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but no plumes in their tails?
And some have plumes in their tails, but no claws on their toes.
And others have claws on their toes, but no power to crow?
He who has a head has no cap to wear, and he who has a cap has no head to wear it on.
He who has good shoulders has no gown to wear on them, and he who has the gown has no good shoulders to wear it on.

The Owa has everything but a horse's stable.
Some great scholars of Ifa cannot tell the way to Ofà.
Others know the way to Ofà, but not one line of Ifa.
Great eaters have no food to eat, and great drinkers no wine to drink.

Wealth has a coat of many colours!

The poem may be entitled "Variety". The tonal arrangement of the lines when written down also gives a good example of variety. For example, in lines 1 and 2, the arrangement is by contrast. Line one ends on a low tone, while line 2 ends on a rising tone. Then there is a change: Lines 3, 4, and 5 end on a middle tone; lines 6, 7, and 8 end on a high, a low, and a middle tone, respectively. Note the contrast between:

fà (high) fà (low)
fà (low) fà (high)

in the following lines:

Enit' ó mo 'fà o m'ona Ofà,
Enit' ó m' ona Ofà o mo 'fà.

Finally, note the low monotone of the word: "Malamala"
(— — — —) with which the poem ends.

Here is the poem:

Igi gbun n'igbo, a nso,
Ofoto enia k'ó gbun larin ilu?
Osupa le a ni o le re,
Nwon l'eni t'owo re ba to o
K'ó yara mura k'ó lo tún u se.
Eyi tí o l'ogbe kó ní 'rèrè,
Eyi t'ó n'irèrè kó l'ogàn l'esè,
Eyi t'ó l'ogàn l'esè kó le ko bi akuko
Eni t'ó l'ori ó ní fila, eni t'ni fila ó l'ori,
Eni t'ó l'èjika ó l'ewu, eni t'ó l'ewu o l'èjika.
Owa l'ohun pe, ko n'iwó esin.
Eni t'ó mo 'fà ko m'ona Ofà,
Eni t'ó m'ona Ofà, ko mo 'fà.
Iyan è wa 'le marinaje,
Oti ó wa 'le marumanu.
Oro abaso màlámàlà!

E. L. LASEBIKAN.

The spirit of civilisation, or the laws of African negro culture

Whether we like it or not, 1955 will mark an important date in the history of the world, and first and foremost in the history of the coloured peoples. Bandoeng will be from now on a rallying for these peoples. Not because of the intrigues which the two Blocs tried to stir up there, but because of the spirit of liberation which came to birth there. The Bandoeng spirit was the anxiety which the Afro-Asiatic peoples showed at that time to strengthen their personality by asserting it, so that they should not come empty-handed to "meetings of give and take". For world civilisation, and, in the first instance, Peace, will either be the work of all, or it will not come about at all. How can we believe that the Bandoeng spirit, which for us is primarily a spirit of culture, does not also animate the Indians, and particularly the Negroes of America? For the Negro race, more than any other, was the victim of the great discoveries. The European Renaissance was built on the ruins of African Negro civilisation, the force of America has waxed fat on Negro blood and sweat. The slave trade cost Africa two hundred million dead. But who can tell what cultural wealth was lost? By the grace of God, the flame is not quenched, the leaven is still there in our wounded hearts and bodies to make possible our Renaissance to-day.

But this Renaissance will be the doing not so much of the politicians, as of the Negro writers and artists. Experience has proved it, cultural liberation is an essential condition of political liberation. If white America conceded the claims of the Negroes it will be because writers and artists, by showing the true visage of the race, have restored its dignity; if Europe is beginning to reckon with Africa, it is because her traditional sculpture, music, dancing, literature and philosophy are henceforth forced upon an astonished world. This means that if the Negro Writers and artists of to-day want to finish off the work in the Bandoeng spirit they must go to school in Negro Africa. Gide already noted at the beginning of the century that, for an artist or writer, the most effective way of being

appreciated and understood by the stranger is still to nourish his work from the roots of his own soil.

There can be no question in this introduction to our Cultural Stocktaking of getting lost in detail, or even dealing with the different literary and artistic forms. There is no question of making a survey of African Negro civilisation, but rather of culture, which is the spirit of civilisation. We must start by talking of the coloured man who has given birth to this culture, and first of all sketch out a psycho-physiology of the Negro.

