claims that the forest howls as the dark sun appears through the trees. A wolf arising with the full moon. But why a dark sun? Gloom!

He wanders on in lines 25-31. The dawn falters, morning brings no hope for them against a dark sun, their songs are alien, their march is of death; death of their real selves and Africanness and their loves and tears are as random as the spin of a coin. There is a pity here. Hopeless is the situation they have come to meet at home. The colonialists may be gone but the sun has not risen well on the morning of our independence as Africans

g) Abioseh Nicol:

BACKGROUND:

Davidson Sylvester Hector Willoughby Nicol or **Abioseh Nicol** (14 September 1924 – 20 September 1994) was a Sierra Leonean academic, diplomat, physician, writer and poet. He has been considered as one of Sierra Leone’s most educated and greatest citizens of the twentieth century^[citation needed], as he was able to secure degrees in the arts, science and commercial disciplines and he contributed to science, history, and literature.^[citation needed] Nicol was the first African to graduate with First Class Honours from the University of Cambridge and he was also the first African elected as a Fellow of a college of Cambridge University. Described by one scholar as a polymath, Davidson Nicol significantly contributed to medical science when he was the first to analyse the breakdown of insulin in the human body, a discovery which was a breakthrough for the treatment of diabetes.



Davidson Nicol, Fourah Bay College, (far right)

Nicol was born as Davidson Sylvester Hector Willoughby Nicol in 1924 in Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone. His family belonged to the Creole minority who were an educated and elite ex-slave community. He attended primary school in Nigeria and, in 1946, graduated with first class honours from Christ’s College, Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. He earned his Ph.D. in 1958 and then proceeded to study for a medical degree at Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary, University of London’s medical school. Following the completion of his studies, Nicol lectured at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria.^[citation needed]

Beginning in 1960, Nicol was the first native principal of the prestigious Fourah Bay College in Freetown (left in 1966) as well as a member of the Public Service Commission (left in 1968). Nicol continued his administrative career at the university level in Sierra Leone as first the chairman (1964–69) then as Vice-Chancellor at the University of Sierra Leone (1966–69).^[1]

The Meaning of Africa – Abioseh Nicol:

Abioseh Nicol (1924–1994) was born as Davidson Sylvester Hector Willoughby Nicol in Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone. His descended from a Creole family; an educated and elite ex-slave community. He attended primary school in Nigeria and, in 1946, graduated from Christ's College and then later from Cambridge University in the United Kingdom where he did research in biochemistry. He earned his Ph.D. in 1958 and lectured at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria.



Nicol

Nicol has written poetry, articles and short stories that have appeared in a number of publications. He won the Margaret Wrong Prize and Medal for Literature in Africa in 1952. Many reviewers have acclaimed his work to be dramatic and representative of rural, idyllic Africa. This poem, **THE MEANING OF AFRICA**, is one of his more notable pieces and speaks volumes about his love for the continent.

The Meaning of Africa:

Africa, you were once just a name to me
 But now you lie before me with sombre green challenge
 To that loud faith for freedom (life more abundant)
 Which we once professed shouting
 Into the silent listening microphone 5
 Or on an alien platform to a sea
 Of white perplexed faces troubled
 With secret Imperial guilt; shouting
 Of you with a vision euphemistic
 As you always appear 10
 To your lonely sons on distant shores.

Then the cold sky and continent would disappear
 In a grey mental mist.
 And in its stead the hibiscus blooms in shameless scarlet
 and the bougainvillea in mauve passion 15
 entwines itself around strong branches
 the palm trees stand like tall proud moral women
 shaking their plaited locks against the
 cool suggestive evening breeze;
 the short twilight passes; 20
 the white full moon turns its round gladness
 towards the swept open space
 between the trees; there will be
 dancing tonight; and in my brimming heart
 plenty of love and laughter. 25
 Oh, I got tired of the cold northern sun
 Of white anxious ghost-like faces
 Of crouching over heatless fires
 In my lonely bedroom.
 The only thing I never tired of 30
 was the persistent kindness
 Of you too few unafraid
 Of my grave dusky strangeness.

So I came back
 Sailing down the Guinea Coast. 35
 Loving the sophistication
 Of your brave new cities:
 Dakar, Accra, Cotonou,
 Lagos, Bathurst and Bissau;
 Liberia, Freetown, Libreville, 40
 Freedom is really in the mind.

