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The "exotic" Black African in the French social imagination in the 1920s.

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THE "EXOTIC" BLACK AFRICAN IN THE FRENCH SOCIAL IMAGINATION IN THE 1920S

A Dissertation Presented

by

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DEDICATION

To D. C. B.

&

for S.L.S and Z.A.B.

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Anyone who has been in graduate school as long as I has amassed more debts--financial, social, and academic--than can ever be repaid. Perhaps, though, by honoring a few of the individuals who helped me finally finish and by passing on what I have learned to the next generation of students, I can truly begin to thank everyone who made my dissertation possible.

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ABSTRACT

THE "EXOTIC" BLACK AFRICAN IN THE FRENCH

SOCIAL IMAGINATION IN THE 1920S

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This dissertation, a study of one strand of French exoticism, discusses the representation and reception of the Black African and Caribbean Other, both of whom the French called the "*nègre*," from the Great War until 1930. Using a wide array of sources (novels, travelogues, advertisements, and photographs), I argue that representations of the *nègre* from French West Africa and the Antilles were constructed ambivalently in the French social imagination to define boundaries of the French self and to mediate cultural changes and social anxieties that World War I had furthered.

In Part I, I demonstrate how the Black African came to be represented as a *grand enfant* in popular culture during and after the Great War. This representation set the stage for the emergence of *négrophilisme* in the 1920s and for some romantic mixed-race relationships. But the *grand enfant* was a contested representation, and this dissertation shows that a battle to define the post-war "Black soul" broke out after René Maran, a Black Frenchman, published his novel, Batouala (1921).

In Part II, I analyze how the French depicted the Black African as the Other in "ethnographic" exhibitions, photographs, and advertisements. In the

1920s, the French represented the Black African as an exotic, primitive "type" in efforts to define post-war moral and social identities.

In Part III, I examine three French travelers to Africa. Writers Lucie Cousturier and André Gide demonstrate a limited French conception of extending fraternity to the Other and a reluctance to embrace the "oceanic" in Africa. Popular response to La Croisière noire, an automobile expedition through Africa, serves as the basis of my analysis of heroic exoticism.

Last, I examine French exoticist desires at the Bal nègre, a dance hall where ethno-eroticism and carnivalesque mixing of races flourished. Some contemporary observers, like writer Paul Morand, feared fluidity across the color line. Morand's exoticism is invoked to demonstrate how *négrophilisme* and *négrophobisme* became intertwined in the French social imagination in the 1920s. Thus this dissertation offers a complex account of French history that problematizes the myth of a non-racist France.

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INTRODUCTION

Just months before Josephine Baker's triumphant debut in the Revue Nègre, now celebrated as one of the defining moments of French *négrophilisme,* the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs opened--a defining moment in French aesthetics. After perusing the fashionable galleries and strolling past the usual rides, like the "*toboggan*" and the "*cascade*" at the "parc des attractions," a Frenchman could easily be enticed by an anomalous diversion: "Le jeu de massacre vivant ou le 'nègre à l'eau.'" There, seated on a plank of wood over a pool of cold water, was what the French called a *nègre*; anonymous, the *nègre* was targeted only because he was black. For some pocket change, a fun seeker received a few balls and threw them at a target. If a ball hit the bulls-eye, the plank dropped and the *nègre* fell into the water: "*après deux ou trois baignades*," Robert de Beauplan reported for L'Illustration, "*on voit le nègre transi...*"[1] De Beauplan did not speculate why a Frenchman would find it sporting to dunk a *nègre*, but he suggested that it was related to the modern French identity: "Dis-moi comment tu t'amuses," he claimed, "et je te dirai qui tu es!"[2]

In a period as lively as the *années folles*, the French found many ways to amuse themselves, define themselves, and grapple with the consequences of the Great War.[3] Arguably the most colorful diversion in the 1920s, and one integral to the post-war definition of the French self, was exoticism in a variety of forms and genres. This dissertation is about one strand of exoticism in the French social imagination. It is about the intertwining of race and notions of civilization in the reception and representation of the *nègre*, the exotic Black Other, from the Great War until 1930. Specifically, I will argue that

representations of the *nègre* from Africa and the Antilles were constructed ambivalently in the French imagination as a means of mediating the cultural changes and social anxieties that World War I furthered.

Before the Great War, there were few Blacks in the metropole. When war broke out, France, unlike Great Britain or Germany, called on its African subjects to fight on European soil, and some 200,000 Black African soldiers served in France, 140,000 of whom saw combat, 31,000 of whom died.[4] Most of these soldiers returned to French West Africa after the armistice. Only a handful of Black Africans were in France in the 1920s. In fact, in 1926, an official census report counted only 2580 Black Africans living in the hexagon.[5] There were, however, probably closer to 5000, most living in Paris. In addition, there were some 10,000 Blacks from the French Antilles in the metropole.[6] Despite the paucity of their numbers in metropolitan France, Black colonial subjects from Afrique Occidentale Française (A.O.F.) and Afrique Equatoriale Française (A.E.F.) and Black citizens from the Antilles figured prominently in French exoticism and the cultural life of France in the 1920s.

The historiography on the range of relationships between Blacks and the French after the Great War typically divides neatly between social and cultural studies of African Americans in Paris and political and economic studies of French colonialism, two vastly different subjects. African Americans came to France in the 1920s to play jazz, write, study art, and to escape the brutal racism they experienced in the United States. The French warmly received African Americans and even enshrined Josephine Baker as one of the very symbols of interwar French cultural life. The story of African Americans in France has been told in a large body of writing, much of it celebrating African American accomplishments and French racial tolerance.[7]

Much less celebratory is the historiography on French colonialism in Africa. After the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), the French, in competition with other European powers, raced through Africa, "pacified" local populations, and imposed a colonial structure on almost 20 million West and Equatorial Africans spread over some three million square miles. French colonialism, like French domestic politics, was highly centralized: the colonies were ruled from Paris through local officials chosen in Paris. There was little, formal, local African autonomy. Although the French believed in the righteousness of their civilizing mission, few Africans were ever assimilated, or even given the chance to assimilate into France. Rather, French colonialism ensured the subordinate status of Africa and African subjects, as symbolized by the imposition of the *indigénat*, an arbitrary system of laws that gave administrators broad summary power to imprison and fine *indigènes*. Indeed, French colonial rule could be harsh: Africans suffered under forced labor and heavy tax burdens that put African resources into the service of the French government and concessionary companies. The exercise of French power over West and Equatorial Africa has been well detailed in a voluminous historiography.[8]

By contrast, the subject of my dissertation, a study of the representations of Black Africans in metropolitan French popular culture, has received relatively little scholarly attention.[9] Although representations of Blacks in French culture were intimately associated with colonialism and must be understood as part of the matrix of the exercise of French colonial power, that subject deserves full treatment by itself. My work does, however, attempt to draw some instrumental links between representations and the political-economy of French imperialism. More extensively though, my work focuses on how the French viewed the Black Other in the metropolitan cultural arena and the functions that the Black Other served in the French social imagination.

Exoticism and Post-war Exoticism

"Exotic" and "exoticism" are terms much bandied about, often employed so ambiguously that they cease to be meaningful. This dissertation will explore some of the contours, manifestations, and ramifications of exoticism in the French imagination in the 1920s. "Exoticism," derived from the Greek word meaning foreign, is a form of relativism where an Other is valorized or denigrated as a means of defining, exalting, or denigrating the self. Exoticism is escapist: it looks far beyond one's social and material world. It is, however, less about reality than about ideals and fantasies. Indeed, the exotic is constructed as a distant, picturesque Other that evokes feelings, emotions, and ideals in the self that have been considered lost in the civilizing process.[10] Integral to exoticism is ethno-eroticism. Ethno-eroticism, as I use the term, is the state of sexual arousal and desire for a specific people solely because of their racial or ethnic identity. And in the 1920s, the exotic and ethno-erotic were readily available to the French in many cultural products: exhibitions, films, *bals*, advertisements, and literature.

Exoticism in French letters had a long and noble tradition. From the beginning of the age of exploration of the new world through the Enlightenment, travel literature, one of the earliest genres of exoticism, not only was popular in France, but also formed one basis for ethnological and philosophical thought on exotic peoples. Indeed, the noble savage of traveler's imagination, for example, most often identified with Amerindians, with whom the French came in contact with in the 1520s, provided French thinkers with a useful construct for exploring cultural relativism. Montaigne's Of Cannibals in the sixteenth century is, perhaps, the most celebrated use of the idealized and imagined Other to critique French society. In the eighteenth century, many *philosophes*, Voltaire and Montesquieu, to name just two, employed the exotic Other as a foil for

cultural criticism.[11] Although literary exoticism could and did highlight French shortcomings, the *philosophes* did not necessarily valorize the primitive. Indeed, Rousseau, who is often identified with exoticism but really did not write about specific exotic people, just the hypothetical *sauvage*, argued civil society was corrupt, but he also claimed the savage state of man in nature was far from perfect, preferring for himself an ideal intermediate between nature and civil society.[12]

While some *philosophes* transformed the exotic Other into a metaphor for social criticism, others saw in him a breed of man that needed to be classified and categorized, giving rise to racialist thought. In the eighteenth century, Lamarck and Buffon explained phenotypic differences among men environmentally. Their evolutionist hypotheses, which proposed non-Western peoples could, potentially, evolve over time to be similar to Europeans, fell out of favor by the late eighteenth century. Biology, race, not environment, many Frenchmen came to believe, determined man's destiny, and biology was considered fixed, immutable. French science, which supported and advanced racialist thought, was the foundation for the study of exotic peoples in the new discipline of anthropology, which privileged physical anthropology, not cultural ethnography, from the eighteenth century until World War I. French anthropology, though it made a fetish of science, paradoxically became intimately associated with aesthetics, and thus human moral qualities became associated with physicality. Franz Josef Gall's phrenology, for example, which drew moral and social conclusions based on the shape of one's head, was wildly popular in nineteenth century France and influenced Paul Broca, the founder in 1859 of the Anthropological Society in Paris. In short, from the Enlightenment through the nineteenth century, in scientific thought and popular thought, the visible human body came to be considered a sign for internal moral

and intellectual qualities. Europeans established themselves as the standard for beauty and morality. Exotic people were classified as inferior to Europeans, and Blacks were classified as the most inferior breed of man, closer to animals than Europeans on the chain of being.[13]

Far from being on the margins of social thought, scientific racialist thinking and all of its judgments about the inferiority of exotic people, especially Blacks, informed literary exoticism and the social imagination of the French. In the late nineteenth century, however, no French author of exotic literature could rate with the *philosophes* intellectually, but the genre found its greatest popular writer: Pierre Loti (1853-1923). Loti, who evoked the very perfume of distant lands, also, as Léon Fanoudh-Siefer has argued, crystallized the modern derogatory French myth of the Black African Other in Le Roman d'un Spahi (1881).[14] Loti mined both vulgar anthropology and the diffuse stock representations of Africa and Africans to create a powerful fantasy of an imagined exotic people and place. Not long after this extremely popular novel was published, the French colonized West and Equatorial Africa and had their first real-life encounter with the Black Other.

Exoticism, which had hitherto sprung more from imagination than direct empirical experience with the Other, was at a turning point by World War I. Indeed, literary exoticism, critic Roland Lebel claimed on the eve of the 1931 Exposition Coloniale, had been replaced by a new genre: colonial literature. Colonial literature, unlike exoticism, he argued, did not trade in clichés and curiosities; rather, it was comprised of "*des œuvres exactes.*"[15] Although it still must be emotive, colonial literature was no longer of "*l'exotisme pittoresque, subjectif ou sentimental...* [nor] *des œuvres d'imagination mais d'observation, s'inspirant des données de l'ethnographie... pour révéler une humanité ignorée.*"[16] Lebel is not convincing, and I will refer to the literature I research

as exotic. More importantly, though, Lebel's argument marked a transition and tension in French exoticism that this dissertation explores. Namely, I argue that a certain vulgar ethnography influenced post-war exoticism and representations of the *nègre* in the social imagination of the French.

A Note on a Problematic Terminology

This dissertation will use some decidedly unfashionable terms. In the 1920s, the French employed a quite limited vocabulary to refer to their multivalent representations of the Black Other. Most often, the Black was referred to as the *nègre*, a noun but which could also function as an adjective. The Black African was also called the *indigène*, an administrative term referring to all colonial subjects. *Noir*, now a preferred term, was used much less frequently, and *homme de couleur* was rarely employed. On the eve of the war, Larousse defined "*nègre*" in terms of color and invidiously as, "'*homme, femme à peau noire. C'est le nom donné spécialement aux habitants de certaines contrées de l'Afrique... qui forment une race d'hommes noire, inférieure en intelligence à la race blanche dite caucasienne.*'"[17] In common usage in the 1920s, however, the word *nègre* was not exclusively used pejoratively, notwithstanding Larousse's negative reference of Blacks as compared to whites. Despite its derogatory connotations today and in the past, I will retain the term *nègre* in this dissertation for its historical accuracy and ambivalent descriptive qualities. Moreover, since this dissertation is an exploration of the peculiar French construct of the *nègre*, not the *noir*, the former term will be employed. The term *indigène* will be used to refer to French ethnographic descriptions of the colonized Black Other in the 1920s. *Indigène* must not, however, be seen as a neutral term: integral to its definition was the French belief that colonial subjects were much less civilized than the French. Finally,

when I analyze my data from my late twentieth century perspective, I will generally use the term, the Black Other.

The French, especially vulgar ethnographers, employed two other now problematic terms for the Black Other in the 1920s: *sauvage* and *primitif*. Neither term was inherently derogatory. Both savage and primitive could refer to man in nature, untainted by civilization. In common usage, however, savage was employed derisively to describe a man considered barbaric, dangerous, and independent of any civilized morality. The "noble savage," a term most often applied to Amerindians in the eighteenth century, was rarely employed to describe the Black African in the 1920s. Primitive, by contrast, referred to one without civilization--but not without some morality and capacity for civilization. The primitive, more so than the savage, was often valorized in the 1920s and was the object of many exotic fantasies and quests. These exotic fantasies, I argue, though often acted out, were more often the province of the French social imagination, a concept I frequently employ in this dissertation. A social imagination, as I define it, is constituted by broadly held mental images, formed often in the absence of a direct experience, that bind individuals to a wider group identity. In this dissertation, I argue that representations of exotic Black Africans, as part of the French social imagination in the 1920s, helped define and stabilize French identity during the interwar years.

Sources and Foreshadowing

To explore the many representations of the *nègre* in the French social imagination, I have mined an eclectic range of sources: newspapers, exotic fiction and non-fiction, book and film reviews, photographs, advertisements, product trademarks, and even a few government documents. In the first section of this dissertation, describing how the hexagon was exposed to the

Black African Other during and just after the Great War, I examine the reception of the *tirailleur sénégalese* as the *grand enfant* which, I argue, helped to create the conditions for the subsequent flourishing of *négrophilisme*. I then analyze how the French conceived of the *nègre* in love, and I conclude this section with an extended discussion of the first Black Prix Goncourt winner, René Maran, and the contested battle to define the Black soul. In the second section, I examine how the French represented the *nègre* as radically other in local "ethnographic" exhibitions and photography. This section ends with an analysis of some of the myths that advertisements promoted of the *nègre*. In the third section, I examine three French travelers to Africa. The problems of extending fraternity to the Other and embracing the "oceanic" are explored in the travelogues of Lucie Cousturier and André Gide, and heroic exoticism is analyzed in work of La Croisière noire--Frenchmen who crossed Africa in automobiles. Finally, I detail the carnivalesque exotic mixing of races at the Bal nègre in Paris and the fear of such crossings at the end of the decade in Paul Morand's Magie noire.

It was not uncommon in the 1920s for the French to extend or to believe that they were extending their high humanistic ideals to the exotic Black Other. More often, however, the French fell far short of living up to their ideals as they denigrated the Black Other in the most graphic of representations. But in contrast to the United States where racism was institutionalized and legislated, on metropolitan French soil, the reception and representation of the Black Other were predominantly in the fluid cultural arena, to which we must now turn.

Endnotes

[1]Robert de Beauplan, "A Travers le Parc des Attractions," L'Illustration, 8 août 1925, 147.

[2]Ibid.

[3]For the best study of French diversions and attempts to grapple with the consequences of the Great War, see Charles Rearick, The French in Love and War (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997). See also Jay Winter, Sites of memory, sites of mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[4]See Joe Harris Lunn, "Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1993).

[5]Archives nationales section Outre-mer, Slotfom serie 6, carton 9.

[6]See Philippe Dewitte, Les Mouvements nègres en France 1919-1939 (Paris: Éditions L'Harattan, 1985), 26; see also page 40. Dewitte estimates from police reports that there were some twice as many Africans in France as the official census reported. The number of Antillais in the metropole was difficult to ascertain: the French census did not identify the race of a citizen.

[7]A fine account of this subject is Tyler Stovall, Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996). See also Phyllis Rose, Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time (New York: Doubleday, 1989), Catherine Bernard, Afro-American Artists in Paris: 1919-1939 (New York: The Hunter College Art Galleries, 1989), and Michel Fabre, La Rive noire: De Harlem à la Seine (Paris: Editions Lieu commun, 1985).

[8]For classic treatments of French colonialism, see Henri Brunschwig, French Colonialism, 1871-1914 (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), Raoul Girardet, L'Idée coloniale en France (Paris: Editions de la Table Ronde, 1972), Raymond F. Betts, Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914 (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1961), and Jacques Marseille, Empire colonial et capitalisme français: Histoire d'un divorce (Paris: Albin Michel, 1984). More specifically for African colonialism, see A. S. Kanya Forstner, The Conquest of the Western Sudan: A study in French Military Imperialism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), Patrick Manning, Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa, 1880-1985 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, ed., L'Afrique occidentale au temps des Français: colonisateurs et colonisés, c. 1860-1960 (Paris, 1992), and Alice L. Conklin, A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

[9]See Raymond Corbey, "Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930," Cultural Anthropology 8 (August 1933): 338-369, Pascal Blanchard, Stéphane Blanchoin, Nicolas Bancel, Gilles Boëtsch, et Hubert Gerbeau, eds. L'Autre et Nous, <<Scènes et Types>> (Paris: Syros et ACHAC, 1995), Pascal Blanchard et Armelle Chatelier, eds. Images et colonies (Paris: Syros et ACHAC, 1993), and Jan Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture (New Haven and

London: Yale University Press, 1992). In addition, for an excellent intellectual history that in many ways prefaces my dissertation, see William B. Cohen, The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880 (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980).

[10]My definition of exoticism is a synthesis of Tzvetan Todorov, On Human Diversity, Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), Dorothy M. Figueira, The Exotic: A Decadent Quest (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), and François Jost, Introduction to Comparative Literature (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, Co., 1974).

[11]See Cohen, The French Encounter, Todorov, On Human Diversity, and Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black.

[12]Todorov, On Human Diversity, 277-282.

[13]See Cohen, The French Encounter and George L. Mosse, Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

[14]See Léon Fanoudh-Siefer, Le Mythe du nègre et de l'Afrique Noire dans la littérature française (de 1800 à la 2e Guerre Mondiale) (Paris: Libraire C. Klincksieck, 1968).

[15]Roland Lebel, Histoire de la littérature coloniale en France (Paris: Libraire Larose, 1931), 82.

[16]Ibid., 143.

[17]The 1914 Larousse was cited by Jean Pirotte, "Les Populations d'Afrique et d'Asie d'après les revues des missions et les dictionnaires (1889-1940)," in Stéréotypes nationaux et préjugés raciaux aux XIXe et XXe siècles ed. Jean Pirotte (Leuven: Recueil de Travaux, 1982), 83.

CHAPTER 1

TIRAILLEURS SENEGALAIS AND THE MAKING OF THE *GRAND ENFANT*

Vous Tirailleurs Sénégalais, mes frères noirs à la main chaude sous la glace et la mort
Qui pourra vous chanter si ce n'est votre frère d'armes, votre frère de sang?