**

It has often been said that the Negro is the man of Nature. By tradition he lives of the soil and with the soil, in and by the Cosmos. He is sensual, a being with open senses, with no intermediary subject and object, himself at once the subject and the object. He is, first of all, sounds, scents, rhythms, forms and colours; I would say that he is touch, before being eye like the white European. He feels more than he sees; he feels himself. It is in himself, in his own flesh, that he receives and feels the radiations which emanate from every existing object. Stimulated, he responds to the call, and abandons himself, going from subject to object, from Me to Thee on the vibrations of the Other: he is not assimilated: he assimilates himself with the other, which is the best road to knowledge.

This means that the Negro by tradition is not devoid of reason, as I am supposed to have said. But his reason is not discursive: it is synthetic. It is not antagonistic: it is sympathetic. It is another form of knowledge. The Negro reason does not impoverish things, it does not mould them into rigid patterns by eliminating the roots and the sap: it flows in the arteries of things, it weds all their contours to dwell at the living heart of the real. White reason is analytic through utilisation: Negro reason is intuitive through participation.

This indicates the sensitiveness of the coloured man, his emotional power. Gobineau defines the Negro as "the being who is most energetically affected by artistic emotion". For what affects the Negro is not so much the appearance of an object as its profound reality, its super-reality; not so much its form as its meaning. Walter moves him because it flows, fluid and blue, above all because it cleanses, still more because it purifies. Form and meaning express the same ambivalent reality. Emphasis is nevertheless laid on the meaning, which is the signification of the real, no longer utilitarian, but moral and mystic, a symbol. It is not without interest that contemporary scholars themselves assert the primacy of intuitive knowledge by "sym-pathy": "The finest emotion we can experience is mystic emotion. There lies the seed of all art and all real science".

**

It is this physio-psychology of the Negro which explains his metaphysics, and therefore his social life, of which literature and art are only one aspect. For social life in Negro Africa rests, according to Father Placide Tempels, on a combination of logically coordinated and motivated concepts. Those whom the Europeans call "primitives", asserts the same missionary, "live" more than the Europeans do, "by ideas and according to their ideas".

At the centre of the system, animating it as the sun animates our world, is existence, that is, life. This is the supreme good, and the whole activity of man is directed solely towards the increase and expression of vital power. The Negro identifies being with life, or, more specifically, with vital force. His metaphysics is an existential ontology. As Father Tempels writes, "being is that which has force", or better, "being is force". But this force is not static. Being is in unstable equilibrium, always capable of gaining or losing force. In order to exist, man must realize his individual essence by the increase and ex-pression of his vital force. But his force, the sub-stratum of intellectual and moral life, and to that extent immortal, is not really living and cannot really grow except by co-existing in man with the body and the breath of life. These, being made of substance, are perishable, and disintegrate after death.

But man is not the only being in the world. A vital force similar to his own animates every object which is endowed with a sentient character, from God to a grain of sand. The Negro has drawn up a rigid hierarchy of Forces. At the summit, a single God, uncreated and creator, "He who has force and power of himself. He gives being, substance and increase to the other forces". After him come the ancestors, and first, the founders of clans, the "demigods". Then, going down the scale, we come to the living, who are, in their turn, ordered according to custom, but above all in order of primogeniture. Finally, at the bottom of the scale, the classes of animals, vegetables, minerals. Within each other the same hierarchy.

This is the appropriate place to point out the outstanding place occupied by Man at the centre of this system, in his quality of a person, actively existing, capable of increasing his being. For the universe is a closed system of forces, individual and distinct it is true, but unified. Thus all creation is centred on man. To the extent that the being is a vital force, the ancestors, if they do not wish to be non-existent, "perfectly dead" — it is a Bantu expression — must devote themselves to reinforcing life and existence, which enables them to share in it. As for the inferior beings — animals, vegetables, minerals — they have no other purpose in the designs of God, except to support the actions of the dead. They are instruments, not ends in themselves.

**

The merit of this existential ontology is that it has, in its own turn, inspired a harmonious civilisation. And in the first place, an authentic religion. For what is a religion, if not, as its etymology indicates, the link which gives the universe its unity, which unites God to the lyme grass and the grain of sand?

This ontology is its dogma. With regard to cult, which is religion in act, in Negro Africa it is expressed by the sacrifice.