Go up-country, so they said,
 To see the real Africa.
 For whomsoever you may be,
 That is where you come from. 45
 Go for bush, inside the bush,
 You will find your hidden heart,
 Your mute ancestral spirit.
 So I went, dancing on my way.

Now you lie before me passive 50
 With your unanswering green challenge.
 Is this all you are?
 This long uneven red road, this occasional succession
 Of huddled heaps of four mud walls
 And thatched, falling grass roofs 55
 Sometimes ennobled by a thin layer
 Of white plaster, and covered with thin
 Slanting corrugated zinc.
 These patient faces on weather-beaten bodies
 Bowing under heavy market loads. 60
 The pedalling cyclist wavers by
 On the wrong side of the road,
 As if uncertain of his new emancipation.
 The squawking chickens, the pregnant she-goats
 Lumber awkwardly with fear across the road, 65
 Across the windscreen view of my four-cylinder kit car.
 An overloaded lorry speeds madly towards me
 Full of produce, passengers, with driver leaning
 Out into the swirling dust to pilot his
 Swinging obsessed vehicle along, 70
 Beside him on the raised seat his first-class
 Passenger, clutching and timid; but he drives on
 At so, so many miles per hour, peering out with
 Bloodshot eyes, unshaved face and dedicated look;
 His motto painted on each side: Sunshine Transport, 75
 We get you there quick, quick. The Lord is my Shepherd.

The red dust settles down on the green leaves.

I know you will not make me want, Lord,
 Though I have reddened your green pastures
 It is only because I have wanted so much 80
 That I have always been found wanting.
 From South and East, and from my West
 (The sandy desert holds the North)

We look across a vast continent
And blindly call it ours. 85

You are not a country, Africa,
You are a concept,
Fashioned in our minds, each to each,
To hide our separate fears,
To dream our separate dreams. 90

Only those within you who know
Their circumscribed plot,
And till it well with steady plough
Can from that harvest then look up
To the vast blue inside 95

Of the enamelled bowl of sky
Which covers you and say
'This is my Africa' meaning
'I am content and happy.

I am fulfilled, within, 100
Without and roundabout

I have gained the little longings
Of my hands, my loins, my heart
And the soul that follows in my shadow.'

I know now that is what you are, Africa: 105
Happiness, contentment, and fulfilment,
And a small bird singing on a mango tree.

NEGRITUDE IN THE MEANING OF AFRICA:

This long poem is a testament to Nicol's understanding of Africa. He speaks for all his brothers, Africa's 'lonely sons on distant shores.'

In the first stanza, he mentions how from afar on distant shores, from other continents, Africa was just to him a name for which they had screamed freedom. Born in 1924, he was in England in the days when most of the continent was still under colonial rule and he makes us understand that he was part of them that shouted freedom into 'the silent listening microphone'(line 5) while 'white perplexed faces'(line 7) looked on with 'Imperialist guilt'(line 8). While he vehemently defended and decreed the freedom of Africa, the continent appeared in his mind and those of all the other Africans in the diaspora, with all glorious appeal, euphemistic.

In the second stanza, he mentions how 'the cold sky and continent'(12) of Europe will disappear from his mind and he'll get on to dreaming about hibiscus blooms, bougainvillea, palm trees, and many African markers that brim his heart with 'plenty of love and laughter'(25). These things make him weary of 'the cold northern sun'(26) and the faces of white people he calls 'anxious, ghost-like' (27) and how he bends over heatless fires in a lonely bedroom. He will only stay alight by the kindness of the few who were not afraid of his blackness. This is miserable.

So in his own words, he comes back down to Africa in stanza three, fascinated by the braveness of its new cities. He mentions in one breath Liberia, Freetown and Libreville. The first embodies Freedom, as it comes from the two words "Liberty Area"(43), the Land of the Free. Freetown is the English translation of the French Libreville, one in Sierra Leone, the other in Gabon. All these evoke passions of liberation and Nicol is immediately engrossed. He is asked to explore the hinterlands, 'For whomsoever you may be/That is where you come from'(44/45) in the fourth stanza and he goes away dancing.

But in five, he is disappointed almost. The Africa he finds in the hinterlands is undeveloped, showing red road, thatch roofing falling off mud walls, if they be complicated, then the houses will have thin, white plastering and be covered with corrugated zinc roofs. He sees weary-looking people with patience written on their faces. He sees simple lives led by simple men, not worried by their seeming poverty and almost unmoved, uncaring and unaffected by all the emancipation noise that he and his brothers have been making on their behalf.