Je ne laisserai pas la parole aux ministres, et pas aux généraux
Je ne laisserai pas--non!--les louanges de mépris vous enterrer furtivement.
Vous n'êtes pas des pauvres aux poches vides sans honneur
Mais je déchirerai les rires banania sur tous les murs de France...

Léopold Sédar Senghor[1]

On 14 July 1913, a year before the Great War, a number of *tirailleurs sénégalais* marched through the streets of Paris. Their triumph really belonged to General Charles Mangin's: four years earlier he had initiated a public campaign to create a *force noire*. Mangin, a colonial officer, believed that France had been weakened from depopulation and democratic ideals, and he argued that the colonies could provide a reservoir of men both to defend and to regenerate France.[2] He could not have been more prophetic. The Great War, obviously, gave the colonies the opportunity to defend France, and 200,000 soldiers from Afrique Occidentale Française (A.O.F.) served in the metropole during the war. This service had a profound effect on French culture. Indeed, prior to the war, there were few Black Africans in France, save those commodified in spectacles.[3] More significantly, at that time the image of Blacks in the popular French mentality was overwhelmingly negative. During and after the era of colonial conquest, the mass press wrote numerous sensational stories about savage Black Africans.[4] In addition, late nineteenth-century anthropologists "scientifically" determined Africans to be a primitive, if not atavistic, breed of man, and in science and in literature Blacks were also considered to be dangerously sexualized.[5] Finally, in advertisements, Blacks

were commoditied as servile, comic, and physically grotesque.[6] Given the necessity of hosting savages on French soil to fight Boche barbarians, the French consciously constructed a new representation for Africans--or rather a new representation for those Africans enlisted in the service of civilization. The French represented the heroic *tirailleur* as a *grand enfant*, rather than as a man, whether in iconography, literature, or memory in order to make sense of France's new, unsettling situation during and after the Great War.

Y'a bon

In 1909, Pierre-François Lardet, an ex-banker and journalist, was near Lake Managua, Nicaragua when he tasted a native drink that soon would exercise a greater impact on the French social imagination than on its culinary tradition.[7] Once back in France, Lardet created Banania based on the drink he loved in Nicaragua, a breakfast cereal made from *farine de banane*, barley, chocolate, and sugar. When Banania was first produced and marketed in 1912, Lardet chose not to associate the cereal with Latin America. From its inception, Banania was associated with the French Antilles. The first boxes of Banania had on them an ideal type of Antillaise: a light-skinned woman with a madras head scarf and a madras shawl covering her shoulders. She was, by contemporary French standards, an attractive, European-featured, island woman--neither sexualized nor caricatured. She appeared almost maternal, exuding island warmth. The image Banania used was not, in fact, unique to Banania: other products had legally deposed *marques*, trademark symbols, with essentially the same Antillaise iconographic image.[8] More important, however, was Banania's first advertising poster. In 1914 Charles Tichon designed a poster for Banania showing the light-skinned Antillaise surrounded by bananas and banana leaves pouring out Banania to diminutive

representations of the French with outstretched arms [Figure 1]. The Antillaise was giving more than cereal to the *poilu* and other assorted French *menu types*. Out of the cans of Banania came the words, "Vigueur," "Energie," "Santé," and "Force." Banania, and the exotic colonies, were engaged in the loyal service to a troubled France.

Although the Antillaise remained on Banania boxes for a generation, her prominence on advertising posters was short-lived, being replaced by a male image. The war and the *tirailleurs* who fought on the Western Front in 1914 offered a new advertising opportunity for Lardet's young company: on 30 August 1915, the smiling Bonhomme Banania *marque* was legally deposed, and de Andreis's poster, "Banania y'a bon," was posted throughout France [Figure 2].[9] The Bonhomme Banania was a great success, and his image reflected and shaped a new understanding of the black African in service to France.

De Andreis's image is remarkable for its almost total break with the prevailing repertoire of representations of Blacks. First, the Bonhomme Banania was not caricatured. His eyes were not like billiard balls nor were his lips absurdly large. He was not grotesque. Rather, the *tirailleur* was a handsome, life-like representation of the *nègre* from French West Africa. Second, the *tirailleur* was resplendent in his brightly colored chechia, white pants, blue coat, and clean boots. He was not in livery, and his attire was neither humorous nor servile. Since the wearing of clothes and especially shoes in colonial iconography symbolized the attainment of some level of civilization, the sartorial splendor of the *tirailleur* was a sympathetic rendering of a semi-civilized warrior. Yet the African as warrior was attenuated: his rifle was only hinted at, and his legendary *coupe-coupe*, a long knife, was totally absent. Last, the *tirailleur* was feeding himself--not a Frenchman. The advertisement

Figure 1. Banania advertisement of Antillaise, 1914.

Figure 2. Banania "Y'a bon" advertisement, 1915.

showed the *tirailleur* seated on a box of Banania eating cereal with a spoon, a sure sign of civilization. This striking Black Bonhomme appeared clean, happy, and somewhat autonomous.

But he was not an autonomous man: his wide smile subverted his manhood. The central element of de Andreis's poster was, in fact, the Bonhomme's smile. The smile was more than an artistic vehicle to contrast or rather reinforce the darkness of the *nègre*'s black skin. In the French imagination, it was also a symbol for the *nègre*'s essence: he was a happy child, and his range of emotions was limited to the simple, naive joy of a child. Moreover, only a child or one with limited civilization would say "*y'a bon.*" Pidgin French or *petit nègre*, as it was called, was the French language of the *tirailleurs*. The military, which believed that Africans were incapable of abstract thought (as we will see below), only taught *tirailleurs* this limited French--enough to get by and understand orders.[10] Unable to communicate well with the French, it was no wonder that the *tirailleur* smiled his way through the metropole. In iconography, in policy, and in the French mentality, the African was constructed as a *grand enfant* in service to France and in need of French paternalism.

The Banania company did much to cultivate this representation of Blacks. In the 1920s, for example, the company not only plastered the walls of France with the Bonhomme, but also disseminated cartoons of the Bonhomme for advertising, like the print cartoon strip, "The Story of Bamboula." Bamboula means a little drum or a wild dance and was commonly used as a paternalistic and derogatory name for Blacks. This cartoon strip opened with the *tirailleur,* Bamboula, being shipped home with boxes of Banania. His ship sank, but he was saved by holding on to his floating boxes of Banania. Bamboula floated to a savage land inhabited by half-naked, grass-skirted primitives. Here, he

became a "*planteur de bananas pour Banania*," but now Bamboula appeared barefoot and more ape-like than *tirailleur*.[11] Only by working for France will the African, once civilized, not completely de-evolve in his native land. Once again in French service, albeit not military service, Bamboula was shown with his *tirailleur* uniform; he then married a "*belle indigène*" and had a large family. In the pro-natalist 1920s, being married and having a large family was a civilized act. Finally, in the last frame of the cartoon, Bamboula's head, surrounded by bananas, appeared on a poster above two French children eating Banania. The caption read: "*Aujourd'hui tous les petits Français grâce à Bamboula se régalent de bon Banania*."[12] The future of France feasted on the happy work of the *indigène*. More than showing the colonies in service to the metropole, cartoons like this reinforced the construct of the Black as a smiling child, happy to be alive and under French rule and whose identity was defined by his relationship with *la patrie*.

The Bonhomme's smile became an iconic synecdoche for the Black Other as a *grand enfant*. Sometime within a generation after the Banania *tirailleur* was born, the artist G. Elizabeth altered and emasculated the Bonhomme. Now, the Bonhomme's body was erased and only his head, smile, chechia, and disembodied hand cradling a spoon along with the words, "*y'a bon*" represented Banania [Figure 3]. The adult, Black male body, dangerously sexualized in the French imagination, was now rendered so harmless that it disappeared.

Banania advertisements, with their symbolic control over the Black body, can best be understood when placed in the wide context of French culture. These images form only a part of the matrix of cultural thought about the Black Other during and after the war, but they were so appealing that they advanced French *négrophilisme* in the 1920s, taming and making available the Black

Figure 3. Banania advertisement of an emasculated Bonhomme, c. 1930s.

Other to the French social imagination. Moreover, the Bonhomme representation, I contend, constituted the dominant memory of Black Africans in the war and in service to France. In truth, during the war and in the early 1920s, few Frenchmen had much direct experience with Blacks. Indeed, the *tirailleurs*, as well as the African-American soldiers, were segregated in units and geographically localized, usually in the south of France. Few were given leave for Paris. Banania images, however, were mass produced, as were exotic novels and non-fiction, and thus given the visible absence of *tirailleurs*, the dominant construction of the *nègre* during the War and the later memory of him remained as a *grand enfant.*

The French Reception of the *Tirailleur*

From Mangin's La Force Noire (1910) until the end of the war, the French military exerted a substantial influence on the construction of the popular representation of the *nègre.* And although the military had mixed feelings about the efficacy of *tirailleurs* in battle, officers were rather consistent in their belief and their writings that the Black African was child-like. Léon Gaillet, sous-lieutenant d'infanterie coloniale, wrote the first reportage on *tirailleurs*, Coulibaly, Les Sénégalais sur la terre de France, and his work demonstrated a change in representations of the *nègre.*[13] The *grand enfant* became the dominant ideal type for the good or noble Black Other who otherwise had no individuality. Actually, Coulibaly was a real *tirailleur:* he was General Mangin's personal bodyguard who in 1914 heroically drove off eleven Germans threatening Mangin.[14] But for Gaillet, Coulibaly was not an individual; he was every *tirailleur:* "*Coulibaly c'est le noir, le noir type.*"[15]

Coulibaly was not a tabula rasa for Gaillet initially viewed him in terms of nineteenth century stereotypes. The Black African was repulsive. "*Ce qui fait*

tort à Coulibaly? mais c'est d'abord ce qui est le plus apparent chez lui, c'est tout son extérieur: couleur, forme, allure, accoutrement."[16] Reflecting popular thought, Gaillet not only found the Black Other distasteful, but also considered him an aberration: something was wrong with him as a man. Moreover, Coulibaly's behavior reflected prewar stereotypes. When Coulibaly ate, he resembled the "*grands singes en pleine Afrique.*"[17] There was little *a priori* reason to like Coulibaly, but on French soil, he became an object of Gaillet's curiosity. Gaillet's repulsion and curiosity ultimately led him to love Coulibaly: "*le connaître, c'est aimer.*"[18]

Coulibaly was not understood as a fully developed mature man; rather, he was imagined only in terms of his incapacities. Gaillet accepted that Coulibaly was capable of learning, including learning how to read. He was not, however, capable of abstract thought, scientific knowledge, curiosity, or even conceiving of controlling his world--in short, the French Enlightenment project. "*Il ne sait point observer, il est presque incapable de comparer et d'abstraire... Il n'a point d'initiative. Il est sans gêne. Il est nature.*"[19]

In contact with the French, Gaillet stated, Coulibaly changed. He ceased to be himself, a primitive, but he would never be able to achieve the level of civilization of the French.

> *Entre cette humanité à l'état d'enfance et notre civilisation beaucoup trop complexe pour elle, l'écart me semblait trop grand. Coulibaly était incapable de profiter de celle-ci.... A notre contact il se déformait et se gâtait inevitablement. Il cessait d'être lui-même sans pouvoir devenir, au vrai sens du mot, un civilisé.*[20]

He could become nothing greater than a *grand enfant.*

"*Oui, Coulibaly pense, parle, agit comme un enfant,*" and he was a sympathetic child, a worthy child.[21] He was worthy of French affection, Gaillet argued, because he was an admirable soldier. Though some challenged Coulibaly's courage, Gaillet stated that he performed well under fire. Moreover,

with the *coupe-coupe*, the African machete, he was fearless: "*Personne en France ne met en doute la valeur et le courage de Coulibaly quand il s'agit de combattre à la baïonnette.*"[22] More than his fighting efficacy, Coulibaly should be loved for honoring a noble French ideal: Coulibaly, Gaillet argued, "*savait mourir pour la France.*"[23] That this primitive, good-hearted being could learn to die for France was remarkable, but it still did not mean that Coulibaly had much agency in his life--children did not: "*Coulibaly a fait ses preuves. Mais à qui donc le devons-nous?*"[24] Gaillet answered: the colonial officer.

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The *nègre* as a *grand enfant* was a recent construct in popular culture, dating to the introduction of Black Africans on French soil during the war. Although few in France had much access to the soldiers, the French, especially women, readily accepted the representation of the *grand enfant*, evidence suggests. In 1920, Lucie Cousturier, a middle aged, minor but known painter and writer, published Des Inconnus Chez Moi, the most extensive and sympathetic account of a civilian encounter with African soldiers during the war. Cousturier's work detailed her experience befriending a number of *tirailleurs* encamped near her *bastide* near Fréjus, on the Côte d'Azur, between 1916 and 1919 (for her later relationship with Black Africans, see Chapter 7). Cousturier readily invited the soldiers into her home, taught them French, and corresponded with them after they were sent to the front. Although Cousturier represented the Black African as a *grand enfant*, she, unlike Gaillet and authors of exotic fiction, both humanized and individualized the *nègre*, bestowing on him the dignity of intelligence while simultaneously essentializing his smile.

Cousturier's initial reaction to the presence of Black Africans in the hexagon was a mixture of a little fear and a great deal of dissatisfaction with the prevailing stereotypes of the soldiers. In fact, the French generally greeted the
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soldiers with suspicion and fear. Some metropolitans, though not Cousturier herself, she stated, were afraid for their daughters "*parmi ces sauvages... Pensez! si l'on était prises par ces gorilles*!"[25] The fear of racial pollution, what O. Mannoni called the "Prospero Complex" (see Chapter 10), was a fantasy in France--but compared to the fear in America at this time, it had little emotive force and did not significantly shape the reception of the *indigène.* Moreover, for Cousturier, one of the least prejudiced of persons but also one who reflected social constructs, the Black African was an unknown being. In 1916, she claimed that "*je me suis trouvée tout à coup en présence d'êtres inconnus, au sujet desquels ni mon expérience personnelle ni la science en général n'ont pu me fournir de renseignements.*"[26]

It was clear to Cousturier that the *indigènes* had a human form. Beyond that not inconsiderable concession, Cousturier knew little else, save judging the information available to her about the *indigènes* as unsatisfying. She immediately discovered that the *indigène* was classified as a *nègre*, a construct she deemed problematic: "*le mot 'nègre,' en effet, symbolise inversement parmi nous, la frénésie brutale, la laideur satanique et autres chimères nocturnes.*"[27] Furthermore, the French military's policies, she suggested, were most recently responsible for denigrating the soldiers as sub-humans, even monkeys. Conversely, Cousturier, and women in general, she claimed citing scant evidence, rejected tarnishing these beings with a modern version of the fable of Ham: "*les femmes, même les plus ignorantes du monde, étant plus fines que les sous-officiers de l'armée coloniale, elles renoncèrent, dès premier bonjour échangé avec les étrangers, à dire: 'ce sont des singes' pour affirmer: 'ce sont des enfants.'*"[28] Cousturier, similarly affected by recent popular representations of the Black African, was only slightly less maternal than other women: "*Pour moi, si je risquais un nom sur leurs figures, morales et*

physiques, ce serait le mot 'hommes,' ou 'hommes souriants...'"[29] The *indigène* may not have been a *nègre* to Cousturier, but he was also, like the Bonhomme Banania, not a fully realized autonomous man; his smile defined him.

Moreover, the *indigène* was not even immediately recognizable as an individual. Cousturier was unprepared and, in fact, incapable of individuating them. The *tirailleurs* all looked alike to her. "*L'un de ces phénomènes est notre inaptitude à distinguer sur les épaules d'un nègre autre chose qu'une boule noire agrémentée d'un peu d'émail blanc--les dents, les yeux--destiné, semble-t-il, à suggérer: par ici, la face*!"[30] Cousturier was not claiming that all *nègres* looked alike. Rather, she asserted that it was a metropolitan trait, a lack of aptitude in the French, not to perceive the Other as an individual. Cousturier, however, had the heart and desire to develop the understanding necessary to differentiate the soldiers and bestow upon them the dignity of personhood. It only took her, an artist, a few months to begin to distinguish the *indigène* from the dominant ideal type of *indigène*, the *nègre*. When Cousturier met Saër Gueye in early 1917, for example, she saw his individualistic traits. He was the

> *premier individu de sa race dont nous ayons perçu exactement les traits... Nous nous rappelons bien les yeux intelligents de Saër, sa bouche puissante sans lourdeur, sa peau mate, son visage mince aux joues longues et fines, avec assez de front et de menton pour ne pas déconcerter notre esthétique européenne. Nous ne savions pas encore dire, en 1917, qu'un noir est joli...*[31]

In the next few years, however, Cousturier's thought would evolve: she learned to accept the *indigène* as aesthetically pleasing, a possessor of beauty, even beauty as a universal ideal.

By chance and out of her perceived need to keep busy the soldiers she met, Cousturier began teaching them French. Structuring her relations with Black Africans around teaching forced Cousturier to reflect on the intellectual

aptitude of the *indigène*. The *nègre* in France was neither considered intelligent nor even believed to be capable of learning. When she first started teaching the soldiers, a doctor said to her: "'*Vous leur permettez de se reposer très souvent, n'est-ce pas? Ces cerveaux rudimentaires ne sauraient s'attacher longtemps à une même idée.*'"[32] Cousturier thought otherwise, and her students were dedicated and easily demonstrated the aptitude to learn as lofty a language as French.

Few of the African soldiers that Cousturier met knew much French, despite many of them having been in the military since before the Great War. Rather, they spoke a language Cousturier called "*espéranto militaire*," her euphemism for *petit nègre*, the language the military taught the soldiers instead of proper French.[33] Indeed, the military's official pamphlet, "Le Français tel que le parlent nos tirailleurs sénégalais," instructed French officers to

> *enjoint la pure suppression des verbes français suivants: être, savoir, aimer, vouloir... et leur remplacement par les expressions respectives: y a, y a gagner, y a bon, y a content... Les autres verbes sont réduits à l'infinitif sans indication de personnes, ni de temps sauf par quelques adverbes...*[34]

Even merchants employed *petit nègre* to interact with the soldiers. The soldiers knew that their language mocked them: "*Les noirs ont appris, par les rires, que leur langage les ridiculise: 'c'est français seulement pour tirailleurs,' reconnaissent-ils tristement. Un de mes élèves, plus malveillant, assure que 'c'est des mots trouvés par les Européens pour se foutre des Sénégalais.*'"[35] Although Cousturier initially believed, like most French, that the *nègre* was incapable of abstract thought and therefore learning French, she came to believe *petit nègre* was a "*prison verbale*," and, more importantly, the Black African was capable of abstract thought and intelligence.[36] He just needed intellectual stimulation, which Cousturier provided teaching French verbs and therefore sophisticated thought.

Although Cousturier learned to love the Black African and find commonality with him, she also found it useful to conceived of him as a happy *grand enfant*. Over time, Cousturier accepted that she was similar to her students: "*Moi, je ne cherche pas comment les hommes sont vernis; je cherche comment ils aiment, pensent et souffrent. J'ai mêlé pendant trois années me rires et mes larmes avec ceux des noirs et je serais flattée de pouvoir dire que les miens ressemblent aux leurs.*"[37] Laughter and tears, though universal, are the emotions most associated with children--and women. Cousturier's humanistic universalism easily integrated the *grand enfant* and his limited range of emotions and attributes.

Furthermore for Cousturier, the Black African's smile embodied his essence --so much so that she rewrote the biblical creation myth to explain him.