It is the head of the family who offers the sacrifice. He is the priest designated purely by his character as the eldest descendant of the common Ancestor. He is the natural mediator between the living and the dead. Nearer to the dead, he lives in intimacy with them. His flesh is less flesh, his spirit is less chained, his world more powerfully persuasive: he already shares the character of the dead. Sacrifice is, above all, an entering into relationship with the Ancestor, the dialogue of me and Thee. With him we share the nourishment whose existential force will give him the sentiment of life. And communion goes as far as identification, so that by an inverse movement the force of the Ancestor flows into the sacrificer and the community whom he incarnates. Sacrifice is the most typical illustration of the general law of the interaction of the vital forces of the Universe.

If we look at the natural aspects of society, the unit of order in the world, we find that the simplest component, the basic cellule is the family. African Negro society is, in effect, made up of widening concentric circles, superimposed and interlaced, formed on the pattern of the family. The tribe is a group of several families, the kingdom a group of several tribes. But what is the family? It is the clan, the totality of all those, living and dead, who recognize a common ancestor. This common ancestor is the link which unites God to men and is himself a genie and a "demi-god". His life often takes the form of a totemic myth, sometimes linked with an astral myth. Hence the importance of the animal in Negro cosmogony. The ancestor has received from God a vital force, and his eternal vocation is to increase it. We see that the aim of the family is to preserve in perpetuity a patrimony of vital force which grows and intensifies itself to the extent of which it is manifested in living bodies, in more numerous and more prosperous human beings. The family shows itself as a microcosm, an image of the universe, which is reflected on an enlarged scale in the tribe and the kingdom. The king is only the father of the greatest family; he is the descendant of the Leader of Tribes.

The family, the tribe and the kingdom are not the only communal organisations which at the same time bind and sustain the Negro. Alongside them there is a whole network of interlocking organisations. These are the *fraternities of age*, a sort of friendly society to which a whole generation belongs, the *craft guilds* and the *brotherhoods*

of secret rites. The latter have a social and political, or even religious, rôle. In truth, all these organisations have a religious basis, among peoples where the distinction between sacred and profane, political and social, appears late and infrequently.

**

It is in social activities, sustained by religious feeling, that literature and art naturally integrate themselves. A Western man finds it difficult to appreciate the place which social activities, including literature and art, occupy in the African Negro calendar. They are not relegated to Sundays or "theatrical evenings" but, to take the example of the Sudan Zone, they fill the whole eight months of the dry season. At this time men are fully occupied with their relations with the Others: genies ancestors, members of the family, the tribe, the kingdom, even strangers. There are festivals all the time and Death itself is the occasion for a festival, the supreme Festival: festival of harvest and festival of sowing, births, initiations, marriages, funerals: guild festivals and brotherhood festivals. And every evening, the vigil round the hearth, with the leaping flames shining on tales, dances and songs, gymnastic games, drama and comedy. Work itself, which celebrates the marriage of Man and Earth is a narrative and a poem. Thus we have the songs of labour, the songs of the peasant, the boatman, the herdsman. For in Negro Africa, as we shall see, all literature and all art is poetry.

The question all the time is to enter into relations either with the legendary totemic Ancestors, or with the mythical genies — but the genie is often merged with a star or an animal, and the legend depends into a myth. Significant in this connexion is the festival of initiation, which is opened and accompanied by numerous sacrifices. It is concerned with initiation into the cosmogonic myth, the legends and customs of the tribe: more specifically with the birth of Knowledge through poetry, song, drama, and masked dance, to the primordial rhythm of the tom-tom. Then it is that the seed dies in order to germinate, that the child dies to himself, in order to be born again as an adult in the Initiator and the Ancestor. This is a religious, animistic existentialism. The other — Adult, Ancestor, genie or God — far from being an obstacle, is the supporter and the source of vital force. Far from there being any conflict in the confrontation of Me and Thee, there is a conciliatory agreement, not a de-realisation, but a greater realisation of the individual essence.

Literature and art are therefore not divorced from the generic activities of man, and particularly from skill in craftsmanship. They are its most effective expression. Do you remember in "The Negro Child"? Laya's father forging a golden jewel? The prayer, or rather the poem, which he recites, the song of praise which the Griot sings as he works the gold, the dance of the smith at the end of the operation, it is all that — poem, song, dance — which, more than the gestures of the craftsman, accomplishes the work, and

makes it into a work of art. The arts in the general sense of the word are, in the same perspective, linked together. Thus, sculpture only fully realises its object by the grace of the dance and the sung poem. Look at the man who incarnates Nyarnié, the Sun-Genie of Baoulé, under the mask of the Ram. Watch him dancing the actions of a ram to the rhythm of the orchestra, while the chorus sings the poem of the deeds of the genie. In both cases we have a functional art. In this last example the masked dancer must identify himself with the Genie-Sun-Ram, and, like the sacrificer, communicate his force to the audience which takes part in the drama.