That line that sits hanging alone in the middle “The red dust settles down on the green leaves”(77) is a dampened hope. The green is fertility, vibrancy and newness. The red coats it and covers it. The red dirties it and makes it worth nothing. For Nicol, his positive acclaim for an energetic Africa is met by apathetic-looking listlessness. He meets an anti-climax and he moans in the ensuing verse, asking God for forgiveness. He says that it is because “I have wanted so much”(80) that he may have been disappointed that he didn’t see the glamour he thought Africa had. In fact, what he sees humbles him that poor people take pride in their lowliness and call the Lord their ‘Shepherd’(76).

Nicol ends philosophically, calling Africa a concept that dwells only in the mind and is better understood by the people who dwell in her. ‘We look across a vast continent/And blindly call it ours’(84/85). It is not ours. It is a dream. It is a notion, a theory, a perception, an impression, a belief. And for what it means to us all separately, it makes us ‘dream our separate dreams’(90). He concludes that Africa belongs more to those dwelling in her than those outside because her in-dwellers can look down at God’s providence ‘inside/Of the enamelled bowl of sky’(95/96) and say ‘This is my Africa’(98). And in their eyes, Nicol has found a new meaning to Africa he never knew before. That Africa means:

‘I am content and happy.
I am fulfilled, within,
Without and roundabout
I have gained the little longings
Of my hands, my loins, my heart
And the soul that follows in my shadow.’

He knows the full extent of Africa’s meaning now:

Happiness, contentment, and fulfilment,
And a small bird singing on a mango tree.(line 99-107)

This poem is a brilliant statement of the affection of Africans for the continent. It goes beyond all saying that Africa is the only continent that was made to be loved and felt a part of. It is said that America is to be honoured and defended, Europe is to be romanticised, Asia is to be spoken of with mystique but Africa is to be loved. This is where Nicol enforces the concept.

h) Leopold Sedar Senghor:

BACKGROUND:

The greatest of the Francophone African poets one will ever read is Leopold Sedar Senghor. He was born in Senegal, in 1906, and schooled both in Dakar and in Paris, France. He was the first West African to graduate from the Sorbonne (a part of the University of Paris, founded in 1253 that contains the faculties of science and literature) and teach in a French university. He is acclaimed as the father of Negritude (from Negro), a philosophy that affirms the black identity and touts the black man’s values as something to celebrate and be proud of. His poetry shows it in abundance.



Senghor

Senghor was a statesman. He fought with the French in the Second World War and became a prisoner of war in then Nazi Germany. He became the Deputy for Senegal in the French Constituent Assembly, President of the Council of the Republic and Counselling Minister at the office of the President of the French Community. In 1960, he became the President of the Federal Republic of Mali and later in the same year, the President of an Independent Republic of Senegal. He was president until 1980.

His poetry revealed the contrast between the French way of life being foisted on French African colonies under a purported Policy of Assimilation and the original unblemished values of the African. In this light, he was either always too busy praising Negritude or denouncing the French ideal. This poem comes from his publication, Chants d’Ombre (Songs from the Shadow).

I WILL PRONOUNCE YOUR NAME:

I will pronounce your name, Naett, I will declaim you, Naett!
Naett, your name is mild like cinnamon, it is the fragrance in which the lemon grove sleeps
Naett, your name is the sugared clarity of blooming coffee trees

And it resembles the savannah, that blossoms forth under the masculine ardour of the midday sun
 Name of dew, fresher than shadows of tamarind,
 Fresher even than the short dusk, when the heat of the day is silenced,
 Naett, that is the dry tornado, the hard clap of lightning
 Naett, coin of gold, shining coal, you my night, my sun!...
 I am you hero, and now I have become your sorcerer, in order to pronounce your names.
 Princess of Elissa, banished from Futa on the fateful day.

NEGRITUDE IN I WILL PRONOUNCE YOUR NAME:

Arguably, Senghor is one of the top three most recognised negritude writers of Africa. It is important to read Senghor's poetry with Negritude themes as he likens Naett to Africa, to whom he writes this letter from France. To *declaim* someone (line 1) is to mention their name theatrically or poetically. Well, this is a poem. Senghor says "Naett" dreamily as one who is totally consumed. Undisplaced, his love for Africa was as strong.