> *Je viens ce découvrir la vraie version de la création de l'homme: Dieu ne le fit pas en une fois, comme on l'a toujours dit, mais en plusieurs fois. Le premier homme qu'il créa fut un nègre. C'était un jour où il était de bonne humeur. Il ne s'était pas proposé de créer précisément un homme; il s'était dit: je veux créer sur la terre le sourire, à l'image de ma belle humeur d'aujourd'hui. Comme tout bon artiste, il mit en avant son idée essentielle: les dents; il les blanchit, les sertit dans des lèvres épaisses comme un cadre riche, aplatit le nez de peur qu'il ne leur portât de l'ombre, et noircit la peau pour qu'on les vit mieux...*[38]

Later, when god was in bad humor, she suggested, he made whites. The smile was the essence of the *nègre* in her view. Cousturier had no intention of denigrating the Black African; however, her creation myth revived a form of the polygenesis thesis. Since at least the nineteenth century, some scientists had argued that Blacks and whites were of different origins.[39] Polygenism suggests, therefore, that Blacks are a different species from whites, a lower one. For Cousturier, however, her myth merely essentialized the *grand enfant*. This representation, though popularized out of the exigency of using Black Africans to help save France, became a post-war vehicle for regenerating the

French. After the armistice, Cousturier toured Paris with a soldier. At a museum, the African's enthusiasm for art profoundly affected Cousturier: "*Il était la folle enfant, éprise d'universel, que j'avais été moi-même, à seize ans, lors de mes premières visites aux musées. Je croyais cette jeune fille disparue, et voilà que je la retrouvais dans sa fraîcheur, intacte malgré tant d'années...*"[40] Through the *grand enfant*, Cousturier saw herself, not as she was currently but as she was before the weight of the war and bourgeois maturity deadened her. The Black African re-enchanted her world.

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The first fictional account of a *tirailleur*'s life was published just two years after Cousturier's memoir, but already her maternalistic humanism paled in the French imagination before the more dominant and appealing representation of the intellectually and emotionally limited *grand enfant*. In 1922, Jérôme and Jean Tharaud, two of the most prolific writers of exotic literature, published La Radonnée de Samba Diouf. Samba Diouf was a sympathetic story of one African's experience upon leaving his village, fighting in the Great War, and then returning home decorated but wounded. More than a romp through time and space, the brothers Tharaud constructed the African, Samba, to be every African, embodying many stereotypes, especially the one of Africans being passive and resigned to their fate.

At the start of the novel the news of the Great War had just been received in the colonies. It was met with a little general concern, but the *indigènes* did not believe it would affect them. Rather, the villagers of Niomi, Samba's village in Southeastern Senegal, spent only a moment commenting on the power of the *Toubabs*, whites, and the folly of war. Samba says of the war, "'*Les Toubabs sont fous!... Dieu leur a donné les richesses, ils sont nos maîtres à tous, pourquoi donc se font-ils la guerre? S'ils étaient comme moi, ils ne*
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feraient la guerre qu'aux poissons."[41] Samba, a talented fisherman, had traditional wisdom and readily accepted white superiority, and yet he wondered about the sanity of making war.

While Samba was on a trek to claim an inheritance of livestock in a far off Peul (Fulani) village, the French established mandatory conscription quotas in the colonies. The French claimed to be powerful, even invincible, but they called on their subjects, or rather their *enfants* to ensure their rapid victory. Furthermore, Africans owed France their support, asserted a colonial official in the novel:

> '*la France fait appel à tous ses fils, à quelque race qu'ils appartiennent. C'est une mère qui compte sur tous ses enfants! Aucun de vous n'ignore les bienfaits qu'elle vous a apportés. La discorde ne vous trouble plus, les guerres ont cessé entre vous, et les sauvages traitants ne vous emmènent plus en esclavage.... Le moment est venu de lui prouver votre reconnaissance.*'[42]

Africans, having received civilization, now could demonstrate their gratitude--in blood. The Tharauds were reiterating with literary flare one of the dominant arguments for colonial conscription and, like Mangin, argued that Africans would readily enlist out of gratitude for the civilizing mission.[43] That this argument was recycled in the 1920s demonstrated not just its hold on the French mind, but the extent to which the *indigène* was constructed as a child who owed everything, including his life, to the parent who brought him out of darkness.

Samba was not immediately subject to his village's conscription quota: he was away trying to claim his inheritance so he would have the means necessary to marry. On route to a Peul village, Samba spent the night in a Mandinka village. There he was given wine, for Samba was not a Muslim, and was tied up by villagers. The Mandinka then delivered Samba to the French as part of their quota. Samba protested, claiming that he was a Niominka, not a

Mandinka, and should only be conscripted by his village. When his protests fell on deaf ears, he cursed the Mandinka: "'*Car tous ceux qui m'ont approché peuvent dire que je n'ai jamais diminué la liberté de personne, et eux m'ont traité comme un esclave!*'"[44] Here, the brothers Tharaud subtly blamed Africans for conscription abuses and slavery. Many village chiefs abused their power to conscript unwilling, powerless young men, many of whom, especially early in the war, were technically village slaves.[45] With French complicity in conscription abuses left unstated, the colonies were shown to be a land still in need of a civilizing mission.

Although conscripted against his will, Samba ceased to protest. He passively accepted his fate and was represented in a manner reminiscent of the Banania man:

> *Ayant ainsi exhalé sa colère, mais déjà soumis au destin, il s'approcha de la bagane pleine de riz nouveau, arrosé d'huile de palme, et pour la première fois sa main, creusée en forme de cuiller, fit un trou large et profond dans la nourriture du Gouvernement.*[46]

Like a child in a parent's care, the *indigène* submitted to the whims of history. This submission then became the dominant theme of the novel. Even in war, the *indigène* was passive, resigned to what would befall him. Life and death were equally of no concern--both were beyond the *indigène*'s control. When one soldier from Samba's unit died, the survivors expressed little emotion: "*On l'avait étendu par terre sur une couverture déployée, et tous les hommes de l'escouade le regardaient d'un air tranquille, assez pareil à de l'indifférence, qui en était peut-être en effet, mais qui venait aussi, et plus profondément, de leur résignation au destin.*"[47] The *indigène* was not merely passive to his fate, like a *poilu*; he, unlike the metropolitan, could not even conceive of agency in his life: he was a dependent child.

The representation of the *grand enfant*, popularized during the war, was a social construct that did not preclude earlier representations of the African, like that of the savage warrior. However, the African's savagery was now directed against German soldiers. Samba only had the opportunity to go over the top once before he was wounded. In his moment of glory, Samba flew out of his trench and ran headlong towards the enemy. He lost his rifle, a trifle for a savage who preferred his *coupe-coupe*:

> *Dans son élan il franchit un fossé, sans même voir les hommes habillés de capotes gris-vert qui étaient couchés au fond. Au milieu des éclatements et des balles qui sifflaient autour de lui, il arriva sur un autre fossé, et cette fois il vit dedans des hommes qu'il ne connaissait pas. Alors, brandissant son coupe-coupe, il se jeta sur eux. Dans un éclair il aperçut près de lui le chamelier, qui faisait tournoyer son couteau et détachait à la volée la tête d'un grand gaillard blond. Du sang lui gicla au visage, l'aveuglant à demi et l'empêchant de voir où sa lame venait d'entrer...*[48]

In myth and literature, the *indigène* could not be fully civilized. Modern technology in the form of guns were foreign to the savage. He fought with knives, as did his ancestors, and his lack of technology defined him in French eyes.

The brothers Tharaud did more than depict the Black African as being simultaneously a child and a savage. They assuaged metropolitan fears about the danger of Black men around white women, the "Prospero Complex." After being wounded in action, Samba was sent to a hospital in Marseille. There a nurse took better care of him, he felt, than would his mother, sister, or fiancé. Samba became smitten by his nurse, and he remembered stories of

> *femmes blanches qui avaient aimé des Noirs, et même en avaient emmené dans leur pays. Il y avait aussi, disait-on, des Noirs qui avaient trouvé leur chance avec des femmes blanches dans les expositions des Toubabs. Mais ces idées qu'il remuait en lui-même restaient secrètes au fond de son esprit...*[49]

A little later, Samba saw his favorite with her boyfriend. With sadness came understanding: "*Par ma vie! pensa-t-il en la regardant s'éloigner, les femmes blanches n'aiment que les Toubabs! Mais elles ont le cœur généreux. Et ce que cette femme faisait pour moi, elle le faisait, en verité, pour le merci de Dieu!*"[50] France needed not to worry about the danger of Black men: Caliban was a *grand enfant* who honored the purity of white women, whose own morals were irreproachable. Stories of love across the color line were just that, sensational stories (as will be shown in Chapters 2 and 10). French women cared for the Black out of the best of intentions, like a mother to a child. In the 1920s, the brothers Tharaud constructed a sympathetic representation of the *indigène*, but they grafted the construct of the *grand enfant* on to older, more derogatory representations, and the Black Other became an even more ambivalent construct.

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The representations that the French constructed of the Black African were not solely discursive practices for the French. They not only reflected French behavior, as Bakary Diallo, a Senegalese soldier demonstrated, but were internalized, at least in part, by some Africans. Diallo, who was a Peul (Fulani), born in M'Bala, Senegal in 1892, enlisted in the military in 1911 and served in one of the first battalions sent to France in 1914. Diallo fought at the Marne and at Sillery, where he was severely wounded. He spent the rest of the war in hospitals and at camps in the south of France, including Fréjus, where he met Lucie Cousturier. With her assistance, Diallo not only became proficient in French, but also published a memoir of his experience as a soldier, Force Bonté. Published in 1926, it was the first African account of the war written in French. It did not establish a pattern. There were no other firsthand published accounts of an African's experience in the Great War, and there were only
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about one hundred oral histories of *tirailleurs*, almost all of which were recorded sixty-five years after the Great War.[51] Diallo therefore provides us with a unique record of both the reception of the *nègre* in France and how one African responded to this reception and French discourse.

The French received the *tirailleurs* with equal amounts of enthusiasm and apprehension. Diallo remembered fondly the warm reception he and his fellow *tirailleurs* received at Sète (Hérault). As the soldiers marched to their camp, Frenchmen reached out and shook their hands. Diallo heard some French cry out, "'*Bravo les tirailleurs sénégalais! Viva la France!'... D'autres nous disent: 'couper têtes aux allemands.' Les tirailleurs répondent avec leur sourire habituel et montrent leur coupe-coupe, disant que nous allons tuer tous les ennemis des Français.*"[52] The knife was for the Germans and the smile was for the French: savages and children, simultaneously. Given such opposite representations and the uncertainty of war, not to mention the natural unease in a garrison town, it was not surprising that Diallo felt the French had a mixed reaction to the African soldiers: "*Certains sont comme des nids de bonté, d'autres révèlent une sorte de tourment caché.*"[53]

The French goodwill and fear was manifested in their first close encounter with the Black African soldiers. Before the war, few Frenchmen had ever directly encountered an African outside of Paris or southern port cities. Even those who had seen a Black, especially in a spectacle, probably never had touched one. Children, Diallo remembered sympathetically, were especially curious about Blacks, open to befriending them and interested in touching them.

> *Ils sont propres, mignons et attirent l'amitié tels que des anges de rêve. Un peu craintifs, mais résolus, ils nous tendent leurs petites mains, que certains d'entre eux retirent ensuite, regardant si elles ne sont pas noircies par la couleur des nôtres. Ce n'est pas là chose bizarre. Il est juste, naturel, que ces petits esprits fassent une étude préliminaire des*

choses qu'ils voient. C'est le seul moyen de se rendre compte soi-même.[54]

This was not an isolated incident nor limited to children: many adults touched the Black Africans to see if their dark skin color would come off. In addition, there was at least one incident of French soldiers selling tickets to civilians to view and touch African soldiers.[55] Given the French history of putting Africans on exhibition and the prevalence of hygiene advertisements that showed a product's efficacy by its ability to whiten a Black, this behavior was not surprising (see Chapters 4 and 6).[56] What was more interesting was Diallo's response: he excused the French behavior. Rather than seeing the French as ignorant or inexperienced, Diallo praised them for their enlightened ways: they subjected their beliefs to experiential verification. The French were civilized, and nothing could alter Diallo's understanding of French goodness and superiority.

Diallo's belief in France was so strong and naive that he made himself into the *grand enfant* the French wanted and imagined him to be. It was not just that Diallo showed no anger at the wrongs done to him; rather, it was that he acknowledged but discounted both petty and gross injustices, as did Amidou Frama, a *tirailleur* Diallo respected. "'*Beaucoup parmi nous croient que nous ne sommes considérés que comme des chiens de chasse, à lancer où besoin est...*'" Frama argued to other *tirailleurs*. "'*Eh bien, c'est une mauvaise croyance. La France est trop humanitaire pour avoir des sentiments contraires aux inspirations humaines...*'"[57] It was this belief that sustained Diallo after the war when he was thrown into a liminal status in France. Diallo requested and received French civil status, citizenship, but, at the same time, he was still considered an *indigène* in the military and subject to repatriation to Senegal.

While waiting for his pension and his status to be regularized, Diallo looked at France with the awe of a child:

> *les injustices militaires que tu as senties ne sont que des accidents de ta vie, comme cela arrive; mais devant elles se redresse, haute et belle, la France généreuse, sensible, poussant à l'extrême sa délicatesse et sa justice pour lutter contre toutes les imperfections de la vie humaine.*[58]

Diallo ultimately remained in France, but he had no money or prospects for a position. With no where else to turn, he went to the French who had befriended him when he was hospitalized. He was received as a child and given a room.

Conclusion: The *Tirailleur* as Bonhomme in Memory and Memory Sites

In June 1919, La Presse Coloniale reported that a monument titled "Aux Coloniaux de la Grande Guerre 1914-18" was unveiled in the Colonial Garden of the Institut national d'agronomie coloniale at Nogent-sur-Marne. The memorial was a simple truncated pyramid of little aesthetic note. The dedication of the memorial, however, was significant--but only to those who realized what was missing.

> *On l'inaugura en même temps que le temple annamite, et rien de particulier ne serait à noter de cette cérémonie si ce n'est que les Indochinois seuls furent admis à l'honneur de l'inauguration. Il nous semble pourtant que d'autres colonies se sont battues avec une bravoure au moins égale à celle des Indochinois!*[59]

La Presse coloniale concluded by noting that the Senegalese deserved a memorial equal to the honor with which they served France.

Just three months later, Le Cri de Paris reported that there were plans for a memorial to the *tirailleurs* to be erected not in the metropole but in Bamako. Clearly there was some debate about the monument, which the journal acknowledged, but it also found a bit of humor in placing the monument at a site so inaccessible to the metropolitan population:

> *Nos tirailleurs sénégalais et soudanais auront leur monument... C'est à Bamakou, sur le Niger, en plein centre africain, que ce monument sera érigé. Et le soin de célébrer des combattants sera confié à un artiste qui a combattu, à l'excellent statuaire Moreau-Vauthier. Les touristes iront admirer son œuvre, quand un service regulier fonctionnera dans l'Afrique centrale.*[60]

Blaise Diagne, Deputy from Senegal and, during the war, Commissioner General of Recruitment, a rank equal to a Governor-General, was livid at the absence of a monument, but one in Africa was far better than not having one at all. He was not alone in his thinking; he struggled with General Archinard for the control and financing of the monument. Fundraising events were held, including *fêtes* in Paris and Fréjus, where tam-tams were played and Africans danced "*éperdument*."[61] Ultimately under Diagne's and Archinard's combined efforts, funds were raised to erect on 3 January 1924 a monument not solely to the fallen *tirailleur*, but also to the colonial officer.

The monument at Bamako was just one of many monuments that were erected to fallen colonial soldiers throughout the colonies in the 1920s.[62] Its greater importance was that it was duplicated as the sole metropolitan monument to the *force noire*. On 13 July 1924 Paul Moreau-Vauthier's statue, "Aux Héros de l'Armée Noire," was inaugurated in Reims with much fanfare [Figure 4]. Reims was an apt choice for a memorial to the *tirailleurs*; it was here, in the last year of the war, that *tirailleurs* heroically pushed back a German division and secured the city. The monument, as Le Monde colonial illustré stated, honored the soldiers and expressed French gratitude for their service: it served to "*faire connaître au monde les services rendus par nos admirables troupes noires et de leur témoigner toute la gratitude à laquelle ils ont droit.*"[63] The monument consisted of four *tirailleurs* in slightly awkward bent poses surrounding a well decorated, erect French officer gripping the tricolor. The *tirailleurs* were each "racially" different to represent that different African

Figure 4. Monument, Aux Héros de l'Armée Noire, 1924.

races made up the *force noire*. Moreau-Vauthier represented the soldiers in pensive poses, guns at their side, looking out at the horizon. The inscription on the memorial read, "*A la Gloire des Héros de l'Armée Noire et de leurs Chefs tombés au champ d'honneur.*"[64] The *tirailleurs* were to be remembered as they were constructed, dependent on French tutelage.

There were many reasons for the lack of monuments to Black Africans in World War I. The Great War was a total war that affected virtually every French family and commune. In the immediate post-war years, Antoine Prost has argued, the French built memorials to the dead in the interests and needs of the state, the citizenry, and the municipalities.[65] The monuments were largely civic and celebrated republican patriotism and the sacrifices of the citizenry, themes that excluded heroes from A.O.F. Furthermore, the memorials became sites of collected memory. They represented fictions that both helped to construct the imagined French community and were instruments to control the French grand narrative and the citizenry.[66] That there was only one memorial to the Black soldier from French West Africa in the hexagon in the 1920s was telling testimony to how the French wished to view their community and narrative--adopted children were to be kept in their place, a place far from the hexagon.

In 1940, Léopold Sédar Senghor asked in memory of the *tirailleurs*, "*Qui pourra vous chanter si ce n'est votre frère d'armes, votre frère de sang*?"[67] That same year, the German army, never lovers of the *force noire*, destroyed the monument at Reims. Since then, there have been no memorials, no memory sites dedicated to Black African soldiers from World War I in the metropole.[68] In 1994, however, a statue based on the extant one in Bamako was inaugurated at Fréjus to commemorate the colonial units that helped liberate France in 1944--not the Great War. It is not surprising that it took a half

century for the French again to memorialize some African soldiers on French soil. De Gaulle chose to whitewash in a policy called *blanchissement* the French African troop's contribution to liberating *la patrie* at the end of World War II.[69] Evidently, a Black presence at victory celebrations was neither desired nor deemed propitious for the founding myths of the reborn republic.

But in the 1920s, Blacks Africans assumed a new place in the popular French *mentalité*, and they could not be forgotten. At least one consistent voice sang of the *tirailleurs*, as Senghor elegized, and that was "*les louanges de mépris*," the Bonhomme Banania in all of his guises.[70] In the absence of memory sites other than at Reims, the Bonhomme and the representation of the *nègre* as a *grand enfant* tamed the savage Black African in the French imagination so that exoticism in the form of *négrophilisme* could flourish and France, as Mangin had prophesied, could be regenerated.

Endnotes

[1]Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Poème Liminaire," 1940, in Chants d'ombre suivis de Hosties Noires, poèmes (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1945 et 1948), 81.

[2]See Charles Mangin, La Force Noire (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1910).

[3]See William H. Schneider, An Empire for the Masses: the French Popular Image of Africa 1870-1900 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).

[4]Ibid.

[5]See William Cohen, The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), Sander Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," in "Race," Writing and Difference, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985, 1986), and George L. Mosse, Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism (London: Dent, 1978).

[6]See Raymond Bachollet, Jean Barthélemi Debost, Anne-Claude Lelieur, Marie-Christine Peyrière, eds., NégriPub: l'image des Noirs dans la Publicité (Paris: Editions Somogy, 1992, 1994) and Jan Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

[7]See Jean Garrigues, Banania, Histoire d'une passion française (Paris: Du May, 1991) for a history of Banania that uses the Banania archives and is flattering to the company.

[8]See Bachollet, et. al., NégriPub and the Bulletin Officiel de la Propriété Industrielle & Commerciale for the 1920s.

[9]See Garrigues, Banania and Bachollet, et. al., NégriPub.

[10]See Lucie Cousturier, Des Inconnus Chez Moi (Paris: Aux Editions De La Sirène,1920) and Joe Harris Lunn, "Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese oral history of the First World War" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1993).

[11]Garrigues, Banania, 53.

[12]Ibid., 53.

[13]For histories about the formation of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, see Shelby Cullom Davis, Reservoirs of Men: A History of the Black Troops of French West Africa (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970), John Charles Balesi, From Adversaries to Comrades-In-Arms: West Africans and the French Military, 1885-1918 (Waltham, MA: African Studies Association, 1979), Myron Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960 (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1991), and Marc Michel, L'Appel à l'Afrique: Contributions et réactions à l'effort de guerre en A.O.F. (1914-1919) (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982).