This brings out another characteristic of the poem — once again. I call every work of art a poem; it is created by all and for all. True there are professional literary men and artists; in the Sudanese lands they are the Griots who are at the same time historiographers, poets and tellers of tales: in the lands of the Guinea and the Congo they are the civil Sculptors of the princely courts whose ermine epaulette is a badge of honour: everywhere they are the Smiths, as the multiple technicians of magic and art, the first artist, according to a Dogon myth, who, to the rhythm of the tom-tom made the rain fall. But alongside these professionals there is the people, the anonymous crowd which sings, dances, carves and paints. Initiation is the school of Negro Africa in which man, putting away childish things, assimilates, with the science of his tribe, the technique of literature and art. It will, moreover, be seen from the two examples given that every manifestation of art is collective, made for all, with the participation of all.

Because they are functional and collective, African Negro Literature and art are committed. That is their third general characteristic. They commit the person — and not only the individual — by and through the community, in the sense that they are techniques of essentialisation. They commit him to a future which will henceforth be to him the present, an essential part of his ego. That is why the African Negro works of art are not, as has often been said, copies of an archetype repeated a thousand times. Certainly there are subjects, each of which expresses a vital force. But what is striking is the variety of execution according to personal temperament and circumstances. Once again the craftsman-poet takes up his position, and commits, with himself, his race, his history and his geography. He makes use of the material which lies to his hand, and the daily facts which compose the web of his life, while he scorns the anecdote, because, being without significance, it does not commit. Painter or sculptor, he will on occasion make use of instruments and materials imported from Europe: he will not hesitate to represent the machine, the pride of the West: he will go so far as to dress some ancestral genie in European style. In the new Society inspired by the spirit of the Colonial Pact, the teller of tales will not hesitate to give Money its due place, the leading one, as the incarnation of Evil. Because he is committed, the craftsman-poet is not concerned to create for eternity. Works of art are perishable. While their

spirit and style are preserved, we hasten to replace the ancient work by modernising it as soon as it becomes out of date or perishes. This means that in Negro Africa "art for art's sake" does not exist, all art is social. The Griot who sings the noble to war makes him stronger and shares in the victory. When he hymns the deeds of a legendary hero, it is the history of his people which he writes with his words, by restoring to them the divine profundity of a myth. Right down to the fables, which, through tears and laughter, help to teach us. Through the dialectic which they express they are one of the essential factors in social equilibrium in the guise of the Lion, the Elephant, the Hyena, the Crocodile, the Hare, the Old Woman, we read clearly with our ears, our social structure and our passions — the good and bad alike. Sometimes it is the refusal, addressed to the Great Ones, the Right opposed to brute force. Sometimes it is acquiescence in the order of the universe of the Ancestors and of God. And, concludes the Jolof, "thus the fable threw itself into the sea. He who shall breathe it first will go to Paradise". The savour of Negro wisdom!..

At the same time, it is impossible to seize the essence of African Negro literature and art if one imagines that they are purely utilitarian and that the African Negro has no sense of beauty. Some ethnologists and art critics have gone so far as to allege that the words "beauty" and "beautiful" are missing from the African Negro Languages. The truth is that the African Negro assimilates beauty to goodness, and especially to effectiveness. Thus in the Jolof of Senegal, the words *târ* and *rafet*, beauty and beautiful are more appropriate in referring to a person. In speaking of a work of art Jolof would use the adjectives *dyéka*, *yem*, *mat*, which I should translate by "fitting", "adequate", "perfect". Once again, it is a question of functional beauty. A beautiful mask, a beautiful poem, is one which produces in the public the emotion aimed at: sadness, joy, hilarity, terror. The word *bahai* — pronounced "bahhai" — is significant. It means "goodness" and is used by the young dandies to describe an attractive young girl. Beauty for them is "the promise of happiness". Conversely, a good deed is often called "beautiful".

If a given poem produces its effect, that is because it finds an echo in the minds and feelings of its hearers. That is why the Fulah define a poem as "words pleasing to the heart and the ear". But if for the African Negro, as for the European, "the great rule is to please", they do not both find pleasure in the same things. In the Graeco-Latin aesthetic which survived in the European West, except for the Middle Ages, down to the end of the XIX century, art is the imitation of Nature; I mean, of course, "adjusted imitation": in Negro Africa, it is the explanation and knowledge of the world, that is a sentient participation in reality which subverts the universe towards super-reality, or more exactly towards the vital forces which animate the universe. The European takes pleasure in recognizing the world through the reproduction of the object, which

is called the "subject", the African Negro from knowing it vividly through image and rhythm. With the European the chords of the senses lead to the heart and the head, with the African Negro to the heart and the belly, the very root of life. The mask of the Ram gives pleasure to the Baoulé spectators because it incarnates the Genie in plastic and rhythmic language.