From lines 2-8, Senghor likens the name Naett to a host of natural breath-takers. Note that he is not even praising the lady herself yet but only her name. In line 2, her name is like cinnamon, an aromatic spice and fragrance. He is a lover of the savannah, the African plains, and to him, her name is like it (line 4) when the African midday sun causes it to blossom. Her name is compared to dew (line 5), that early morning remnant of night mist and also to the short dusk (line 6), very welcome respite from the heat of day. Her name evokes power, as of a dry tornado (line 7) and inspires him to confess his love for blackness, something that Western literature is mute on. He calls her shining coal, my night (line 8): strange references for beauty. Does night entice? But it is black and he likes it. Does coal shine? No, but Senghor's coal is of another beauty. His sun! Africa and Blackness! Negritude!

In the last two lines, her name has transformed him into a sorcerer (line 9). For her only. And this is important because the African sorcerer deals in invocation, incantation and chanting. He mentions the names and sings in praise of his divine spirit. And to him, nothing can help him "to pronounce your names" better than being a sorcerer. Note that, he has never said she had names until now. And now, as a sorcerer, he proceeds to call her Princess of Elissa, banished from Futa on the fateful day (line 10). Futa was a West African kingdom that had its capital as Futa Djallon and blossomed around present-day Guinea. She was banished from there. African royalty, if indeed she was a princess, were banished for serious crimes, for example, falling in love with a commoner when a prince is the allowed. Africa is thus glorified metaphorically, making it a negritude poem.

i) Christopher Okigbo:

Christopher Okigbo is a Nigerian poet who was born in Ojoto, in the east, in 1932. He read classics at the University of Ibadan and rose through many education-related professions to become the West African Representative of Cambridge University Press. He was a lively conversationalist and had a creative disposition, borne out of his large appetite for reading.

But civil strife in Nigeria took his life quickly. When the Biafra war started, he stood for the secession-seeking Biafra region and was one of the early casualties of the war, in 1967.

But before he passed away, Okigbo published the volumes *Heavensgate, The Limits and Other Poems*, as well as long sequences in journals.

He is a true pillar in the development of Nigerian literature.

LOVE APART:

The moon has ascended between us,
 Between two pines
 That bow to each other;

Love with the moon has ascended
 5 Has fed on our solitary stems;



Okigbo

And we are now shadows
That cling to each other,
But kiss the air only

NEGRITUDE IN LOVE APART:

Much as this poem could be seen as a nature poem, it has themes which are more indulging than mere physical environmental factors. A theme that portrays negritude in this poem is the contrast between African and European cultures.

This is a poem of heartbreak. Christopher Okigbo conveys this feeling through the particular reference to nature, where all artists seek inspiration. He uses the air, the moon and two pines.

In many parts of Africa, such as Ghana and Nigeria particularly, the passage of time is measured by the moon. "Three moons" is "three months" for the Ewe people of Ghana, Togo and Benin.

Okigbo says the moon has descended between two pines, he and another. The pine is an evergreen tree, symbolising longevity. This means that the two people still live on. But times have changed for them.

And with its ascent, it took love with it in line 4. So the two of them have lost the love they shared. And it's left them solitary; Left them as "shadows!" (line 6)

So, two "pines" which loved, now only "cling" to each other in line 7 and kiss only the air. This cling is not the meaning that explains "holding tight." The word cling also means to have emotional need of somebody. A need that is not met. That is hard or impossible to satisfy.

So, Okigbo tells us that the parting was done, just like the rise of the moon, maybe just fleetingly. But it leaves an ache, a pain, a longing, a craving that is hard to meet. And that is the power of the poem.

The advent of Europeanism and its devastating aftermath is what the poem deeply extrapolates, hence a negritude poem.

j) Dennis Osadebe:

Dennis Osadebe was born in Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria in 1911 to parents of mixed cultural backgrounds. For a long time, his education and work were in Nigeria before he left to study law in England in the 1940s. He has been in politics, journalism and practiced as a jurist. For a time, he was Premier of the Mid-West Region of the Federation of Nigeria upon its creation. He was also one of the founders of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons in 1944. Like many poets, Osadebe wrote first for journals and newspapers such as the West African Pilot. His first anthology, Africa Sings was published while he was studying in England. As an African born in the colonial era, his poetry resonates with others rising across the continent at that time, talking about Africanness and the desire to carve an identity for a continent fighting to put herself on a more-deserved pedestal.