[14]See Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, 32.

[15]Léon Gaillet (Sous-lieutenant), Coulibaly, Les Sénégalais sur la terre de France (Paris: Jouve et Cie., 1917), 9.

[16]Ibid., 12.

[17]Ibid., 13.

[18]Ibid., 52.

[19]Ibid., 10.

[20]Ibid., 17.

[21]Ibid., 10.

[22]Ibid., 79.

[23]Ibid., 18.

[24]Ibid., 148.

[25]Cousturier, Des Inconnus chez moi, 13.

[26]Ibid., 7.

[27]Ibid., 8.

[28]Ibid., 17.

[29]Ibid., 9.

[30]Ibid., 24.

[31]Ibid., 32-33.

[32]Ibid., 62.

[33]Ibid., 100. See also pages 100-106 for an extensive civilian discussion of *petit nègre*.

[34]Ibid., 104.

[35]Ibid., 105.

[36]Ibid., 106.

[37]Ibid., 135.

[38]Ibid., 255.

[39]For a discussion of polygenesis, see Cohen, The French Encounter with Africans, especially pages 84-86 and pages 233-238.

[40]Cousturier, Des Inconnus chez moi, 287.

[41]Jérôme et Jean Tharaud, La Randonnée de Samba Diouf (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1922), 24.

[42]Ibid., 71.

[43]See Mangin, Force Noire.

[44]Tharaud, Samba Diouf, 88.

[45]See Joe Harris Lunn, "Kande Kamara Speaks: An Oral History of the West African Experience in France 1914-18," in Africa and the First World War, ed. Melvin E. Page (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), Lunn "Memoirs of the Maelstrom," and Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts. Historians treat this issue lightly, and I have not found any work on the moral implications of using a slave population to fight for France.

[46]Tharaud, Samba Diouf, 90.

[47]Ibid., 178.

[48]Ibid., 198-199.

[49]Ibid., 205.

[50]Ibid., 225.

[51]See Lunn, "Memoirs of the Maelstrom."

[52]Bakary Diallo, Force-Bonté (Paris: Rieder, 1926), 113-114.

[53]Ibid., 114.

[54]Ibid., 115.

[55]See Lunn, "Memoirs of the Maelstrom."

[56]See Schneider, An Empire for the Masses and Bachollet, et. al., NégriPub.

[57]Diallo, Force-Bonté, 177.

[58]Ibid., 186.

[59]Archive nationales, section Outre-mer, Affaires Politiques, carton 543, dossier 1 et 2.

[60]Le Cri de Paris, 28 septembre 1919.

[61]Le Cri de Paris, 17 juillet 1921 and 16 octobre 1921.

[62]See Le Monde colonial illustré for the 1920s. These monuments go unnoticed in the recent scholarship on memorials and memory. It would be interesting to study if monuments in the colonies functioned in the same way as monuments in the metropole.

[63]Le Monde colonial illustré, août 1924, 258.

[64]Ibid., 258.

[65]See Antoine Prost, "Les Monuments aux Morts: Culte républican? Culte civique? Culte patriotique?" in Les Lieux de Mémoire, v.1, La République, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1984), 195-225.

[66]See David Glassberg, "Public Memory and the Study of Memory," The Public Historian, 18 (Spring 1996): 7-23, Antoine Prost, "Les Monuments," Pierre Nora, Lieux de Memoire, and George L. Mosse, Fallen Soldiers, Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[67]Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Poème Liminaire," in Chants d'ombre , 81.

[68]Davis, Reservoirs of Men, mentioned that a statue to the "Great African" was erected in Paris in the 1930s. I have not yet found any further information about this statue and what it was supposed to honor.

[69]See Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts. Echenberg notes that two small stones were erected after World War II in the provinces memorializing Black African soldiers murdered by Nazi soldiers in 1940. See Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, 167-168.

[70]Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Poème Liminaire" in Chants d'ombre, 81.

CHAPTER 2

LOVE AND THE COLOR LINE

Négrophilisme flourished in France in the 1920s, so much so that Paul Colin, the great graphic artist, imagined with delight that a "*tumulte noire*" had overtaken French culture.[1] Colin was referring, of course, both to the quest for the exotic and to the tremendous popularity of jazz and Josephine Baker in the *années folles*. It is incorrect to assume, however, that this *tumulte* characterized the entirety of the period or that the exoticism that was prevalent was the sole reaction to the *nègre* after the Great War.

Moreover, the fêting of certain cultural figures tends to construct an unambiguous portrait of a people and an epoch, but in fact the French had highly ambivalent feelings about Blacks, especially when it came to love between white women and Black men. One of the first and only post-war novels about French women crossing the color line was Paul Reboux's Romulus Coucou (1920). Reboux traced the moral decline of an American mulatto whose love for a French woman in New Orleans was rebuffed on racial grounds alone. Although he set his novel in the United States, Reboux, who was sympathetic to Blacks, revealed contradictory French beliefs about Blacks and their hold on civilization. Furthermore, Reboux's novel inspired the only survey in France that I have found from the 1920s that addressed racial feelings. In 1920, Eve, a new woman's daily, published its first *enquête*: "*Une blanche peut-elle épouser un homme de couleur*?" This survey demonstrated that the French held a set of almost contradictory beliefs about Blacks that both reflected high French ideals and, simultaneously, denigrated Blacks as Blacks, with little idealization of them as exotic, at least in 1920. Despite the post-war *négrophilisme*, the French did not work out their thoughts on inter-racial

relationships in much exotic literature during the decade: few works addressed the issue. Two that did, Pierre Mille's and André Demaison's La Femme et l'homme nu (1924) and Louise Faure-Favier's Blanche et noir (1928), took decidedly opposing positions. Mille and Demaison argued that crossing the color line was an act of vacant nihilism while the Faure-Favier argued that it was necessary to mend racial divisions and to create a fraternal Republic. In popular culture, as represented in exotic novels and the Eve survey, the color line was shown to be permeable, but even when loved, the *nègre* remained the Other in the French social imagination in the *années folles*, notwithstanding Faure-Favier's exceptional polemics.

Romulus Coucou: The Thin Veneer of Civilization

Although Paul Reboux (1877-1963) is no longer considered a significant author, before and after the war, he was prominent for his *pastiches*. His 1925 work, for example, A la manière de..., was written as a melange of the genres of different writers, such as Paul Morand's modern sensibilities with the fables of La Fontaine. In addition, over the course of his long life, Reboux was also known for his journalism and literary criticism as well as for his painting and lore about cooking, publishing at least one cookbook. Some time before the war, Reboux traveled to America and the Caribbean and became interested in Black culture and American race relations. He published Blancs et noirs in 1915 and Romulus Coucou, roman nègre in 1920. Romulus Coucou, a novel noticed but not widely reviewed, was a fast-paced, tragic melodrama of love, personal dissipation, redemption, and racial hatred. Although the novel was set in the United States and its focus appeared, at least superficially, to be American racial prejudices, it reflected the French imagination of the Black Other. In his story, Reboux contrasted a morally superior French civilization to a racially

inequitable, even barbaric, American civilization, and though he found American racial hatred to be repugnant, he demonstrated nonetheless his own derogatory French beliefs about Blacks.

Romulus Coucou, set in New Orleans sometime around the time of the Great War when Jim Crow was king, was the story of a young man's moral dissipation after failing to win the hand of a white woman. Romulus was the son of Mrs. Alcinaïde Coucou and a French officer. The combination of a Roman first name and a surname of "cuckoo" or "cuckold" foretell his dividedness. He was a light skinned mulatto who worked in a pharmacy, not the family laundry run by his step-father, Cicéron. The Coucous, a Black family, allegedly of French Caribbean ancestry, were small business people of minor means but proud ways. They went to the theater, on occasion, and had a few nice clothes, but their veneer of civilization was thin: even when they were dressed up and out at the theater, Cicéron Coucou picked up a discarded cigar and stole a few puffs. Romulus, by contrast, spoke and wrote French well and felt superior to his family, especially Cicéron: "*Malgré l'affection qu'il lui portait, Romulus ne pouvait se défendre d'une pitié un peu dédaigneuse envers ce gros homme de couleur dont il se sentait lui-même si distant par le physique et par l'intelligence.*"[2] Reboux reflected a French understanding of the importance attributed to skin color--not just between Blacks and whites but also among people of color who had appropriated notions of the superiority of white skin.

With haughty pride, Romulus allowed himself to fall in love with Jacqueline Béliard, a young Parisian store clerk who had lost her parents and came to live with her older brother in New Orleans. Before courting Jacqueline, Romulus dreamed of being in Paris with her: Paris, "*en fête perpétuelle*," was a place where race did not matter: "*en France, en ce pays où la couleur est un titre de curiosité*,"[3] Romulus thought he too could achieve success like the

mulatto Alexandre Dumas, both *père* and *fils*. Although Reboux created an image of France true to its grand republican ideals, his construction of Romulus did not reflect such high ideals, and thus Alexandre Dumas was the exception rather than the rule that so many in France wished to be true.

Romulus eventually met Jacqueline. Secretly, they began to court, but their relationship was built on a lie. Romulus did not tell Jacqueline that he had Black blood. Only his hair betrayed his mixed race, and this he kept straightened, slathered with lotion and under a hat. As their relationship developed, Romulus took greater and greater chances. He frequently passed himself off as white, riding on street cars and being seen with Jacqueline in selected spots. One night, when talking about their future, the subject of race in America came up. Romulus emotively praised Booker Washington and the courage and gentle disposition of Blacks in general. Jacqueline responded: "*Que j'aurais aimé un homme comme celui-là!*"[4] Challenging her, Romulus said she would not love a black man. She responded: "*je comprends qu'on éprouve... enfin... du malaise... en présence d'un nègre véritable. Pour nous autres Européennes, c'est si différent... cela nous fait un peu peur!... Mais quelqu'un qui aurait du sang nègre sans signes trop visibles, pourquoi ne l'aimerait-on pas?*"[5] Romulus then told her that he had a drop of Black blood, and Jacqueline responded first magnanimously and then paternalistically. She said that she loved him for who he was, such as he was. But before kissing him to seal their engagement, Jacqueline thought that this Black man, and she now considered him Black rather than white, would be a humanitarian project for her: "*Encourager ce garçon, être à son côté pour l'aider à combattre l'injustice des hommes; vaincre par l'union de leur courage et de leur énergie tous les monstrueux préjugés.*"[6]

Reboux's treatment of love across the color line was complex. On the one hand, he asserted that in the French spirit, color or at least racial origin did not matter; indeed, Jacqueline loved Romulus and conceived of a life with him. On the other hand, the physical appearance of the *nègre* was significant: a white could marry a man of color as long as he did not appear Black. Here, phenotype was more important than genotype. In fact, it could be argued that this belief was consistent with French socio-political history. From the "Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen," the French Republic was founded upon universal principles, none more important than equality. Republican equality was predicated on the idea that all Frenchmen assimilate in the public sphere and confine their differences to the private sphere. In theory and to a large degree in practice in France, one must not assert or even display signs of difference in public to be accepted by the French, a problematic demand for the *nègre*.[7]

Indeed, Reboux demonstrated that prominent displays of difference, including being Black, were disturbing to the French. When Jacqueline met the Coucou family, she was struck first by their black skin and then by their kinky hair: "*Maintenant, elle ne regardait plus rien que les cheveux de Romulus, ces cheveux crépus par lesquels il s'apparentait à cette famille de singes... Elle cherchait en lui d'autres signes de race, avec l'appréhension d'en découvrir.*"[8] Despite Jacqueline's aesthetic and moral distaste for dark-skinned Blacks, she was won over by the hospitality and what she considered was the naïvety of the Coucous. Although the Coucous initially welcomed Jacqueline, they soon turned against her. Mrs. Coucou fell ill and died shortly after Jacqueline's visit. Reboux's simple minded Black could only conclude that Jacqueline was the cause of the tragedy: "*Les Coucou n'osaient-ils pas accuser vaguement la jeune fille blanche d'être la cause du malheur abattu sur la maison? Vraiment,*

ils étaient trop superstitieux, trop bêtes, trop nègres!" [9] In their anger, the Coucous, save Romulus, resorted to voodoo to exact their retribution. Reboux suggested not just that whites were racialist in their thinking, but that Blacks could not truly be civilized: when crisis struck, the Black Other, by nature, resorted not to reason but to magic and filled his heart with vengeance.

Romulus, ostensibly different, being as white as he was Black, still wanted to wed Jacqueline, but when he asked Béliard, Jacqueline's brother, for her hand, he was categorically rejected--on racial grounds alone. Béliard argued to his sister that Blacks were bad and mulattos were worse: "*Ils sont fainéants, sales, menteurs, ils n'ont pas plus de morale que les bêtes...*"[10] Moreover, Béliard stated that there was no reason for Jacqueline to understand Blacks: "*En France, on ne sait rien des nègres. On en parle par théorie. On les considère comme des frères humains. C'est très joli... Mais...*"[11] Béliard continued to denigrate Blacks as monkey-like and having a bad odor. In her defense, Jacqueline claimed that Romulus had none of the faults attributed to his race and that she would only marry a French speaker, like Romulus. Reboux asserted the primacy of French civilization through Jacqueline. Speaking French, or rather, thinking in French was more important than race. It was this belief, or theory, as Béliard called it, that supported the French ideal of assimilation. Reboux thus suggested that the Black Other was capable of becoming French, even part of the French self, through the internalization of French civilization, its language and therefore its thought. And yet, universalism was merely theoretical. Difference, especially the most visible difference had to be denied. Jacqueline initially claimed that Romulus did not appear Black, either physically or morally. To her, subjectively, Romulus was not really a *nègre*, and therefore speaking French, he could be a suitable partner in marriage.

But Romulus could not be a husband to a white woman in America, and with his hopes dashed, the identity he constructed for himself and the one society constructed for him clashed. "*Il se sentait prisonnier de son origine, parqué désormais avec les noirs. Il devrait souffrir, durant toute sa vie, de cette assimilation dégradante, il serait condamné durant toute sa vie à ces cases spéciales dans les tramways.*"[12] The petty banalities of racial oppression were especially hard on Romulus who felt estranged from other Blacks. "*Il en venait à haïr ces noirs hideux, grotesques, ces descendants de macaques africains dont le sang, mêlé au sien, le déshonorait. Ah! ce sang détestable! que ne pouvait-il s'ouvrir les veines, pour l'en faire sortir!*"[13] Feeling himself to be civilized in his soul, he bemoaned the fact that he would have to marry a Black or mulatto. Romulus's self-hatred was socially constructed. He internalized and expressed derogatory representations of the Black Other but not ones solely generated under Jim Crow. Rather, they reflected Reboux's understanding of French beliefs about Blacks. Though sympathetic to the *nègre*, Reboux also did nothing but caricature him.[14]

Rejected in love and then disillusioned with his subsequent flirtations with religion and even revolution, Romulus became alienated from society. Rancor and humiliation dominated him. His only escape became cocaine and alcohol. He shed the veneer of civilization that he masqueraded under. Romulus took to living among the socially marginal in society--that was those marginal by choice. "*Romulus, par dégoût des blancs, ne fréquentait plus que des gens de couleur choisis parmi ceux qui vivaient en ennemis de la société...*"[15] His new milieu was composed not just of social outcasts, but of regressive persons who in secret rites showed their true barbaric nature:

> *Durant ces assemblées clandestines, on danse au son d'un tambourin voilé; on évoque le cérémonial des rites africains; on proie à la fois Jésus-Christ et les dieux barbares. Dans ces âmes naïves et sauvages,*

> *les enseignements des pasteurs laissent des traces qui se mêlent aux traditions d'idolâtrie. Une affinité s'établit entre les sacrements catholiques et les sacrifices humains. Le rêve obscur, que ces vieux nègres ne réalisent pas par crainte de la police, mais dont ils s'entretiennent à voix basse, serait de communier avec un peu du sang blanc, pour se pénétrer ainsi du courage, des vertus pratiques et de la chance, qui sont les privilèges de cette race jalousée.*[16]

Romulus no longer had his rational spirit: he lost it to hate, envy, cocaine, and whiskey. And in this spirit, or rather lack there of, he reached the depths of depravity.

During Carnival, Romulus saw a voodoo priest who told him that the best sacrifices were done using the blood of a white baby. Romulus then concocted a plan to steal from the now married Jacqueline her infant son. Romulus stole the child and brought him to the voodoo priest at a secret site.

> *Une quinzaine de nègres étaient assemblés là en longues robes blanches. Ils formaient un cercle au milieu duquel se trouvait un vieux noir enveloppé d'un manteau de pourpre sur lequel étaient collés des insignes en papier doré. Il tenait un bébé entièrement nu, un enfant blanc. Autour de lui, les nègres, mains jointes, les yeux levés, semblaient tous frappés d'extase.*[17]

But before the ceremony could go further, Romulus suddenly realized what he was doing. His mind was immediately cleared of its drug-induced fog, and understanding the barbarism of the sacrifice, he demanded back the child.

Romulus brought the baby back to Jacqueline who, upon seeing her child, immediately fainted. Romulus caught her, but when nearby whites saw a Black man, for Romulus's moral decline affected his ability to pass for a white, holding a limp white woman, they reacted violently: "*Il allait la violenter, parbleu!*" cried one, and another said: "*On va t'apprendre à salir nos femmes.*"[18] Without knowing any of Romulus's guilt in the kidnapping, a mob formed and beat him; the mob, led by Jacqueline's husband and in defiance of the police officer on the scene, then threw gasoline on Romulus and burned him to death. The novel ended with someone asking what was happening and

if there was a fire. Another answered nonchalantly: "*Non, rien... Un négro qu'on flambe...*"[19]

Romulus's tragic end was, in essence, an accurate and stark indictment of American racial hatred in the 1920s, but Reboux's work was not just about America. Rather, Reboux reflected the post-war French imagination. The French committed few racially based violent crimes against Blacks in the metropole in the 1920s; however, as Reboux's depiction of them indicated, the French did not also unequivocally imagine Blacks in terms of the best of republican ideals--the perfectibility of man. Beneath their dark skin, Reboux suggested, a savage remained. Moreover, Reboux's treatment of the imagined atavistic behaviors of Blacks was reminiscent of the anti-Semitic belief that Jews committed ritual murders of Christians. Such beliefs, though patently unfounded, suggested that there was some tension in the construction of the post-war French identity.[20] Given their *dette de sang*, a number of Blacks in the 1920s demanded compensation--i.e. assimilation, but French beliefs about them and their thin veneer of civilization served to support resistance to giving them any place in French society.[21] This was confirmed by Eve's response to the novel.

Eve

On 20 February 1920 Eve, "*Le Premier quotidien illustré de la femme*," as it billed itself, published its first edition. It was published, like a few other papers and like a number of supplements, in response to the newly won freedoms women experienced during and after the war. A Mr. Huguette published Eve, and he claimed from the second edition that the journal was a success. In fact, the paper was successful: although it only lasted as a daily for a short period, it published continuously through the 1920s as a weekly.

The paper was run by a man, but it employed a number of female writers and addressed some of the political and social issues of the day, especially issues of consequence for women. Eve featured articles on the women's movements internationally as well as regular articles on fashion, knitting, raising children, literature, the arts, and cooking. It was not unusual to find a piece on the fastest French typist or a celebratory story on a woman in sports. Eve was neither a radical paper nor a *haut bourgeois* paper. Rather, it appealed to the struggling middle class--proper women who wanted to live well but had limited funds to secure their status and desires. This was also not a journal for the flapper. Indeed, in 1924 the paper asked its readers to respond to the new style of short hair on women. Sixty-five percent of the readers of Eve preferred long hair to short hair, and of the thirty-five percent who liked short hair, the majority did not want it in the style of *la garçonne*.[22]

On 26 February 1920 Eve began running one of its many "*Grandes Enquêtes*." In response to Paul Reboux's novel, Romulus Coucou, Eve asked Reboux to query twenty-one French cultural figures on the question: "*Que blanche peut-elle épouser un homme de couleur?*" Reboux asked three additional questions: "*Quel est votre avis sur le traitement reserve aux Noirs par les Américains*?" and "*que penser-vous du mariage ou se mêlent des races différents*?" Finally, Reboux asked, "*si un homme, lointainement issu de noirs, n'en offre plus les caractéristiques de manière apparente, s'il est agréable, tendre, et fidèle, considerez-vous qu'il puisse être aimé et même épousé par une blanche?*"[23] That a paper that was anything but avant garde would query and publish responses to the question of mixed race marriages illustrated the significant difference between racial beliefs in the United States and in France. Nevertheless, the overwhelming message of the responses that Eve published,

of both intellectuals and its readers, was one of ambivalence in racial attitudes and love across the color line.