**

Image and rhythm, these are the two fundamental features of African Negro style.

Image first of all. But before going any further, we must pause a moment on the question of language, so as to reach an understanding of its nature and function from a brief study of the African Negro tongues. We shall thus be better able to appreciate the value of the African Negro image.

It is clear to us that language is the major instrument of thought, emotion and action. There can be no thought or emotion without a verbal image, and no free action which is not first planned in thought. This fact is even more true among peoples, most of whom disdain writing. Language is a power in Negro Africa. Spoken language, the word, is the supreme expression of vital force, of the being in his fulfilment. God created the world by the Word — we shall shortly see how. In the human being, speech is the animated and animating breath of prayer; it has a magic power, it fulfils the law of participation and by its intrinsic virtue creates the thing which is spoken of. In the same way, all the other arts are merely specialised aspects of the major art of speech. Before a painting consisting of a network of white and red geometric forms, representing the dawn chorus of birds in a tree, its creator expresses himself in these words: "These are wings, and songs; they are birds..." (1)

The first outstanding characteristic of the African Negro language is the wealth of their vocabulary. There are ten, and sometimes twenty words to describe an object, according as it changes form, weight, volume or colour; as many words to describe an action, according as it is simple or multiple, weak or strong, beginning or ending. In Fulah the nouns are divided into twenty-one genders, all neuter, under a classification based partly on their semantic value, partly on their phonetic value and partly on the grammatical category to which they belong. But it is the verb which remains most significant in this respect. In Jolof it is possible, by means of affixes, to construct from the same root more than twenty verbs with different shades of meaning, together with at least as many derivative nouns. Whereas current Indo-European languages lay emphasis on the abstract idea of time, the African Negro languages stress the aspect, the concrete fashion in which the verbal action unfolds

(1) Jose Redinha : Paredes pintadas da unda, Estampa 17. (Lisboa, 1953).

itself. This means that they are essentially concrete language. The words are always pregnant with images; through their value as signs transpire their value as sense.

The African Negro image is therefore not an equation-image, but an analogy-image, a surrealist image. The African Negro has a horror of the straight line and the false "right word". Two and two do not make four, but "five" in the words of the poet Aimé Césaire. The object does not signify what it represents, but what it suggests, what it creates. The elephant is strength, the spider Prudence; horns are the, Moon, and the moon is Fertility. Every representation is an image, and the image, I reiterate, is not an equation, but a symbol, an ideogramme. Not only a figure image, but substance — stone, earth, copper, gold, fibre — as well as line and colour. Any language is wearisome that does not tell a story. Better still, the African Negro does not understand such language. How astonished the first Whites were to discover that the "Natives" did not understand their pictures, or even the logic of their speeches, I have spoken of a surrealist image. But, as you might guess, African Negro surrealism is different from European surrealism. The European is empiric, the African is mystic and metaphysical. André Breton writes in *Signe ascendant*: "Poetic analogy" — by which we must understand European surrealist analogy — "differs fundamentally from mystic analogy in that it in no way presupposes beyond the veif of the visible world, an invisible universe, which tends to manifest itself. It is entirely empiric in its approach". Negro surrealist analogy, on the other hand, presupposes and manifests the hierarchic universe of vital forces.

Power of the image, power of speech. So it is in Dahomey, among the *Fons*, where the king, on every outstanding occasion during his reign, uttered a rhythmic sentence, whose key word furnished a new name. "The *Pineapple* that laughed at the thunder". And the word, and the pineapple were despotically graven everywhere, and became an image: in wood, clay, gold, bronze and ivory; on the throne, the headgear, the commander's baton and the walls of the palace.

The proof is that in African Negro poetry the abstract word is rarely met with. Here there is no need to comment upon the image: the hearers are gifted with double vision. In sculpture some masks achieve an exemplary power of suggestion, such as the mask of the Genie-Moon-Bull among the Baoulé. A man's bearded face with the horns and ears of a bull — sometimes the horns are not a question of the anecdote or the "slice of life". The facts are images and have the value of examples. Hence the pace of the recital, its progress by leaps and bounds, its matricial improbabilities, the absence of psychological explanation.

