



# Senghor's Eucharist: Negritude and African Political Theology

by David Tonghou Ngong

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David Tonghou Ngong's *Senghor's Eucharist* is one of the most inventive books I have read in quite some time. The synthesis of so many disciplines, speaking to each and all of them at times, makes for a creative and successful monograph. Ngong engages African Studies, theology and religion, political philosophy, English (and the subfield of poetry in particular) and Black Atlantic history within his analysis of Leopold Senghor's book of poetry, translated to *Black Hosts* (*Hosties noires*), written sometime between 1938 and 1945. *Senghor's Eucharist*, as Ngong claims, is also particularly inventive because it is the first extensive engagement of poetry in contemporary African Christian theology. Readers and scholars of all these diverse disciplines would be wise to read and examine this book closely.

In *Senghor's Eucharist*, Ngong interprets *Black Hosts* as a book of poetry about healing most broadly; the suffering of Africans is like a eucharist through which a fractured world may be healed. In these poems, Senghor interprets the suffering of Africans and the sins of the world such as slavery, colonialism and imperialism in both the Old and New Worlds which may be pardoned. As Ngong argues, not only is the suffering of Africans a site of healing, but as the context from which the world may be transformed from a brutal place to one of communion amongst all peoples. Through Africa both Africa and the world can be saved. Furthermore, Ngong claims that *Black Hosts* engages Negritude in a specific way, as an idea and movement with worldmaking potential. Ngong argues that '...Senghor's Eucharist creates not only a Pan-Africanist vision but also a cosmopolitan vision aimed at stitching the fragments of Africa and the world together and creating a pluriversal politics characterized by cosmopolitan connectedness rather than ethnic or racial fragmentation (p. 8).' Finally, this monograph is framed by three strands: political theology, world-making discourses in African studies and Black critical thought.

This book is comprised of five main chapters. Chapter one discusses Negritude through Senghor's poetry, situating it in time and framing it with respect to African theology. Chapter two takes up the theme of refusal of communion – described as witchcraft within *Black Hosts* – and how legitimate communion between races and ethnicities might be realised. Chapter three addresses the problem of essentialism of Blackness, arguing that Senghor's

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poetry moves beyond ethnicity, Blackness and Pan-Africanism to produce a universal vision of society. Chapter four argues that suffering of Africans in the world is redemptive as Senghor explains in *Black Hosts*. And finally, in chapter five, Ngong argues that Senghor's offer of forgiveness should be interpreted as a form of resistance to exploitation and the construction of a just world order – a world order in which the West needs to acknowledge the wrongs it has committed against Africans, repent and offer restitution.

Chapter two, about witchcraft particularly, caught my attention – probably because I have written extensively about the phenomena in both my books, particularly in chapter three of *The West African Revival* which argues that the divine healing church Faith Tabernacle was so successful on the Guinea Coast during the 1920s because it mimicked local forms of religious expression, particular anti-witchcraft cults. The Christian battle against witchcraft was taken up by Ngong in this chapter as well, but in a particularly novel and inventive way in his analysis of Senghor's poetry. Ngong argues that Senghor uses this concept of witchcraft theologically as an analogy, linking religious imagery to that of political economy. Framed by the scholarship of anthropologists such as Peter Geschiere, Communion is like witchcraft in the oppression of African peoples by Euro-American society – like witchcraft which consumes human bodies – as communion is the enactment of the consumption of Christ. This has led to the suffering, consumption and death of African bodies. However, all is not lost, argues Ngong. Senghor offers a way out; his goal is to create a new world of friendship and community once again where the 'black child and the white child may walk hand in hand (p. 55)'. Senghor imagines equality of races, ethnicities and nations as eating together, an important African value, as Christians receive the Eucharist from the same chalice. This chapter, like all the others, struck me as a spectacularly inventive text that should be widely read by scholars in a multitude of disciplines.

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## **The Work of Repair: capacity after colonialism in the timber plantations of South Africa**

**by Thomas Cousins**  
**Fordham University Press, 2023.**

James Merron

University of Basel

Thomas Cousins' exceptional contribution – *The Work of Repair* – accounts for the social and historical topology of a timber plantation in KwaZulu-Natal.