Although the Eve survey demonstrated that the French had complex, even contradictory feelings about mixed race marriages, it found, without any equivocation, the American treatment of Blacks to be reprehensible, Reboux's opinion also. In fact, the barbaric practice of lynching was inconceivable to the French--at least in the metropole. The French believed that Blacks were deserving of the civilizing mission, and even if Blacks were incapable of attaining a high level of civilization, it was incumbent upon whites not to denigrate themselves in their treatment of the inferior Other. Henri Barbusse, the Prix Goncourt author and left-wing activist, for example, wrote that the American treatment of Blacks was unworthy of a great people. Blacks may not be perfectible but still must be treated humanely: "*il aurait fallu tout au moins essayer de le* [the Black population] *perfectionner et le traiter autrement que par la persecution.*"[24] Barbusse suggested that Americans were guilty of not engaging Blacks in the Enlightenment project of perfecting all men. America was therefore abandoning its occidental roots. In a similar vein, André De Fouquières, an author and dramatist, claimed that Blacks were inferior beings, but they deserved to be treated as humans:

> *La mentalité des hommes de couleur est telle qu'il est impossible de les traiter, généralement, sur le même pied que les blancs. Ce qui ne veut pas dire que le noir ne merite pas d'être traité avec humanité et justice. C'est un devoir de conscience sur lequel on ne saurait transiger...*[25]

And finally, to mock the Americans and even suggest that they were in some ways more barbaric than the least civilized of Africans, Abel Faivre, the painter and caricaturist, compared Americans to cannibals and found the Americans lacking: "*Avec vous, je pense que le traitement des nègres aux États-Unis est beaucoup plus impérialiste qu'humain. Car si quelques blancs ont été rôtis au*

Centre de l'Afrique, c'était pour être mangés. Les Américains n'ont pas cette excuse."[26] American might was clearly apparent to Europeans during the Great War. This parvenu state, however, could still be belittled morally. The *nègre* and how he was treated thus became a vehicle for asserting the superiority of French morality, recently bruised on the Western Front.

Those who argued that whites should not marry a man of color reflected popular anthropological beliefs about the difference between races and the inherent inferiority of some races. Charles Richet, a writer and doctor, for example, was clear that no mixing of races should occur:

> *La response est très nette. Nulle hésitation n'est permise. A aucun prix une blanche ne doit épouser un noir, même si les caractères de l'infériorité ethnique sont peu apparents, ils vont renaître dans les enfants.... Et ce qui est vrai des noirs est vrai ces jaunes. Tout mélange de notre race blanche avec une race inférieure est détestable. Alexandre Dumas est une exception.*[27]

Richet's clear position on the necessity not to mix races underscored a point common to many French: rejecting the use of the term "*homme de couleur*," Richet suggested that a drop of Black blood made one Black, even if there were no visible signs of one's heritage. Moreover, Richet lionized Alexandre Dumas, a quadroon, as the exception to the rule rather than using the example of Dumas to challenge racial theories.

André De Fouquières reaction was similar to Richet's. He acknowledged, however, that passion rather than reason determined one's choice in love:

> *Un homme, même issu lointainement des noirs, peut, certes, être aimé par une blanche. Le cœur ignore les subtilités de l'ascendance et du sang. Mais le mariage qui consacrerait cette passion du cœur serait une folie, car il faut que chaque race conserve sa pureté. Les enfants qui naîtraient de cette union légitime seraient désaxés dans la vie et risqueraient d'être malheurex.*[28]

Fouquières, like Richet, was concerned with the children of mixed race unions. France in the 1920s felt that it was suffering from a demographic crisis, and although some, like General Charles Mangin, author of La Force noire, believed the colonies could make up for French population losses, no one saw the mixing of races as a solution. Talk of mixed race marriages was just pure folly for many. As Roland Dorgelès, the novelist and bohemian chronicler, observed: "*Chaque race a ses sentiments, ses goûts, ses idées... Cest seulement dans les discours qu'on peut se dire 'citoyen de l'univers.*"[29] Dorgelès suggested that it was only in theory that one could think of mixed marriages. People were too different and should not even think of attenuating the differences.

For many, though, marriage across the color line was not only conceivable, but acceptable--at least in theory. These theoretical arguments, however, appeared facile, almost glib. Romain Coolus, a philosophy teacher who became an author and dramatist, stated that race was just one of many differences between people and therefore should not preclude marriage:

> *Il y a assez d'inégalités naturelles entre les individus pour que nous ne protestions pas contre les inégalités artificielles et arbitraires subsistant encore entre les classes ou les races... Une différence de pigmentation ne me paraît pas une raison suffisante pour humilier un être humain. C'est vous dire que le mariage d'un noir et d'une blanche n'a rien qui me choque. Il n'y a pas de différence dans la musique de l'amour et l'amour, comme l'esprit, souffle où il veut.*[30]

Victor Snell, an author and translator of Upton Sinclair, believed the races needed to be brought closer together, but in contrast to Coolus he was not glib about such marriages: "*Je ne 'donnerais' pas ma fille à un nègre, mais il me semblerait odieux qu'une loi prétendit l'interdire. Et puis, enfin, ça ne regarderait que ma fille!*"[31] Jean Finot, author of a work on prejudice and editor of La Revue Mondiale, also picked up on the injustice of legally preventing mixed marriages, but his analysis was more modern than Snell's:

> *Mais, comme l'infériorité intellectuelle et morale des noirs n'accuse pas un caractère organique et par cela même irréductible, toutes les mesures radicales ayant en vue d'empêcher le mariage entre blancs et noirs, ou ce qui est plus grave, entre les premiers et mulâtres, deviennent une injustice criante. Sans encourager ce genre d'unions, on devrait les abandonner au choix libre des uns et des autres.*[32]

Finot suggested that in the post-war world, there should be free choice in marriage whereas Snell still wanted some control over his daughter's choices in love. One's beliefs about Blacks then became part of one's stance toward modernity.

For some, marriage to a man of color was an opportunity for humor; however, the target of ridicule could be the white. Pierre Benoît, author of very popular exotic and adventure novels, including L'Atlantide, stated, tongue in cheek, "*il me semble que j'aurais mieux épouser un mulâtre aimable, gai, bon musicien, que le président Wilson, qui ne doit pas être tous les jours drôle dans l'intimité.*"[33] Benoît was saying, in guarded language, that marriage across the color line was possible, especially when the choice of a white was less than satisfactory. The French ideal of meritocracy and equality could conceivably be extended to love, regardless of color.

The French ambivalence towards Blacks was most apparent in those who accepted mixed race marriages but simultaneously denigrated Blacks. Gabriel de Lautrec, an author and translator of Mark Twain, thought that mixed marriages could improve the physical stock of a people, but he argued against such unions claiming they would weaken the intellectual level of a people. André De Lorde, an author and dramatist, by contrast, considered the very weaknesses of Blacks to be appealing:

> *si un homme, au tamis d'une longue descendance, s'est peu à peu 'dénégrise,' s'il n'offre plus les caractères physiques de sa race, je suis persuadé qu'il peut être aimé et choisi par une des nôtres... Une femme sera peut-être même plus heureuse avec lui, car le mari nègre*

apportera, dans son ménage, des qualites d'humilité, d'obeissance, de fidelité, qui font totalement défaut aux époux blancs.[34]

Even when accepting of mixed marriages, as De Lorde was, the French respondents found the Black most acceptable when he did not appear Black but retained the stereotypical attributes of the good colonized subject--the *bon nègre*.

In almost no instance in the survey did any author claim that a man of color was a suitable catch as just a man. The *nègres* racial origins, no matter how distant, were of singular importance for the French, assuming the authors surveyed were representative of many in France. The authors queried were not literary geniuses, articulating avant garde social beliefs and shaping culture. Rather, they were a prosaic group, successful in their day but with, justifiably, no lasting reputation, save Barbusse and Benoît. Their views on the Black Other, I suggest, thus accurately captured widely held beliefs in France, as the readers of Eve confirmed.

The Readers Respond

On 5 March 1920 Eve announced that it would hold a contest for its readers: the best responses to the question "*Épouseriez-vous un Homme de Couleur?*" would win cash prizes, with the first place response worth 500 francs. Paul Reboux authored an analysis of the responses and, it appeared, was one of the judges of the contest. The contest generated 2040 responses: 1060, or 52%, were against mixed marriages; 980 or 48% of the respondents believed themselves capable of having such a marriage.[35] The difference was not statistically significant. What was significant was the apparent contradictions in the responses of the women--and it is to be assumed that most if not all the respondents to the survey were women. No better illustration of this ambiguity

exists than Reboux's summary of the data. The women who claimed that they would not enter into a mixed marriage "*en principe*," also stated that if they met a "*un nègre intelligent, délicat, parfaitement civilisé et dont le physique ne leur inspirat point de répugnance, elles consentiraient à le prendre pour mari.*"[36] Similarly, women who, on principle, accepted the idea of mixed race marriages, believed that they, themselves, would be hesitant to have one.

Respondents rejected inter-racial marriages, Reboux stated, because of the problem of raising a mulatto child, the physical appearance of Blacks, and the imagined savagery innate in Blacks. Many women, Reboux claimed, felt that a mulatto baby would be rejected not only by society, but also by themselves as mothers. These children would not be beneficiaries of a normal maternal love. As one woman asserted, "'*J'aime café au lait, mais pas dans un berceau.*'"[37] Many women, however, could not even entertain the idea of a mixed race union and mulatto children because they found Blacks physically repulsive: "*L'interieur décoloré des mains de nègres, le nez aplati, les grosses lèvres inspirent une répulsion.*"[38] Finally, the natural and learned behavior of Black men frightened many women:

> *Un réveil de la sauvagerie naturelle semble menaçant. La civilisation des noirs est un vernis: un jour, le vernis s'écaille... Cette race, brutale et perfide, demeure toujours toujours[sic] semblable à elle-meme, en dépit des apparences, et quand elle se teinte, elle ne s'améliore point, car les mulâtres ont un caractère instable, hésitant, incertain enclin aux chimères inapte à la realisation.*[39]

This belief that Blacks could not truly be civilized was a prominent theme in novels of the 1920s and, as the survey indicated, in the social imagination of the French. If drums beat or the scaffolding of civilization weakens, the Black Other would return to his natural savagery. With such beliefs prevalent, it was no wonder that France was not a color blind society--despite Republican ideals of equality and meritocracy.

And yet those who believed that they could marry a man of color extended the highest French ideals to matters of the heart. Some women smugly stated that love was blind, but for most, it was not. Rather, one could grow accustomed to anything: "*La répugnance physique, disent plusieurs correspondantes, serait vite effacée par l'habitude, l'impression défavorable produite d'abord par une pigmentation foncée serait de peu de durée.*"[40] Most often, though, since the idea of marrying a man of color was more hypothetical than real, the women in the survey engaged in comparative thinking: a good Black was better than a distasteful white. "*L'odeur spéciale à cette race semble inspirer moins de degoût encore que, par exemple, l'haleine d'un buveur d'alcool.*" Or, "*La sauvagerie naturelle? Mais elle existe chez tous les hommes, et beaucoup de jeunes mondains font craquer, eux aussi, leur vernis d'amabilité quelques mois après le mariage, car empressés au début, ils désertent le domicile conjugal pour retourner au club. Un homme de couleur vaut encore mieux qu'un ivrogne, un apache, un rustaud ou un métèque.*"[41] They may not have been good, but they were better than the louts many women had married. Although the survey did not paint an unequivocally favorable picture of Blacks, in a society just opening up to women's new sense of freedom, many seemed to prefer in hypothetical thinking the unknown *bon nègre* to the known chauvinistic French male. Some French women even claimed they would prefer a colonized man of color--someone who was French, at least to a degree--than a *métèque*, a foreigner. In reality, French women (and men) were marrying foreigners, not Blacks, at a high rate in the 1920s.[42]

Finally, like good citizens of the Third Republic, many women felt that the civilizing mission could perfect the Black. If the man of color was not inherently good, he could be changed: "*le milieu et l'éducation transforment les âmes*," ostensibly to a civilized and republican soul.[43] A relationship with a Black was

not one between equals. Paternalism or rather republican maternalism was close to the heart of many:

> *épouser un nègre serait une mission de bonté. Quelle noble tâche que de développer en eux une culture morale! C'est un sujet de fierté que de pouvoir dire à tous ceux qui auraient tendance au mépris ou à la raillerie: 'Je possède sur vous l'avantage d'apercevoir dans ces nègres des qualités insoupçonnée par vous et plus que suffisantes pour rendre heureuse une femme.'*[44]

With the civilizing mission came bragging rights.

Eve only published in their entirety the four winning responses to the survey. Of the four, only one, the third place winner, was against mixed race marriages. Baronne de G. categorically rejected these unions on grounds of the inferiority of Blacks and the problems of raising a mulatto child:

> *[Une blanche] n'en a pas le droit. La race noire se trouve incontestablement, vis-a-vis de la notre, dans un état de grande infériorité, et quant à prendre la decision d'un tel mariage, la femme ne peut s'estimer seule en cause: il faut qu'elle songe à ceux qu'elle est appelée à mettre au monde et à qui elle doit la vie de sa race.*[45]

Baronne de G. claimed the mulatto child would be inferior to his mother, and she asserted the children would violate the mother's duty to produce pure offspring, a belief that reflected the popularity of eugenics. What was more, the mulatto would live under difficult circumstances. Europe, the Baronne de G. stated, was not especially open to people of color. "*Car notre Europe accorde à la question noire une bienveillance qui n'est que théorique: l'expansion de la race nègre implique un danger,*" a danger for all of Europe.[46] Blacks were inferior to whites, but deserving of help; the civilizing mission was as much a moral necessity as was preserving the purity of the races. Although she appeared firm in her beliefs, the Baronne de G. also believed there were a few civilized Blacks with "*une intelligence des plus remarquables et doués d'une âme delicate et généreuse,*" and a white woman could love "*un noir doué d'une belle âme toute blanche!*"[47] In the French imagination, the reception of the

nègre may have been less determined by his color and appearance, which by no means must be minimized, than by his level of civilization--as determined by the French: the playing field was not even, but it existed in France, and the French congratulated themselves for creating and maintaining that field.

The grand prize winner of the contest was a paean to maternal love, something more powerful than the color line. L. S. 123, the winner's pseudo-name, had married a mulatto and wrote that some tried to dissuade her from her marriage, claiming her child would be "*un petit moricaud!*" Without reservation, L. S. acknowledged that they were correct:

> *On m'avait prophétisé juste. Au moment de son arrivée au monde, mon petit Jack était d'un ton bizarre, un peu gris. Et puis il a foncé. Il est devenu couleur d'écaille blonde... C'est un superbe enfant, un petit Hercule doré aux membres robustes, aux traits harmonieux... Je l'aime. C'est mon petit.*[48]

This mother's attitude coincided with a national movement in the 1920s to valorize and strengthen the traditional role of women as mother's. L. S. won a prize for demonstrating that a mother's love for her child was independent of the child's color. Nevertheless, in the social imagination of the French, the bond to a child was color dependent. Indeed, when little Jack was born, L. S. claimed that her husband was afraid that she would not love the child because of his color--and yet one assumes, as was stated, that L. S. loved the dark-skinned father. L. S. concluded that in a mixed-race marriage, "*La pire menace, celle d'un enfant très coloré, j'en ai fait l'épreuve. Je ne le regrette en aucune façon.*"[49] In France, there was love across the color line, but this love was not color blind, even for one's own child.

If the *nègre* was not encumbered with negative qualities, he was an object of curiosity, even for his spouse. Yvonne D., the second place winner, like L. S., was married to a man of color. He was good, gentle, and faithful. But what Yvonne confessed to Eve was one of her obsessions when courting him:

"*J'avais une obsession: Les plantes de ses pieds sont-elles claires comme les paumes de ses mains?*"[50] This anthropological curiosity may not have affected Yvonne's choice in marriage, but it was indicative of the ignorance of the white towards the Black and the view of the Black as a specimen for study, if not a fetish.

Finally, the fourth prize was given to a young girl of eleven, Miette, who believed herself capable of marrying a *nègre*, despite believing Blacks were physically displeasing and dirty: "*Je ne sais pas si je trouverais ça très agreable de dejeuner en face d'un nègre.*"[51] Miette stated that she would want her Black spouse to wear gloves, and she feared his dark skin would dirty napkins. Nevertheless, she still thought she could marry a Black: "*Sans cela* [his dirty skin] *si je l'aime, je ne vois pas ce qui m'empêcherait d'être heureuse avec lui, et j'essuierai simplement mes joues quand il m'aura embrassée.*"[52] Miette's image of the *nègre* reflected the image depicted of him in popular advertising (as Chapter 6 will show). It was a common theme in hygiene and shoe polish publicity to depict dark skin as dirty and capable of soiling what was clean. In the French mentality, Miette's beliefs were not contradictory: the *nègre* was imagined to be dirty, inferior, and socially and physically regressive but also, if civilized, a Frenchman suitable for marriage.

A Faint Echo: Crossing the Color Line in Literature

During the heady days of the *années folles* crossing the color line became fashionable. Most often, this took the form of sexually charged dancing at notable night spots in Montmartre and Montparnasse. Inter-racial relations, sexual relations, were not unknown; they were tolerated, even readily accepted, but they were also problematic in the social imagination of the 1920s. In the iconography of the time, French men were rarely shown with a

sexualized *négresse*.[53] It was too often a known reality. French men had a history of taking advantage of their power and the sexual liberty they experienced in Africa, acquiring *petites épouses*, fathering, but not parenting, mulatto children, and as many thought, decivilizing themselves. In exotic literature, the civilizing or decivilizing of metropolitan men and their *petite épouse* was a common theme.[54]

The relationships women had with the *nègre* was represented much differently than male relationships with *négresses*. In iconography, women were shown dancing with *nègres* with such captions as, "Very Exciting."[55] Although some saw Caliban in the hexagon and, even more scandalous, modern women even desiring him, most representations of white women and Black men emphasized the impenetrable barrier between the two. Strangely, this topic seemed not to be addressed in literature to any appreciable degree. Roland Lebel's 1931 survey of colonial and exotic literature only cited two works from the 1920s that addressed white women's sexual relationships with Black Africans, neither of which did he choose to review.[56] These two works, Pierre Mille's and André Demaison's La Femme et l'homme nu (1924) and Louise Faure-Favier's Blanche et noir (1928), were banal, artistically deficient novels. Their importance, however, was how they developed French racism and exoticism. Mille and Demaison connected racism and exoticism and suggested that inter-racial relationships were vacant expressions of nihilism. Faure-Favier, like some of the readers of Eve, neither exotified the *nègre* nor essentialized his imagined savagery. French women, she further argued in stark contrast to Mille and Demaison, could bring racism to an end when and if they assumed their natural role of *civilisatrices*, joining the races through mixed marriages.

Vacant Love: La Femme et l'homme nu

Pierre Mille and André Demaison were old colonial hands and writers. Mille had spent a great deal of time in the colonies. Roland Lebel credited him with writing some of the first precise and specific descriptions of Africa and the *indigène* from extensive first-hand experience.[57] Demaison was an honored writer. He won the Grand prize for Colonial Literature and the *prix du roman* from the Académie française. In addition to his numerous publications, he inspired the best-selling authors, the Tharaud brothers to write Samba Diouf, the first novel about a *tirailleur*. Together, Mille and Demaison crafted a story of a white woman's love for a *tirailleur* that warned the post-war generation against taking the liberty to cross the color line. Sexual relations with the *indigène*, the authors suggested, were inherently absent of love, considered a western concept, and degrading to the white.