An image, however, does not achieve its effect with the African Negro unless it is rhythmic. Here the rhythm is consubstantial with the image; it is the rhythm which perfects the image by uniting sign and sense, flesh and spirit into one whole. It is only artificially

and for the sake of a clearer account that I have distinguished the two elements. In the music which accompanies a poem or a dance the rhythm creates an image as much as the melody. In the mask of the Genie-Moon-Bull it is rhythm which makes it possible to substitute an image with the same symbolic value; crescent moon in place of horns and horn of abundance in place of birds.

What is rhythm? It is the architecture of the being, the internal dynamism which gives him form, the system of waves which he emits in relation to Others, the pure expression of vital force. Rhythm is the vibratory shock, the force which, through the senses, seizes us at the root of our being. It is expressed through the most material and most sensual means; lines, surfaces, colours and volumes in architecture, sculpture and painting: accents in poetry and music: but in doing this it guides all that is concrete towards the light of the mind. With the African Negro rhythm enlightens the spirit to the precise extent to which it is embodied in sensuality. African dancing abhors physical contact. But watch the dancers. If their lower limbs are shaken with the most sensual tremors, their heads are sharing in the serene beauty of the masks, of the Dead.

Once again, the primacy of Speech. It is rhythm which gives it its effective fulfilment, which changes it into the word. It is the word of God, that is, rhythmic speech, which created the world. It is also in the poem that we can best capture the nature of African Negro rhythm. In this case rhythm is not born of the alternation of long syllables and short syllables, but solely of the alternation of accented syllables and unaccented syllables, of strong tones and weak tones. The question is one of rhythmic versification. There is verse, and therefore a poem when an accented syllable recurs at the same interval of time. But the essential rhythm is not that of the words, but of the percussion instruments which accompany the human voice, and more specifically those of them which mark the basic rhythm. We are dealing with a multiple rhythm, a sort of rhythmic counterpoint. It is this which saves the words from that mechanical regularity which breeds monotony. In this way the poem appears as a piece of architecture, a mathematical formule based on unity in diversity. Here is the rhythm of the words in two Jolof poems chosen at random. (1)

A)	24	00
	24	00
	44	00
	44	00
	43	00
	43	00

(1) Cf. *Langage et Poesie Negro-Africaine in Poesie et Langage*. Editions de la Maison du Poete. Brussels.

B)	32	31
	32	31
	22	31
	32	21
	32	31
	32	21
	32	31
	32	31
	21	31

As may be guessed, the basic rhythm in the first case is 444, in the second 3333. In both cases the verse is a *tetrameter*. But the public often takes part in the poem. We then have two groups of rhythm; this allows both the leader of the reciters and the leader of the tom-toms to give themselves up entirely to their inspiration and to multiply counter-time and syncope, solidly supported by the basic rhythm. For the monotonous basic rhythm, far from being a handicap to inspiration, is its essential condition. The rhythmic elements, however, are not limited to those which I have described. In addition to the clapping of the public and the steps and gesture of the reciters and the tambourinists, it should be noted that there are certain *figures of speech* — alliterations, paronomasis, anaphora — which, being based on the repetition of vocables or sounds form secondary rhythms and add to the effect of the whole. Finally, the port makes ample use of those *descriptive words* whose importance has been brought out by M. de la Vergne de Tressan. He tells us that these words, formed by onomatopoeia sometimes amount to as much as a third of the vocabulary of African Negro languages.

The "prose recital" partakes of the grace of rhythm. In Negro Africa there is no fundamental difference between prose and poetry. Poetry is merely a more markedly and regularly rhythmic form of prose: it is recognized in practice from the fact that it is accompanied by a percussion instrument. The same phrase may become a poem by accentuating its rhythm, thus expressing the tension of being: the *being* of being. It appears that, "long, long ago" all recitals were strongly rhythmic, were poems. In more recent times the recital was still recited, and was spoken in a monotone voice and in a higher tone: it was an element in a religious ceremony. As we know it to-day even in the form of a fable, which is the most secularized form, it is still rhythmic, although not so strongly. In the first place *dramatic interest* is not spared, or more specifically, sparing the dramatic interest does not mean, as it does in modern European recitals, banishing repetition: quite the reverse, dramatic interest is created by repetition, the repetition of a fact, a gesture, a song or words which constitute a *leitmotiv*. But nearly always some new element is introduced, some variation in repetition, a *unity in diversity*. It is this new element which emphasizes the progress of the drama. This

means that the prose recital is not above resorting both to figures of speech based on the repetition of vocables, and to descriptive words. That is not all : the structure of the African Negro sentence is naturally rhythmic. Because, whereas the Indo-European languages use a logical syntax of subordination, the African Negro languages turn more willingly to an intuitive syntax of co-ordination and juxtaposition. And, in propositions of almost equal length, the words are arranged in groups, which each have a major accent.