WHO BUYS MY THOUGHTS:

Who buys my thoughts
Buys not a cup of honey
That sweetens every taste;
He buys the throb,
5 Of Young Africa's soul,
The soul of teeming millions,
Hungry, naked, sick,
Yearning, pleading, waiting.

Who buys my thoughts
10 Buys not false pretence
Of oracles and tin gods;
He buys the thoughts

Projected by the mass
 Of restless youths who are born
 15 Into deep and clashing cultures,
 Sorting, questioning, watching.

Who buys my thoughts
 Buys the spirit of the age,
 The unquenching fire that smoulders
 20 And smoulders
 In every living heart
 That's true and noble or suffering;
 It burns all o'er the earth,
 Destroying, chastening, cleansing.

NEGRITUDE IN WHO BUYS MY THOUGHTS:

This poem is Osadebe's statement of Africa's soul at a time that he can confidently call Africa young: a continent waking to the realities of her need for independence. He compares his thoughts to *the throb/ Of Young Africa's soul* (lines 4-5) and in his opening lines, he tells us that they are *not a cup of honey/That sweetens every taste* (lines 2-3). Osadebe feels the revolutionary wind that is blowing across the continent and which he embodies in the soul of this poem, representing *The soul of teeming millions* (line 6) with his thoughts. He writes on despair but looks to hope in the contrast of the lines that end the first stanza: *Hungry, naked, sick* (line 7) are desperate but in the next line, *Yearning, pleading, waiting* are more hopeful.

Osadebe says that his thoughts are not the thoughts of any one man who bestrides Africa, the country, like a Colossus, a tin god to be worshipped. But he breathes the fire of restless youths who, are tired of their present and are *sorting, questioning, watching* (line 16). In pre-colonial times, this was a common theme that helped to shape the thinking of a continent on the brink of revolution. What Osadebe does best is to use a prophetic, rhythmic repetition to show the desperation of Africa for change. His continued repetition of the line, *Who buys my thoughts*, is more of a warning than a statement of harmony.

The final stanza ignites the volcano that is hid in his heart and is now brewing inside the African revolutionary heart. He claims his thoughts as unquenching fire that burns in every heart that is alive. Every heart that is suffering and is honest! Osadebe now calls his thoughts a fire that burns all over the earth. Here reflects the mission of his life which was lived on two continents and goes beyond the call for freedom in his country Africa. Here sounds a call for freedom for people suffering everywhere. A call that Osadebe, and of course Africa, is not ready to beg for, but to claim in an inferno.

The beauty of every last line of the stanzas is the fact that it ends with a word that evokes a brighter future for which Africa is *waiting* (line 8), *watching* (line 16) and with her fire, is *cleansing*, (line 24). He thus, glorifies Africa giving the poem a negritudinal outlook.

3. CONCLUSION

In sum, the theme of glorification of Africa or rejection of European colonization which underpin the literary ideology of negritude have been adequately explored in many African English poems. The ideology may have been initiated by the French-speaking blacks in the French colonies of Africa and the Caribbean but African English writers, on poetry in particular, have extensively treated the subject in their works. A survey of African poets cited in this paper confirm this assertion in some of their poems. Some African English poets-e.g, Kofi Awoonor, Christopher Okigbo, Kwasi Brew, Lenrie Peters, etc-however provide a new lens for viewing European colonisation of Africa. They believe in the "universal brotherhood" ideology in which they portray a yearning to have the past in the present as, in their opinion, the past (European colonisation) also has its advantages for Africa's development. Arguably therefore, one can say that negritude as a movement in the 1930s was a fight against accelerated development in Africa.

REFERENCES

- [1] Achebe, Chinua. *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann, 1975.
- [2] Gleason, Judith Illsley. *This Africa*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965.
- [3] Iyengar, Srinivasa K.R. *Two Cheers for the Commonwealth*. New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1968.
- [4] Narasimhaiah, C.D. *An Anthology of Commonwealth Poetry*. Madras: Macmillan India, 1990.
- [5] Porter, Simeon. *Our Language*. Aylosbury Buck: Hazel Watson & Vorey, 1958.
- [6] Povey, John. "A Comment on the Attitudes to the Past in West African Poetry." *National Identity*. Ed. K.L. Goodwin. London: Heinemann, 1968.
- [7] Theroux, Paul. "A Study of Six African Poets: Voices out of the Skull." *Introduction to African Literature*. Ed. Ulli Bier. London: Heinemann, 1986.
- [8] Walsh, William. *Commonwealth Literature*. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.