The main characters in this racial drama could not be more different, save their status as outsiders. Vania Sélianova was a white Russian *émigré* from well before the turn of the century. She was of comfortable means and was desirous of her liberty--total liberty tending towards nihilism. She had had many lovers, none capable of satisfying her, and she frequently changed them. The war and revolution embittered her for the loss of her beloved Russia to the Bolsheviks, and she headed to Saint Rafael on the Côte d'Azur to renew herself. There, she volunteered in a hospital for wounded *tirailleurs* and met Tiékoro, a young soldier from Ifane, Gambie. In Africa, Tiékoro was described as a primitive who did not wear clothes. He lived a pastoral life and filled his days with drinking, hunting, and following the traditional *fétiches*. When traveling peddlers came through his village, Tiékoro discovered the wider world. On a trip to the city, he enlisted in a colonial army unit. He went to war and was wounded but not before showing great heroics, saving a number of injured

soldiers. Despite learning French, Tiékoro remained traditional in thought and passive in life: he believed his wound was from abandoning the spirits of his village.

Vania became attracted to Tiékoro in the army hospital almost immediately. He was an exile, as was she. At first, Tiékoro was something of a toy to her, but her interest towards him grew. There was something primitive in Tiékoro that she wanted to possess for her own renewal: "*Elle confond l'heroïsme et l'impudence, l'insouciance et la générosité, la satisfaction immédiate des instincts et la liberté.*"[58] There was nothing to prevent Vania from possessing Tiékoro. She was uninterested in social conventions: her nihilistic moral code knew only laws that she defined. But her desire for the primitive, Mille and Demaison demonstrated, confused her. Egoism was not liberty, especially when it violated a racial moral order. Vania was not an every woman nor specifically Russian. She represented one extreme of the new woman, similar to *la garçonne*, who was redefining post-war social relations, and Mille and Demaison, as voices for traditional female roles, warned that there were consequences to taking liberty to its egoistic limits.[59]

The *indigène* had little free will in the French imagination, and exotic literature was a site for contesting the definition of the *indigène*'s passivity (see Chapter 3). Thus Vania alone initiated and furthered her relationship and ultimate intimacy with the passive Tiékoro. Eventually she took Tiékoro to her apartment. The atmosphere was sexually charged: "*il en éprouvait une sensation chaude, indéfinie, faite de désir et de malaise réunis.*"[60] Tiékoro, as a Black African, knew that he could not have Vania, and he feared the power of her *fétiches*--pictures and icons. Fortunately for Tiékoro, his curfew bell sounded before Vania could consummate their relationship. Not long after this, Tiékoro returned to her apartment. Vania was hot with emotion: "*Il parut si*

grand à Vania qu'elle eut peur de lui--peur et désir. Elle l'enlaça par la taille."[61] Tiékoro disengaged from Vania, afraid of the spirits. She used this power over him, putting on an icon of the Madonna, an *igwar* to Tiékoro. Christianity, considered a civilized religion, had to triumph over *fétichisme.* So Vania struck Tiékoro with a crop: "*Le Noir parut se réveiller en sursaut. Les instincts de la forêt le secouèrent...*"[62] He came after her, but her icon was too powerful for the soldier.

> *Vaincu, il s'affala sur le lit... Vania se rapprocha, et, timidement, lui posa les mains sur les épaules. Comme il ne réagissait pas, elle le poussa doucement pour qu'il s'étendît. Docile, il se laissait faire.... Dans le silence, le choc des boutons d'uniforme sur le parquet accompagna le bruit mou des habits...'Sauvage!' cria Vania, tendrement...*[63]

Thus Vania and Tiékoro became lovers, but their relationship did not approximate Western love. Tiékoro became comfortable, even confident with Vania after he sacrificed a chicken for protection against whites and to learn of their power. Vania and Tiékoro began to spend a great deal of time together, drunk on champagne and desire. She said that Tiékoro was a slave to her pleasures, but, as Mille and Demaison narrate, it was really she who was enslaved--to her own desires: "*À cette heure elle était l'esclave d'un souvenir sensuel.*"[64] There was little more to the relationship than this. Tiékoro was simple. He did not think of much of anything. He did not have to: the gods determined and dominated everything. Thus he had no interests exterior to him. Walking through town, for example, "*Il n'y arrêta pas sa pensée, ne posa point de questions.*"[65] If he cared about anything, it was learning the secrets of white people's *fétiches.* He was not interested in Vania as an individual, short of physical pleasures--as long as the *fétiches* were favorable. But even this was perfunctory; in the French imagination, the *nègre* had an unquenchable physical appetite for women, any woman, as if it was a bodily function (see Chapter 3). Vania was thus left with a vacant spiritual relationship. "*Maintenant*

qu'elle était toute à Tiékoro, elle se sentait, par sa race, par sa naissance, par son éducation, impénétrable à lui, et lui à elle. Les sentiments dont son âme était pleine ne trouvaient pas d'écho dans celle de son amant."[66] Mille and Demaison suggested that the gap separating whites and *nègres* was irresolvable, and idealized Western love, the sharing of souls, was limited to the Occident. Inter-racial unions, they demonstrated, were a fantasy empty of true love.

Still, champagne and sex could make for a lasting relationship, and it did until French racism reared its chauvinistic head. Whites talked about Tiékoro and Vania. Some insulted the couple. Others viewed this *marrainage* as unusual but understandable: Vania was considered a foreigner. Obviously, a French woman would never cross the color line, despite evidence to the contrary. Nevertheless, conflict eventually ensued, and Tiékoro was sent back to Dakar to be decommissioned. Beside herself, Vania followed him to French Senegal where racism was depicted as even more severe than in the hexagon. At the hotel in Dakar where she initially stayed, Vania and Tiékoro could not have a drink and a meal in peace. Whites were scandalized by them and informed the hotel patron: "*pensionnaires et clients déclaraient, d'une voix que le nombre faisait hardie, qu'ils ne resteraient pas un instant dans la même salle que ce 'cochon de nègre.'*"[67] They did not have to; Vania and Tiékoro left. Driven out of this hotel, Vania could not find another. No hotel would rent to a women who slept with a *nègre*. Finally, she rented a small apartment where she spent idle hours with Tiékoro. In her apartment with him, Vania was able to forget the hatreds and realities of the world: "*C'est là que, pendant une demi-heure sans arrêt, Vania oubliait dans les bras du primitif mystérieux, la blancheur... de sa race.*"[68] Alone, she dreamed of fleeing to the bush with Tiékoro to live both far from the jealousies of man and in total liberty, her

representation of the idealized limits of primitivism. Although Mille and Demaison explicitly revealed racist French attitudes, they did not condemn racism. Rather, they suggested that inter-racial unions were an aberration that marginalized and isolated individuals in society, and by their nature, they could not provide for happiness.

Such stories demonstrated that inter-racial unions led to pain and dissolution. In Africa as in the hexagon, racial animosity greatly affected the lovers, especially since they openly strolled through Dakar together. White officers felt that Tiékoro had usurped them: a single white woman was theirs for poaching. And white women were disgraced. One said, "*on vous voit tous les jours avec un nègre.... Ces gens sont nos domestiques... pas nos amants.*"[69] Their relationship eventually angered a municipal official who resolved to take action. Tiékoro was soon discharged, paid his bonus, and then promptly beaten, robbed, and left in the street after leaving his garrison for the final time. An *indigène* woman took in the bloodied Tiékoro and nursed him. Tiékoro thought that Vania's *igwars,* her *fétiches*, were no longer powerful; why else would he have been hurt? Tiékoro was constructed as a primitive: he had little sense of agency in his life. The spirits must have wanted him to be with the *indigène* and he was comfortable with her manioc and palm wine. So Tiékoro did not return to Vania.

Vania was crushed and reflected harshly on herself, but she was white and that meant everything. After feeling pain and anger, Vania turned her gaze on herself: "*Elle eut honte. Pour la première fois elle sentit justifiée la réprobation qui s'attachait à ses actes, à sa situation.*"[70] It was as if she came out of a fog to see clearly what she had done to herself. She wanted to repent but could not: she was too free. So Vania caught the next steamship to France. She thought she would return to Paris, regain her friends, and

"*raconterait son voyage à sa façon. On écouterait ses histoires étranges... Une auréole de légende l'entourerait...*"[71] Vania thought her adventure would make her culturally chic. She would wear her *nègre* like an ornament. But her glib thoughts did not last. As Dakar faded in the distance, she experienced a feeling of hatred:

> *son cœur montait la haine... Haine contre les hommes incompréhensifs qui l'avaient bafouée... elle accusait de son destin tout ce peuple de blancs coloniaux; elle les trouvait odieux et ridicules. C'étaient ceux-là qui l'avaient reniée ou l'avaient laissé insulter...*[72]

But hate alone would not salve her soul. Society may have been intrusive and corrupt, but she had sinned and humiliated herself: "*Son âme lui murmura le dégoût, l'abjection des actes qui outragent l'honneur de la caste.*"[73] Vania was white, and she discovered this by being with a *nègre*. She would return to her racial caste and its privileges.

Tiékoro, for his part, struck off for his village. On the road home, he took off his shoes, symbolically sloughing off his veneer of civilization. Each step he took did more than physically bring him home: "*À mesure qu'il avançait, une âme à la fois ancienne et nouvelle remplaçait en lui celle qui avait vécu là-bas.*"[74] His old soul came back to him as did his old animosities and respect for the spirits. Tiékoro soon returned to his village, became the chief, bought a couple of wives, drank palm wine and never looked back at his white lover. The spirits favored a primitive life for a primitive.

Mille and Demaison spun a tale that was consistent with literary exoticism but also that challenged a few common shibboleths. Tiékoro was a man with little free will, buffeted by the winds of change, who could be fierce in battle, skilled on the chase, but had no interests beyond palm wine and sex. He was a stereotypical *indigène--le nègre*. Although he learned French and desired the power of the whites only because their *igwars* seemed stronger

than his, civilization held no allure for him and could not adhere to him. His regressive proclivities were natural, never far below the surface of his docility. But unlike most *nègres* in exotic fiction who acquired civilization or the pretensions of it, like Romulus Coucou, Tiékoro did not come a tragic end. In French fantasies of the exotic Other, civilization destroyed the *indigène*--or primitive forces destroyed the civilized *indigène*.[75] Civilization, the French believed, was incompatible with the *nègre*. Tiékoro, though bruised, survived his bout with civilization, but it really never took hold with him: it was a thin veneer that came off when he took off his shoes. Despite these conventions, Mille and Demaison strayed from conventional views by highlighting racial hatred on the part of whites. Indeed, no white in the story was a compelling figure. Civilized they were but also racist, petty, and egoistic. Yet the tale of Vania and her *nègre* ended by reaffirming traditions, treating mixed-race love as vacant and degrading.

L'Atavisme as *Civilisatrice*

Louise Faure-Favier (1870-1961) was a heroine and author. In the 1920s she was a famous aviatrix, setting records and flying where no woman had flown before, and she wrote numerous popular books on flight. In 1928 she published Blanche and noir, a story of racism, shame, and racial reconciliation. In a letter to La Dépêche Africaine, a French assimilationist paper with an international focus, Faure-Favier took a optimistic stance on race relations in France: "*Je crois fermement à l'avenir de la Race Noire gâce à la culture intellectuelle qu'elle reçoit depuis quelques années et qui va s'intensifiant. Il me semble tout naturel de prévoir, pour un temps très proche, la complète égalité des races.*"[76] Faure-Favier was unique for her optimism and this was reflected in her novel. Blanche and noir was not only a story of

race relations, but a statement about moral evolution, the continuous civilizing process that in France, Faure-Favier asserted, women alone could advance.

Blanche et noir began as the story of Jeanne Lotac-Rieux and her provincial bourgeois family's disgrace. Jeanne was born in Monistrol-sur-Loire (Haute-Loire) in 1890. Her father was a notary; her mother a stern bourgeois woman. Jeanne was a spirited, spontaneous child, and she was the spitting image of her grandmother, Malvina, also a high-spirited woman of much beauty and who was surrounded with some mystery about Africa. Whenever Jeanne's wild behavior flared, she would hear cryptic comparisons of herself to Malvina. Whatever was passed on to her, it was dangerous: "J*e ne savais pas encore ce que c'était que l'atavisme, mais je le sentais déjà peser sur moi.*"[77] Her regression went beyond her looks to her character, moral fiber, and, strangely, to a fascination with Africa.

When Jeanne was about ten, around 1900, two friends asked her: "'*Avec qui préféreriez- vous vous marier, d'un juif ou d'un nègre?*'"[78] Jeanne knew that the Church did not look favorably on Jews. A *nègre* was something unknown to her, but her friend said they had big lips and bulging eyes "'*comme celui qui est sur la boîte de cirage chez l'épicier.*'"[79] After being prodded, Jeanne finally blurted out that she would marry the *nègre*. Her little friends immediately teased her and ran to a nun who mocked her. Her parents were mortified by what she said and stated that she would come to no good, like Malvina. In the provinces around 1900, when this fictional incident was supposed to have taken place, it should not be surprising that Jews and *nègres* were equated in some way as the Other. Anti-Semitism had been simmering since the Dreyfus Affair and Jews were depicted malevolently and grotesquely in popular culture and by some in the Church. But Jews were citizens, a status withheld from most of France's *indigènes*. On the other hand, *nègres* were only

known to these children as a figures on consumer product and, just as likely, in the popular press. The *nègre* in these popular representations was depicted as a servant, at best, and more often as a grotesque buffoon (see Chapters 5 and 6). The *nègre* was not experienced directly by these provincials, but he was known to be Black, not white, and was thus held in lower esteem than the Jew, except by Jeanne.

Not long after this, Jeanne discovered the source of her family's shame. When playing an African adventure game with some kids, she was teased about her "*oncle nègre*," who was as black as shoe polish. Finally, Jeanne discovered the sad story of Malvina, her grandmother. Widowed at thirty-seven, and with her only son married, the still beautiful Malvina went to the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris. There she met a Senegalese with whom she fell in love. Their affair scandalized her son back in the province, and he immediately rejected her. Malvina then left for Africa with her *nègre*, Samba Laobé. She had a child the following year, the same year of Jeanne's birth, and thus Jeanne had an "*oncle nègre*." Malvina died not long after childbirth, from yellow fever on a return trip to France to try to regularize her marriage. A photo of her Black child was sent to the local *mairie*, and it was passed around, mocked, and then given to the family. The Lortac-Rieux's had bourgeois status anxiety from that date. Jeanne felt differently about Malvina and her Black child. She proclaimed that she had an uncle, but her favorite cousin, Dr. Rieux, told her otherwise: "*Tes parents te déclareraient qu'une famille bourgeoise n'a pas de membres nègres*."[80] In provincial France, class was everything and race rarely an issue. But race and class were not independent at least when it concerned Black blood.

Not long after learning all of this, Jeanne discovered that not all whites were civilized. Her cousin, Dr. Rieux, and his domestique, Rosalie, took

Jeanne on a trip into the mountains, to Rosalie's home. She met Rosalie's family but could not communicate with them; they only spoke patois. Furthermore, Jeanne was struck by the brutal poverty of the peasants. They had an "*air dur et fier, presque farouche.*"[81] They lived in shacks with some of their livestock amidst fetid odors. One friend of Rosalie's had eight children, barefoot and with bugs in their nest of hair. Dr. Rieux was appalled with such economic and moral poverty: "*Hein! quelle misère*!" he said to Jeanne. "*Quels sauvages! On se croirait au bout du monde. Cela ne doit pas être pire chez les nègres.*"[82] Jeanne rose up in defense of the *nègres*. They are clean she asserted: they bathe. *Nègres* were morally above these provincials. Drawing stark contrasts, Faure-Favier challenged the French to examine the relationship between savagery and race. A white, by virtue of his skin color alone, she suggested, was not inherently more civilized than a *nègre*, especially when that white only spoke patois, not French, the hallmark of civilization.

Jeanne left the provinces for boarding school and did not return for any appreciable length of time after age ten. When she returned, she discovered old prejudices did not die, save for her father's repentance--on his deathbed. Just before dying, he confessed the grave sin of renouncing his family: "'*Je traîne depuis vingt ans le remords de ma dureté envers ma mère... Elle n'est allée mourir si loin de moi, de sa maison, que parce que j'ai manqué à mon devoir envers elle. Je devais la soutenir, la défendre... Et j'ai renié celui qui était mon frère.*'"[83] This symbolic familial reconciliation was also a racial one. But it came too late and was only private talk, and it could not withstand Jeanne's mother's provincial bourgeois racism. Rifling through her father's papers, Jeanne found the picture of her *oncle nègre* as a child. Her mother rose up to deny the boy's lineage: "*Son frère! Tais-toi! Tais-toi! Un nègre n'est pas un frère. Et ce nègre n'était qu'un enfant naturel.*'"[84] In short, he was a

Black bastard. Jeanne's mother carried her bitterness to the end. Malvina had dishonored her and the family, and it was public knowledge. She died with this hatred--the same hatred other provincials had to the *nègre*, Faure-Favier suggested.

During the war, Jeanne became a journalist. At war's end, she traveled to Tréguier in Brittany to write a story on African soldiers, and her childhood interest in the *nègre* was reawakened. Africans, she discovered, were civilized. She interviewed an *indigène* officer who spoke excellent French and who praised the heroism of his *tirailleurs*. Then she saw an amazing sight: Bretons embracing the *tirailleurs*. As soldiers strolled proudly but nonchalantly down a street,

> *un groupe de jeunes filles bretonnes venait au-devant d'eux. Et je ne fus pas peu surprise de voir ces blondes jouvencelles se suspendre au cou de ces grands noirs pour de tendres embrassements... je n'éprouvai aucune horreur, aucune répugnance. Ces nègres étaient de fort beaux garçons. Près des Bretons rabougris, trop souvent alcooliques et dégénérés, ils semblaient des hercules, et leur prestance, la grâce de leur démarche, leur larges épaules expliquaient parfaitement l'attrait qu'ils exerçaient sur les blanches Bretonnes.*[85]

Here, Faure-Favier approached a universalistic stance towards the *nègre*. The *nègre* was attractive for his manly, but not overtly sexualized, physicality. Faure-Favier reflected a development of thought in France since the 1925 debut of Josephine Baker and the discovery of an African Venus noire that accepted that the Black body could be beautiful (see Chapter 9), and if the body was beautiful, the soul was likely to be as well, a connection that humanized the *nègre*. Moreover, the African's attractiveness was enhanced by the contrast with the physically and morally degenerate provincial who Faure-Favier constructed as an Other.

But the provincial was not the Other--Jews and *nègres* were, and Jeanne asked a few Breton girls the question that so vexed her as a child: who would

you prefer to marry, a Jew or a *nègre*? The young women did not hesitate to answer: "'*Mais le plus gentil des deux!*" A second woman added: "'*À la condition qu'il soit joli garçon, riche et bien élevé.*'"[86] A generation after Jeanne was queried about marrying a *nègre*, she believed prejudice had abated. The new post-war generation, she wanted to believe, cared only for beauty and one person's skin arousing another's. Furthermore, Jeanne questioned hitherto unquestioned and implicitly fixed cultural categories that helped define the French, such as what was white and what was beauty. White, she realized, was only a concept. No one was truly white, and many whites were aesthetically displeasing. Equating white with beauty, Jeanne concluded, was a chimerical and chauvinistic thought.

> *Mais voilà les blancs ont décrété, dans leur fatuité, qu'ils détenaient la beauté du monde. Fi du jaune, fi du noir! Le blanc est la couleur idéale. Décret vain autant que puéril. Les jaunes, au reste, en disent autant du jaune... Il n'y a que les noirs qui se taisent. Et pourtant, seule, la couleur noire est intégrale.*[87]

After meeting the *nègre* and reflecting on him in a comparative context, Jeanne came to a universal understanding of beauty, one the French were groping towards in the 1920s.