On the plane of rhythm, the music is linked to the words and the dance, but certainly more closely to the poem than to the dance. For the African Negro it is the element which specially characterizes the poems. In the Senegalese languages the same word — *wol* in Jolof, *kim* in Serer, *winre* in Fulah — means the song and the supreme form of poem : the ode. In any event, a poem is not complete unless it is sung, or at any rate given rhythm by a musical instrument. And the prose of the public Crier is given solemnity and acquires authority by the voice of the tom-tom. It has often been observed that, in African Negro music, rhythm takes precedence over melody. This is because the object of music, as I have already said, is not so much to charm the ears as to *re-impose* the words, to make them more effective. Hence the place which is given to rhythm, to sudden falls, inflexions and *vibrati*; hence the preference for *expression* over harmony.

Great stress has been laid in recent years on the ethnologic, religious and social values of African Negro sculpture. And yet those writers and artists were not wrong who, at the beginning of the century emphasized its aesthetic value, its rhythm. Just look through the works which contain reproductions of African Negro sculpture, such as that of Carl Kjerfveier called *Style Centres of African Negro sculpture* (Paris, Copenhagen). Pause over Figure 48, which represents a female statuette from *Bande*. Two themes of sweetness sing an antiphony. The ripe fruit of the breasts. The chin and the knees, the buttocks and the calves are also fruit or breasts. The neck, the arms and the thighs are columns of black honey. In another volume this *Fang* statuette from Gaboon again offers us fruits — breasts, navel, knees — with which are contrasted the curved cylinders of the trunk the thighs and the calves. Now look in the first volume at this high *Bambara* mask, representing an antelope. Strophe of the horns and the ears; antistrophe of the tail and the neck and the hairs of a mane sprung from the sculptor's imagination. As André Malraux writes in *Les Voix du Silence*: "The African mask is not the fixation of a human expression, it is an apparition... The sculptor does not interpret the geometry of a phantom of which he is ignorant, he calls it up by his geometry : the effect of his mask comes not so much from the extent to which it is like a man, as from the extent to which it is unlike; the animal masks are not animals; the antelope mask is not an antelope, but the Antelope-Spirit, and it is its style which makes it a spirit". Its style must be understood to mean its rhythm.

Rhythm is even more manifest in African Negro painting. The

modern painters of Potopoto and Elisabethville have begun to persuade attentive observers of this. They are merely following a tradition which is already ancient. We know that the African Negro sculptor is often a painter as well. And now, for the last twenty-five years, the mural paintings of Negro Africa have been discovered, reproduced and commented upon. In these paintings rhythm is not marked by dividing lines between light and shade; it is not *arabesque* as in classical European painting. African Negroes, for the rest, paint in flat colours, without shadow effects. Here as elsewhere, rhythm is born of the repetition, often at regular intervals, of a line, a colour, a figure, a geometric form, but above all from colour contrast. In general, against a dark ground, which creates the effect of space or dead time, and gives the picture its depth, the painter arranges his figures in light colours, or vice-versa. The design and colour of the figures correspond less to the appearance of reality than to the profound rhythm of the objects. Two examples will be enough for me to illustrate this truth. First, Painting 12 of *Paredes pintadas da Lunda*. The upper part consists of a frieze which depicts the sumptuous procession of a prince. It consists of six people moving from left to right. Starting from the right we see : three members of the escort, two bearers carrying on their shoulders a sort of palanquin in which the prince is lying, and then, closing the procession, the fourth member of the escort. The ground is light brown; the figures are painted in three colours, the three traditional colours of Negro Africa, white, black and red. The six members of the procession all wear a white head-dress, a black tunic, a red belt, white trousers and black footwear. But the monotony of this basic rhythm must be broken by introducing secondary rhythms. The two bearers have tunics speckled with white spots, while the members of the escort merely have a row of white buttons on their black tunics, except the one who opens the procession whose tunic is buttonless. One of the bearers wears gaiters, like the members of the escort, whereas the other wears low shoes. The two men who open and close the procession each have a staff, but one is white and the other black. Finally, of the two birds painted at the foot of the frieze, one is black, speckled with white spots, like the bearers' tunics, while the other is white like the trousers and headgear of the members of the procession. Now look at Painting 54 A, which represents plants in pots. The two figures are painted in two colours; blue and red on a straw-coloured ground. Everything is blue and red, — stems, leaves, flowers, pots, — and symmetrically arranged in quasi-geometric forms with secondary rhythms, decorative paintings, I shall be told. I would answer, African Negro paintings, *rhythmic* paintings. And the facts are all the more significant since the examples chosen have undergone European influence.