This position humanized the *nègre*. Jeanne not only humanized him, but became a *négrophile*, like others in the early 1920s.

> *Ma curiosité continuait à s'aiguiser vers le pittoresque africain. Elle avait, il faut l'avouer, de quoi se satisfaire. Que de films cinématographiques, que de revues, de danses, d'expositions, d'exhibitions! J'ai été une spectatrice passionnée de ces spectacles nègres multipliés à Paris.*[88]

Unlike in her youth, when the only opportunity to see a *nègre* was on a shoe polish tin, Paris was now aflutter with *spectacles nègres*--and this was not African American jazz shows. Jeanne even dreamed of going on the Croisière noire (see Chapter 9); she had to settle for a planned trip to Dakar.

But her travel plans were upset when she inherited Dr. Rieux's home, the ancestral home of Malvina. Jeanne returned to the province, soaked up memories, and felt she would return to write a book in the "*cœur pur de la France*!"[89] Before she left, she walked out to the cemetery to look at her family plot. There she saw a plane flying low then land. A few minutes later, while in deep reflection over the names on monuments, a man came up behind her and noted that Malvina's name was missing from the family memorial. The man was Francis Laobé-Rieux, Malvina's son, Jeanne's *oncle nègre.* He was a handsome elegant man, Jeanne thought. "*Il avait grand air. Un nègre, sans doute, mais un nègre aux traits fins, à la bouche à peine un peu forte. Ses yeux noirs, très beaux, regardaient bien droit et reflétaient l'intelligence et la maîtrise de soi.*"[90] He came to the province to purchase Malvina's house, not knowing that it had been left to Jeanne. Her response was quick, and she brutally asserted that it was her house. Then she reflected: "*Ah! que mon âme de propriétaire se revélait fougueuse. Tout mon atavisme terrien réapparaissait...*"[91] Jeanne quickly apologized for her bitter response to him, desiring not to be like other provincials with their age-old animosities. More than developing the French attachment to their land, Faure-Favier was suggesting that it was not just the *nègre* who had atavistic traits, as was commonly believed, but that metropolitans had them as well. Civilization had a tenuous hold on all of humanity.

With his correct French, impeccable manners, and bronze skin, François Laobé-Rieux cut a smart figure to Jeanne. He told her about Malvina. She was loved in Senegal by both the French and *indigène* communities. She wanted to live with Samba so she moved into his hut. Furthermore, she gave up western attire, but she did not go primitive or decivilize herself. Rather, she established a close humanistic union with Samba: "'*Quelle sûre conseillère elle*

était!'"[92] Working beside Samba, she brought peace to villagers who were revolting against Samba's innovations and civilized rule. Malvina was thus a unique figure in exotic literature. She was a *civilisatrice* who worked in harmony with the *indigène.*

This harmony was manifested in her desires for her son. When Malvina gave birth, Samba was disappointed that the boy was not white. Malvina was not. She said, "'*je veux que notre enfant soit aussi fier du sang de son père que de celui de sa mère. Je veux que François Laobé-Rieux soit un grand Français du Sénégal.*'"[93] And that was what guided his life. He was educated in French schools, went to lycée in Paris, and joined the military, earning stripes as an aviator. After the war, he became a successful modern businessman, flying all over France for meetings. François was proud to be French and African, proud of both of his blood lines. A *nègre*, Faure-Favier demonstrated, could be as civilized, if not more civilized than any metropolitan--and it was not a thin veneer.

Rather, French civilization was weak: it could not live up to its ideals. François was indignant about race relations, and he blamed France for neither extending equality to the colony nor conceiving that the best *indigène* was the equal of a metropolitan. France may have abolished slavery and should be congratulated for this, but it had not welcomed *indigènes* nor even honored their achievements, François asserted:

> '*En 1925, la race blanche continue à mépriser la race noire, à la considérer comme inférieure.... Combien ne voient les nègres du Sénégal qu'à travers les pitreries simiesques des jazz-bands! Combien ignorent qu'une élite de noirs s'honorent d'un député intelligent et énergique, d'un écrivain lauréat, de peintres de talent, de nombreux médecins de savants...*'[94]

The image of Africa and the African, François claimed, had not changed in the public arena. There was a modern Africa with well educated productive people,

but all the French wanted to see, at best, was the buffoonery of entertainers. France kept its prejudices despite change in Africa, and this had a human cost.

Finally, François claimed that the French withheld their fraternity from the *indigène*: "'*Vous nous avez apporté votre civilisation, mais vous nous refusez votre affection.*'"[95] Indeed, it was as difficult in 1925 as it was in his mother's day for a Black man to marry a white woman. François knew; he married a French woman over the objections of her parents--who renounced her after her children were born, one black and one white child. Thus François asked, as history appeared to repeat itself, "'*mais qui nous sera jamais fraternel*?'"[96] The answer was obvious to Jeanne:

> '*Les femmes... Les femmes reprendront, un jour, le beau rôle de médiatrice qui fut celui de Malvina Rieux... Les femmes, avec leur cerveau élargi et leur cœur meilleur: Voilà les véritables civilisatrices! Ce sont elles qui feront cesser ce terrible antagonisme de races et qui empêcheront les hommes, après s'être battus pour des territoires, pour des religions, pour de l'argent, de s'entre-tuer pour des couleurs... Il leur suffira de décrétér que la race noire vaut la race blanche et que la beauté réside là autant qu'ici, qu'un cerveau de noir est constitué comme un cerveau de blanc et qu'il n'est qu'une humanité.*'[97]

Men had made a mess of the world. They had fought and driven the races apart. Women, Faure-Favier argued, would be the ones to mend the wounds. They would not just civilize their men as wives were supposed to do; they would civilize society, healing and uniting into one humanity what conquest, war, and prejudice had torn asunder.

Faure-Favier's compelling idealism albeit preachy book was unique in the 1920s. Her main *indigène* character was civilized from birth and by education. His refined culture was not a shell that could crumble to reveal a primitive, nor were his achievements in any way hubris that would lead to tragedy. If primitive savagery existed in the novel it resided in the ill-educated, prejudicial provincial Frenchman. Contrasting the provincial and the *nègre*,

Faure-Favier questioned what defined civilization: race or achievement. Her answer was clear. Birth right based on color was inconsequential compared to universal ideals of beauty, intelligence, and fraternal behaviors. Finally, Faure-Favier made a feminist statement against racial hatred. The male civilizing mission that was based on schools, roads, and economic exploitation was predicated on conquest and division. The modern woman was the bearer of the fraternity needed to heal, civilize, and uplift all of humanity.

Conclusion

Celebratory histories of the *années folles* easily capture the exoticism of Blacks, their positive reception, and their significant contributions to French culture. But celebratory histories neither provide nuanced portraits of the horizons of the French *mentalité* in the 1920s, nor develop the evolution in thought about the Black Other. In fact, just after the war, when Reboux's Romulus Coucou and the Eve survey were published, the *nègre* could be imagined with little of the exotic piquantness of his later representations but with many of the stereotypes that would adhere to him throughout the 1920s, virtually all negative.

The love between a white woman and a Black man was sensational even in the *tumulte noire* of the 1920s. French men and women imagined this crossing of the color line differently. Male authors, Reboux and Mille and Demaison, developed the inherent impossibility of such social transgressions, and they used inter-racial relationships as a means of critiquing society, a standard practice in exoticism. Reboux, for example, employed a form of projection, using information about Blacks in the United States, to disclose attitudes about Blacks in France--and to distance the French from some of their most unsavory beliefs. Mille and Demaison, by contrast, employed the *nègre*

as a vehicle to critique the unsettling new social order in the 1920s and the exotic quest of some modern women. Women, by contrast, were more ambivalent in their views towards the *nègre* in mixed-race unions. Although half of the Eve respondents denigrated the *nègre*, the other half viewed him as prosaic as any French husband, which was, ostensibly, fully human. Faure-Favier extended this humanizing discourse, claiming women were civilizers not just of the *nègre* but of the French by loving the *nègre*.

As the 1920s progressed, these latter views were expressed much less often, in part, perhaps, because few women had the opportunity to express their voices in the cultural arena. More likely, however, humanizing the *nègre* had less appeal than exotifying him and defining him as the Other to help the French mediate the changes in culture the war advanced. Representations of the exotic Black Other, not the humanized Black, were, with rare exception, developed throughout the 1920s, and the Black became the locus of contested cultural conflicts, as René Maran discovered after he published Batouala in late 1921, laying out the high stakes of exoticism in France.

Endnotes

[1]See the reprint of Paul Colin's portfolio of lithographs, "Le tumulte noir" in Paul Colin, Josephine Baker and La Revue nègre: Paul Colin's Lithographs of Le Tumulte noir in Paris, 1927, Intro. by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Karen C. C. Dalton (New York: Harry A. Abrams, 1998).

[2]Paul Reboux, Romulus Coucou, roman nègre (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, Éditeur, 1920), 30.

[3]Ibid., 33.

[4]Ibid., 87.

[5]Ibid., 87.

[6]Ibid., 89.

[7]See Jay R. Berkovitz, The Shaping of Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century France (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1989) for the problem of assimilating Jews during the Revolution; see Gérard Noiriel, Le Creuset Français: Histoire de l'immigration XIX-XXe siècles (Paris: Édition du seuil, 1988) for the assimilation of all immigrants into France.

[8]Reboux, Romulus Coucou, 97-98.

[9]Ibid., 122.

[10]Ibid., 158.

[11]Ibid., 159.

[12]Ibid., 151.

[13]Ibid., 152.

[14]For another instance of Reboux showing sympathy to the *nègre* but also denigrating him, see Paul Reboux, "Les Nègres sont à la mode," Paris-Magazine 10 juillet 1919, 105-106.

[15]Reboux, Romulus Coucou, 231.

[16]Ibid., 232.

[17]Ibid., 244.

[18]Ibid., 247.

[19]Ibid., 250.

[20]See Gavin I. Langmuir, History, Religion, and Antisemitism (Berkely: University of California Press, 1990) for a discussion about how anti-Semitic beliefs were constructed in response to crises in the belief structure of the dominant group. By analogy, a crisis in French identity may have generated an explosion in the dissemination of fictions about Blacks.

[21]See Philippe Dewitte, Les Mouvements nègres en France 1919-1939 (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1985).

[22]Eve, 23 novembre 1924.

[23]Eve, 26 fevrier 1920.

[24]Eve, 26 fevrier 1920.

[25]Eve, 29 fevrier 1920.

[26]Eve, 1 mars 1920.

[27]Eve, 26 fevrier 1920.

[28]Eve, 29 fevrier 1920.

[29]Eve, 26 fevrier 1920.

[30]Eve, 26 fevrier 1920.

[31]Eve, 2 mars 1920.

[32]Eve, 2 mars 1920.

[33]Eve, 1 mars 1920.

[34]Eve, 3 mars 1920.

[35]Eve, 28 mars 1920.

[36]Eve, 28 mars 1920.

[37]Eve, 28 mars 1920.

[38]Eve, 28 mars 1920.

[39]Eve, 28 mars 1920.

[40]Eve, 28 mars 1920.

[41]Eve, 28 mars 1920.

[42]See Gérard Noiriel, Le Creuset Français, for the numbers of immigrants, especially Italians, who married French nationals and were assimilated. Today, some thirty percent of all French nationals have a parent, grandparent, or great-grandparent of foreign origin.

[43]Eve, 28 mars 1920.

[44]Eve, 28 mars 1920.

[45]Eve, 29 mars 1920.

[46]Eve, 29 mars 1920.

[47]Eve, 29 mars 1920.

[48]Eve, 29 mars 1920.

[49]Eve, 29 mars 1920.

[50]Eve, 29 mars 1920.

[51]Eve, 29 mars 1920.

[52]Eve, 29 mars 1920.

[53]For a discussion of this iconography, see Jan Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992) and Raymond Bachollet, Jean Barthélemi Debost, Anne-Claude Lelieur, Marie-Christine Peyrière, eds., NégriPub: l'image des Noirs dans la publicité (Paris: Somogy, 1992, 1994).

[54]See Roland Lebel, Histoire de la littérature coloniale en France (Paris: Librairie Larose, 1931) and Ada Martinkus-Zemp, Le Blanc et le Noir, Essai d'une description de la vision du Noir par le Blanc dans la littérature française de l'entre-deux-guerres (Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1975).

[55]See Fantasio, 15 juin 1924, 584. It should also be noted that Fantasio, a humor magazine, frequently caricatured Blacks in the early 1920s. Unfortunately, I was unable to access many of these issues, but this is clearly a rich source that should be mined for its representations of the *nègre*.

[56]See Lebel, Histoire de la littérature coloniale. Although Lebel's work is an exhaustive survey of colonial litterature, it did not include general French fiction. The topic may have have been discussed in other novels, but I have yet to find any references that indicate this.

[57]Ibid., 140.

[58]Pierre Mille et André Demaison, La Femme et l'homme nu (Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1924), 118.

[59]For a discussion of the new woman in the 1920s, see Mary Louise Roberts, Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[60]Mille et Demaison, La Femme et l'homme nu, 135.

[61]Ibid., 141.

[62]Ibid., 143.

[63]Ibid., 144.

[64]Ibid., 153.

[65]Ibid., 156.

[66]Ibid., 154.

[67]Ibid., 185. It is also interesting to note that in 1923 Kojo Touvalou, a decorated veteran from French West Africa, was thrown out of a Parisian restaurant because his presence offended white American customers. The President of the Republic proclaimed that in France such things must not exist and blamed the incident on Americans. Such racist attitudes, however, also existed within the French population.

[68]Ibid., 193.

[69]Ibid., 197.

[70]Ibid., 220.

[71]Ibid., 240.

[72]Ibid., 241.

[73]Ibid., 242.

[74]Ibid., 248.

[75]For a brief discussion on how civilizing the *indigène* was connected to tragedy in the French imagination, see János Riesz, "L'Ethnologie Coloniale ou le refus de l'assimilation" in L'Autre et Nous, <<Scènes et Types>>, eds. Pascal Blanchard, Stéphane Blanchoin, Nicolas Bancel, Gilles Boëtsch, et Hubert Gerbeau (Paris: ACHAC, 1995, SYROS, 1995), 209-214. See also my discussions of Gaston Joseph, Koffi: roman vrai d'un noir (Paris: Aux Éditions Du Monde Nouveau, 1922) and Jérôme et Jean Tharaud, La Randonnée de Samba Diouf (Paris: Plon, 1922).

[76]Louise Faure-Favier, "Autour de 'Blanche et noir,'" La Dépêche Africaine, décembre 1928, 1.

[77]Louise Faure-Favier, Blanche et noir, (Paris: J. Ferenczi et Fils, Editeurs, 1928), 30.

[78]Ibid., 38.

[79]Ibid., 39.

[80]Ibid., 83.

[81]Ibid., 110.

[82]Ibid., 112.

[83]Ibid., 142.

[84]Ibid., 150.

[85]Ibid., 166-67.

[86]Ibid., 167.

[87]Ibid., 168-69.

[88]Ibid., 171-72.

[89]Ibid., 176.

[90]Ibid., 180.

[91]Ibid., 182.

[92]Ibid., 197.

[93]Ibid., 199.

[94]Ibid., 208.

[95]Ibid., 209.

[96]Ibid., 212.

[97]Ibid., 212.

CHAPTER 3

BETWEEN EXOTICISM AND COMMITTED LITERATURE: BATOUALA (1921) AND THE STRUGGLE OVER *L'AME NOIRE*

C'est que M. Maran est noir et que le prix Goncourt n'y changera rien. [1]

On 14 December 1921 the Académie Goncourt lunched at the café Drouant in Paris. Before they could indulge in their meal, the Académie had to attend to their business: they were meeting to determine the nineteenth winner of the coveted Prix Goncourt, the highest literary prize in France for a work by a young author. After several rounds of voting, the Académie was hopelessly deadlocked, five votes for René Maran's Batouala and five votes for Jacques Chardonne's L'Epithalame. Rather than delaying their meal any longer, Gustave Geffroy, president of the Académie, asserted his prerogative to add weight to his vote to break ties. Throwing this weight behind Maran, a Black man from Martinique, Geffroy saw to it that Batouala was awarded the Prix Goncourt.[2] Their work accomplished, the Académie then dined in peace. The critics, however, were just starting to sharpen their pens, in part to attack the Académie Goncourt but even more to defend French civilization from Batouala.

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René Maran's novel, Batouala, véritable roman nègre, was a sensation, not for its sales but for the passionate discourse it generated in the 1920s. The novel, a story of a Banda chief's jealousy and demise in equatorial Africa, was lyrically written and compelling, even worthy of a literary prize. What was most significant to many contemporaries about the book, however, was its preface: a scathing indictment of French colonialism. Not surprisingly, the responses to Batouala were as strident as Maran's preface. The book was occasionally
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praised and defended, but more often, critics, especially colonialists, excoriated it. In addition, several books were written in response to Batouala, and it was the subject of an *interpellation* in the Chamber of Deputies. Today, Batouala is considered to be of little literary value. Since the flourishing of the *négritude* and colonial independence movements after World War II, René Maran's influence on history, both literary and cultural, despite a few monographs devoted to him and a number of critical essays exploring aspects of his *œuvre*, has been minimized. In the 1920s, however, Batouala was of immense cultural importance: it was a site for defining and contesting *l'âme noire* and therefore French civilization and its exotic desires.

René Maran: French and Black

René Maran (1887-1960) was born in Fort-de-France, Martinique. His father was a low-level Black colonial official from Guyana, stationed at the time of his birth in Martinique; Maran's mother, also from Guyana, was a *mulâtresse*. When Maran was three, his father accepted a post in Gabon. The climate in Africa was harsh on the young Maran so he was sent to Bordeaux for boarding school around age seven.[3] Maran stayed in Bordeaux, separated from his family, until he graduated from Lycée Michel de Montaigne. In Bordeaux, he perfected his French, developed a love for literature, and became thoroughly acculturated to France. Maran saw himself as a Frenchman who was Black rather than a Black man who was a French citizen.[4] After graduating from the *lycée* and without the financial resources necessary to attend a university, Maran enrolled in the colonial service, a common career choice at the time for educated French Blacks. From 1910 until his resignation in 1923, Maran lived in Africa as a colonial official in the Ubangui-Shari, Afrique Equatoriale Française. He was a competent official who learned Banda, the dominant

language of his jurisdiction in the Ubangui-Shari, and was a scrupulous observer and student of the African culture

Maran empathized with the suffering in Africa, which he carefully and forcefully addressed in his writing. After the publication of Batouala, Maran, who was no longer welcomed in the colonial service, moved to Paris and embarked upon a prolific, albeit impoverished, literary career. He wrote numerous books of poetry, including Le Livre du Souvenir which won the Prix de Poésie from the Académie Française in 1959. After Batouala, he wrote an additional nine novels about Africa that lyrically expressed his exotic vision of the continent, and he continued to try to describe objectively the customs and morals of Black Africans. Included in these works were a series of novels about animals that have led some to compare Maran with Kipling.[5] In addition, Maran wrote sympathetic studies of Livingstone, Brazza, and other imperialists, and a biography of his friend, the Black Governor General of A.E.F., Felix Eboué. More important politically and sociologically, Maran wrote countless articles in numerous journals about the conditions of Blacks in the colonies and his hope for the development of harmonious race relations.[6] Through his journalism, Maran collaborated with committed French-African intellectuals and a number of African-Americans engaged in the Harlem Renaissance, even traveling to the United States for two months in 1927. Although his assimilationist French humanism, indeed French patriotism, came to be seen as distasteful, even traitorous, to some of the figures in the later *négritude* movement and especially to anti-colonialists like Frantz Fanon, Maran was arguably both the loudest, most influential, and eloquent French voice advocating for Africans in the 1920s and one of the literary godfathers of *négritude*.[7]

Batouala: The Plot

On its surface, Batouala was a story of love, jealousy, and the fall of an African chief who had experienced, with great resentment, the coming of French colonial rule. The novel's simple, linear plotline, however, merely formed a structure for a richly descriptive, even exotified, narrative of the customs and *mentalités* of the Banda people. At the opening of the story sometime around 1914, Batouala, a Banda chief, was at the height of his power. He greeted each morning wondering whether he wished to wake up. He was not afraid to rise and work. Rather, he, like all traditional Africans, one whose *mentalité* colonialism had not yet transformed, was in harmony with nature:

> *La vie est courte. Le travail est pour ceux qui ne la comprendront jamais. La fainéantise ne dégrade pas l'homme. A qui voit juste, elle diffère de la paresse. Quant à lui, Batouala, jusqu'à preuve du contraire, il voulait croire que ne rien faire, c'était, simplement, profiter de tout ce qui nous entoure.*[8]

Batouala was one with his natural surroundings, in synch with the perfection of nature.