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I must come to an end. Such then is the African Negro for whom the world exists by the fact of its reflexion upon himself.

He does not realise that he thinks : he feels that he feels, he feels his *existence*, he feels himself; and because he feels the Other, he is drawn towards the other, into the rhythm of the Other, to be re-born in knowledge of and of the world. Thus the act of knowledge is an "agreement of conciliation" with the world, the simultaneous consciousness and creation of the world in its indivisible unity. It is this urge of vital force which is expressed by the religious and social life of the African Negro, of which art and literature are the most effective instruments. And the poet sings : "Hail to the perfect circle of the world and ultimate concord!", (1)

I shall be told that the spirit of the Civilisation and the laws of African Negro culture, as I have expounded them, are not peculiar to the African Negro, but are common to other peoples as well. I do not deny it. Each people unites in its own aspect the diverse features of mankind's condition. But I assert that these features will nowhere be found united in such equilibrium and such enlightenment, and that rhythm reigns nowhere so despotically. Nature has arranged things well in willing that each people, each race, each continent, should cultivate with special affection certain of the virtues of man; that is precisely where originality lies. And if it is also said that this African Negro culture resembles that of ancient Egypt, and of the Dravidian and Oceanic peoples like two sisters, I would answer that ancient Egypt was *African* and that Negro blood flows in important currents in the veins of the Dravidians and the Oceanics.

The spirit of African Negro civilisation consciously or not, animates the best Negro artists and writers of to-day, whether they come from Africa or America. So far as they are conscious of African Negro culture and are inspired by it they are elevated in the international scale; so far as they turn their backs on Africa the mother they degenerate and become feeble. Like Antaeus who needed to support himself on the earth in order to take flight towards the sky. That does not mean that the Negro artists and writers of to-day must turn their backs on reality and refuse to interpret the social realities of their background, their race, their nation, their class, far from it. We have seen that the spirit of African Negro civilisation became incarnate in the most day-to-day realities. But always it transcends these realities so as to express the meaning of the world.

The literary and artistic history of Europe proves that we should remain faithful to this spirit. After the set-back of Graeco-Roman aesthetics at the end of the XI century, the writers and artists of the West discovered Asia, and above all Africa, at the end of their quest. Thanks to Africa they were able to legitimate their discoveries by giving them a human value. This is not the moment that we should choose to betray, with Negro Africa, the very reason of our lives.

LEOPOLD SEDAR SENGHOR

The session ended at 6 p.m.

(1) Aimé Césaire : Cahier d'un retour au Pays Natal.

DISCUSSION

19th SEPTEMBER, at 9 p.m.

Chairman: Dr. Price-Mars.

The Chairman :

Fellow Delegates (I say Delegates because at the end of the last Session we decided that we should constitute an Assembly of Delegates) we are going to discuss the Papers which were presented this afternoon by the Madagascan Delegate, our friend Hazoume, Lasebikan and M. Senghor.

We will begin with the very interesting and important contribution by the Madagascan Delegate, I will call upon anyone who wishes to speak.

You all have the Paper in question in your hands. You are therefore fully conversant with the ideas expressed and I therefore throw the discussion open.

Does no one wish to speak?

Perhaps we might discuss the three Papers together? I will therefore call upon anyone who wishes to speak on any of the three Papers. (Silence).

Gentlemen, you know that silence means consent,

Mr. R. Wright :

First of all, a point of order :

I would like to know if I am speaking only to the traditionally accredited delegates, here. I don't know.

The Chairman.

I will answer Mr. Wright immediately that very likely there are some people here who are not exactly "Delegates".

We allowed everyone to come in who was waiting in the courtyard, but as I was careful to explain in closing our last Session, it is fully understood that our assembly this evening is *purely private* in character, limited to Delegates only. But you will quite understand that courtesy compelled us to admit those who were waiting in that hope. On the other hand, it goes without saying that no one who is not a delegate may take part in the discussion.