When he finally arose, Batouala scratched himself, something he knew from the animal world was a wonderful, natural exercise. Then he looked at Yassiguindja, his favorite of his nine wives, and like "*tous les autres matins en se levant, il voulut remplir ses fonctions de mâle.*"[9] This was not to be passionate sex. Rather, it was a mechanical function that defined man's natural life: "*Comme elle était habituée à leur accomplissement quotidien, bien qu'elle dormît encore, il n'était pas nécessaire qu'il la réveillât.*"[10] This was sex devoid of western ideals of romantic love and intimate feeling, ideals which the *nègre* was inherently incapable of expressing, so the French imagined.

After smoking his pipe and eating his morning meal of manioc, sweet potatoes, and grilled caterpillars, Batouala set out for his major activity of the

day: to call the neighboring villages to a great feast, the ceremony of the *ga'nza*, the circumcision and excision *rite de passage* for adolescents. While Batouala was sending out the drum signals for the forthcoming ceremony, Bissibingui, a handsome muscular youth of sixteen and a friend of Batouala's, indulged in Batouala's food, which was of no consequence, and, unbeknownst to the chief, his wives. With the exception of Yassiguindja, Bissibingui had, in fact, slept with all of Batouala's wives. In the French imagination--Maran's--the *indigène*, both male and female, was a sexualized being who acted solely on instinctual desires: "*Une femme ne doit jamais se refuser au désir d'un homme. La réciproque est vraie. La seule loi est d'instinct.*"[11] In Banda culture, Maran stated, these sexual infidelities would normally not be an issue. If one pleasured in what was not his, a simple compensatory gift would set everything right again; however, Batouala was not like other *indigènes* in this respect. He was jealous and vindictive, and "*il n'hésiterait pas à suprimmer ceux qui passeraient sur ses terres.*"[12] Wives were paid for with dowries and, Maran asserted, were considered, in some respects, much like property, and Batouala believed his wives were property that was not to be shared, which ultimately led to his demise.

The climax of the novel was the violent and highly erotic *ga'nza* ceremony, a *rite de passage*, held strictly in the absence of whites, marking the transition to adulthood. The *fête*, held paradoxically at the French commandant's compound because of the size of its clearing, commenced with much drinking, eating, talking, and dancing. The *ga'nzas* then appeared, nude, dancing. The tam-tams produced an intoxicating beat. Women danced; men danced. Passions were aroused: "*Et quels cris! Et quels rires! Et quels gestes! Car la présence de tant d'hommes et de tant de femmes, la bière, le chanvre, le mouvement, la joie, avaient accumulé la frémissante chaleur du*

désir."[13] Soon it was time for the actual ceremony: the circumcision of the boys and excision of the girls, both described with disturbing realism and radical otherness to the French. For the young girls,

> *la vieille arrivait, interpellait l'une des danseuses, lui écartait rudement les cuisses, saisissait à pleins doigts ce qu'il fallait saisir, l'étirait à la manière d'une liane à caoutchouc et, d'un seul coup, --raou!-- les tranchait. Sans même retourner la tête, elle jetait derrière, à la volée, ces morceaux de chair chaude et sanglante...*[14]

Village dogs then competed for the skin.

The *rite* accomplished; passions built to an explosive level, only being released during "*la danse de l'amour... où il est toléré de se livrer à la débauche et au crime.*"[15] With a frenetic drum beat, and after a dance where a virgin was taken by a man, symbolized by the naked Yassiguindja wearing a wooden phallus, all joined in with unbridled sexual frenzy, described almost pornographically by Maran:

> *Les hommes se débarrassèrent de la pièce d'étoffe qui leur servait de cache-sexe, les femmes, celles qui en avaient, de leurs pagnes bariolés.... Une odeur lourde de sexes, d'urine, de sueur, d'alcool s'étalait, plus âcre que la fumée.Des couples s'appariaient. Ils dansaient... Au hasard, des corps s'aplatissaient sur le sol, où se réalisaient tous les gestes dansés. Ivresse sexuelle, doublée d'ivresse alcoolique, c'était une immense joie de brutes, exonérée de tout contrôle... Le seul désir était maître.*[16]

In this orgiastic tumult, Yassiguindja and Bissibingui fell to the ground to have sex, but Batouala, in a jealous rage, chased them away, to the laughter and delight of others. The festival then ended, prematurely, when the French commandant unexpectedly turned up, forcing the *indigènes* to flee.

Batouala then plotted his revenge against Yassiguindja and Bissibingui. The two, knowing their danger, decided that after the great chase they would abandon traditional African ways and flee to the safety of the whites: Bissibingui would become an *indigène* soldier and Yassiguindja his wife. Although it appeared that Batouala became reconciled with Bissibingui, at the

height of the chase, the chief threw his spear at Bissibingui, under the guise of trying to kill a panther. Batouala missed both but angered the panther who turned and ripped open Batouala's belly.

The great chief took two weeks to die. Once the villagers realized his fate was sealed, they pillaged his grain, cattle, and other possessions. Even his wives were claimed. The only two villagers that stayed with Batouala, in his hut, to the end, were Yassiguindja and Bissibingui, and accompanying them was Djouma, the chief's little yellow mutt. As Batouala lay delirious gasping for his last breath, "*Bissibingui s'approcha de Yassiguindja, l'embrassa et, la ployant consentante sous l'étreinte de son désir, prit possession de sa chair profonde.*"[17] Batouala, ever jealous, then rose up like a ghost, and in fear, the lovers uncoupled and fled--perhaps to the whites--just as Batouala fell over, dead.

By contemporary standards, the figure of Batouala was anything but flattering to the Black African, and this has not been lost on recent critics, most notably Femi Ojo-Ade.[18] It was possible to understand Maran's *indigène* as embodying virtually all the negative stereotypes of Black Africans. He was lazy, dirty, and promiscuous. Batouala appeared most interested in getting drunk and having sex. Women in the novel were simple, instinctual sexual objects who demonstrated no fidelity. Finally, the *indigène* was amoral, resigned to colonialism, and accepting of his inferiority. Ojo-Ade, though polemical, was not incorrect to perceive Maran's less than favorable depiction of the Black African in Batouala. But in the 1920s, the reactions to Batouala belie critics who solely use contemporary standards, especially those shaped by post-colonial theory, to judge historical works. The furor over Batouala suggested that there was something novel and disturbing in the book.

Batouala: A New Depiction of *l'Âme noire*

Batouala was not just a colonial love story of a primitive African chief and his tragic end. Nor was Batouala, the hero, simply depicted as a *grand enfant*, licentious, sexualized and lacking rational capabilities--all of which were standard representations for the *indigène* in the 1920s. Rather, in some subtle and not so subtle ways, Maran constructed a new *l'âme noire*, one where the *indigène*'s language, tradition, ability to reason, and love of the white diverged from the prevailing stock of representations.

Civilization and abstract thought, it was believed in the 1920s, could only be expressed through a sophisticated, nuanced language--French. Maran, a student of French and Banda, agreed; however, he diverged from other writers of exotic fiction by allowing the *indigène* to speak in French, not *petit-nègre*.[19] *Petit-nègre*, a pidgin French, was the *tirailleur*'s language, the language of the *grand enfant*. In literature, *petit-nègre* marked the *indigène*'s subordinate linguistic and intellectual status, and it suggested the *indigène* was not only in need of the civilizing mission, but also, perhaps, incapable of ever being fully civilized--devoid of all atavistic potential. In Batouala, Maran demonstrated that *petit-nègre* was the result of colonization and the civilizing mission. It was not the highest expression of thought that the *indigène* was capable of achieving. In fact, only one character in the entire novel spoke in *petit-nègre*, and then only briefly: a Banda soldier in the colonial service used *petit-nègre* to address his French commandant.[20] The civilizing mission, Maran suggested, as noble as its ideals were to him, in practice only subordinated the *indigène* sociologically and intellectually.

Rather than speaking *petit-nègre*, the *indigènes* in Batouala spoke perfect French. Maran thus symbolically equated Banda with French. This equivalence suggested that the *indigène* was rational, analytical, and the

creator of a civilization, albeit one different than the French. This was not to suggest that Maran considered the *indigène* equal to the French. He did not.[21] Rather, Maran was content to demonstrate that Africans had a language, set of customs, and traditions that were worthy of study and respect as a civilization. Treating the *indigène* in this way had a profound impact on both later representations of the *indigène* and the development of Black francophone intellectual thought. In fact, Léopold Sédar Senghor argued in 1965 that Maran's linguistic twist was crucial to the development of *négritude*: "*Il ne s'agira même plus de leur faire parler 'petit-nègre,' mais wolof, malinké, éwondo en français. Car c'est René Maran qui, le premier, a exprimé 'l'âme noire,' avec le style nègre, en français.*"[22] Giving the *indigène* the dignity of having his own language and therefore thought independent of the colonial power returned to him his autonomous being. This subtle valorizing of the *indigène* would be contested in the responses to Batouala.

Rather than treating African traditions as merely barbaric, Maran treated them almost ethnographically. Thus he constructed the African *mentalité* less to denigrate than to emphasize alterity. Before colonial rule, Batouala claimed to have lived a happy, natural life:

> *Jadis, avant la venue des blancs, on vivait heureux. Travailler peu, et pour soi, manger, boire et dormir, de loin en loin avoir des palabres sanglantes où l'on arrachait le foie des morts pour manger leur courage, et se l'incorporer,--tels étaient les jours heureux que l'on vivait, jadis, avant la venue des blancs.*[23]

War and even cannibalism were part of traditional practices--practices that had significant meaning and helped to construct traditional identities. Now, all was changing, and Batouala, not unlike Edmund Burke, carved out a conservative reaction to change. "*Les anciennes coutumes sont les meilleures. On ne saurait trop les observer. Elles se fondent sur l'expérience... Il n'approfondissait rien au delà. Contre l'usage, tout raisonnement est*

inutile..."[24] Batouala was not just faithful to custom; he was the keeper of the old ways. The young who served the French abandoned custom and mocked Batouala and the elders. But Batouala asked, what had Africans received from colonialism: "*Les routes, les ponts, ces machines extraordinaires, où ca? Mata! Nini! Rien, rien!*"[25] Rather, they were taxed and virtually enslaved, and they lost the natural freedom of traditional life. Maran did not so much valorize tradition as withdrew its negative attributes. His *l'âme noire* was neither child-like nor atavistic. It was traditional in an anthropological sense but considered in need of the best of French universalism, not concessionary companies and contemporary colonial policies and practices.

Although a metropolitan Frenchman could easily overlook Maran's subtle transformations of the *indigène* in the 1920s, he could not help but notice that his beloved exotic primitive, even savage, was a reasoning being who thought critically about colonialism and the French in particular. The Black African reasoned that the practice of colonialism was not just an affront to Africans, but also an affront to the individual Frenchman. The French quest for mammon in far off lands, Batouala thought, was unnatural. It upset the harmony in nature and in man. Indeed, Maran's Batouala realized truths that even Voltaire's Candide could not teach the French. Attacking colonialism, Batouala stated: "*Ah! les blancs. Ils feraient bien mieux de rentrer chez eux, tous. Ils feraient mieux de limiter leurs désirs à des soins domestiques ou à la culture de leurs terres, au lieu de les diriger à la conquête d'un argent stupide.*"[26] Money was not the sole reason for European colonialization, but for the African who tended someone else's garden and had to pay taxes for no visible gain, mammon was the curse--for both Blacks and whites. Comparing his traditional past to the new market economy, Batouala concluded, evoking but not citing Candide, that

life was short, and one could do no better than to live in harmony with his surroundings rather than struggling for what in the end was of no consequence.

European literature, like European ideals, diverged from lived experience. Whites were entrenched and strong, and they were not going to leave Africa. Although the African was in awe of white power, he was not in awe of the white as a moral man. In fact, Batouala argued that the white was a hypocrite, lying to suit his needs or changing his mind, for a price. At the *palaver* preceding the *ga'nza* ceremony, Batouala and other village elders discussed life under colonial rule with bitterness and resignation. They saw the civilizing mission as a fabric of lies: nothing came of it. "'*Je ne me lasserai jamais de dire la méchanceté des blancs,*" shouted Batouala. "'*Je leur reproche surtout leur duplicité. Que ne nous ont-ils pas promis! Vous reconnaîtrez plus tard, disent-ils, que c'est en vue de votre bonheur que nous vous forçons à travailler.*'"[27] The white's promises, Batouala argued were thinly veiled ploys to justify forced work, the *prestations*, and taxes. Batouala represented a new literary figure. Rather than the savage warrior opposed to France, but who confirmed French myths of herself and the Other, Batouala was the angry *indigène* critic who attacked French identity, an attack more powerful than all the guns of African soldiers previously aimed at France.

Moreover, white hypocrisy was one of the causes of African resistance. Batouala suggested that the *indigène* just wanted to be left alone to preserve his traditional ways. Weaker than whites, Black Africans had bargained that submission would bring them benefits. It did not because of white duplicity. Batouala stated that his people fell under French rule after fleeing the whites numerous times. Exhausted by the difficulty of creating new villages, Batouala's people finally submitted to the French. But French rule proved destructive and hypocritical:

> '*Notre soumission ne nous a pas acquis leur bienveillance. Non contents d'essayer de supprimer nos coutûmes, ils veulent nous imposer les leurs. Plus le droit de jouer de l'argent au 'patara.' Plus le droit de s'enivrer. Nos danses et nos chants troublent leur sommeil. On ne daigne les tolérer que si nous payons une dîme. Payez, payez toujours! Les caisses du gouvernement sont insatiables. Au fond, l'on obéirait à ces vilaines gens, s'ils étaient seulement plus logiques avec eux-mêmes. Il n'en est rien...*'[28]

Batouala accepted French power, especially technological and military superiority. What he resisted was the implementation of European rule where he was treated as an unthinking, lazy child subject to rules different than the ruler. This was not a *cri de cœur* for democracy in Africa. It was a statement that the *indigène* was a reasoning being and that French moral superiority had to be demonstrated, not taken for granted.

Maran's *indigène* was a student of white behavior, and whites in the colonies were found to be lacking any moral superiority in the most sacred of French institutions: the family. It was common until World War I for a colonial administrator to have a *petite épouse*, as African concubines were called. "Going native" was even encouraged in the nineteenth century; populating a colony with *métis* was considered a viable method for civilizing primitives.[29] In Africa, the *indigène* took notice of officials who had Black mistresses, and *indigènes* found white behavior immoral not for having a *petite épouse* but for abandoning their children.

> *Il n'y avait rien à espérer d'une race sans cœur. Car ils n'avaient pas de cœur, les 'boundjous* [whites].' *Ils abandonnaient les enfants qu'ils avaient des femmes noires. Se sachant fils de blancs, ces derniers ne daignaient pas fréquenter les nègres. Pleins de haine et d'envie... ces blancs et noirs vivaient exécrés de tous...*[30]

The *métis* alienated himself from Blacks, believing himself superior because of his white blood, but he was shunned by whites, as an unwanted object, save some *mulâtresses* who were desired for their imagined sexuality. Batouala saw

how the white treated his own children and chose not to be a *grand enfant*. The French father was repugnant to African ways, where children mature and fully develop learning traditions, laws, and morality from their parents.

The white woman, Batouala felt, was no less hypocritical than the white man. Until the post-war years, there were few white women in the African colonies. After the Great War and with a hardening of the color line in colonial policies, officials encouraged administrators to marry and bring their wives to the colonies. It was considered beneficial to the civilizing mission to have a French wife. Their presence reinforced the boundaries between whites and Blacks. Moreover, they would prevent colonial officials from being "decivilized," which was now believed to occur when a white male took a *petite épouse*.[31] The presence of white women may not have had the desired effect either on their husband's or on the *indigène*. Batouala felt, almost misogynistically, that white women were worth less than Black women:

> *Quant aux femmes blanches, inutile d'en parler. Longtemps, on avait cru qu'elles étaient matière précieuse. On les craignait et on les respectait à l'égal des fétiches. Il avait fallu en rabattre. Aussi faciles que les femmes noires, et plus vénales, elles avaient des vices que ces dernières ignoraient... Mais à quoi bon insister là-dessus? Et elles voulaient qu'on les respectât!*[32]

The French assumed that the non-rational, child-like *indigène* would automatically respect them and the virtuous French women. Maran taught the French that the *indigène* was an acute observer of man. He may not have been lettered, but he was capable of comparing the past with the present and the Black with the white and on both counts found the former preferable.

Prior to Batouala, the *grand enfant*, exotic primitive, or ignoble savage largely defined *l'âme noire*. These representations helped the French construct an exalted identity of themselves in contrast to a non-rational, usually passive Other. Batouala, however, was not the distorting mirror the French needed him

to be. He was not a submissive happy child grateful to his powerful protector and parent. For the first time in history, the Black used the French language, the very tool of civilization, to reflect back to the white an image he did not wish to see: the white was odious to the *indigène* and the father only of destruction and toil. The Black soul thus became a contested site for ethnographic truth and for French identity.

"*La bombe*": Maran's Preface to Batouala

Batouala diverged from earlier and many later works of colonial exoticism, but in the public arena, its narrative was of secondary importance to its ten-page preface, "*la bombe*."[33] Indeed, the responses to the novel paled before the vitriolic responses to the preface. The preface, unlike the novel, was written with little distance between the author and the reader: Maran wrote in his own name, in the first person. In his preface, Maran established the geographic and socio-political context of the Banda people in the Ubangui-Shari. After arguing that his work was objective, Maran unleashed in the most evocative of language a broadside attack on civilization and its debased emissaries--colonial officials in Africa.

Maran opened his preface by claiming, in the best Gallic tradition of empiricism, that his work was a scrupulously objective series of "etchings" of African life. It was the product of six years of writing after years of observing and conversing with Banda people: "*Ce roman est donc tout objectif. Il ne tâche même pas à expliquer: il constate. Il ne s'indigne pas: il enregistre. Il ne pouvait en être autrement.*"[34] Its verisimilitude was not an end in itself. Maran hoped that the book's empiricism would win it success, make known conditions in French Equatorial Africa, and affect change. Maran did more than state that he was objective; he also provided an unsettling portrait of conditions

in the Ubangui-Shari. In recent years, he wrote, villages were decimated from famine, and those individuals that survived competed with vultures for undigested seeds in horse droppings. The colonial endeavor, Maran stated with Darwinian irony, was the source of this misery: "*Après tout, s'ils crèvent de faim, par milliers, comme des mouches, c'est que l'on met en valeur leur pays. Ne disparaissent que ceux qui ne s'adaptent pas à la civilisation.*"[35]

Civilization then came under headlong attack. Drawing off of the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, the widely respected Hindu poet and 1913 Nobel laureate, Maran indicted civilization, the Occident, for being a destructive force in the colonies:

> *Civilisation, civilisation, orgueil des Européens, et leur charnier d'innocents... Tu bâtis ton royaume sur des cadavres. Quoi que tu veuilles, quoi que tu fasses, tu te meus dans le mensonge. A ta vue, les larmes de sourdre, et la douleur de crier. Tu es la force qui prime le droit. Tu n'es pas un flambeau, mais un incendie. Tout ce à quoi tu touches, tu le consumes...*[36]

Maran's indictment of French civilization came at a particularly vulnerable time for the French and inflamed passions. The horror of the Great War forced the French to question the supremacy of Western civilization. Second, and more directly related to the colonial project, France and Germany had an uneasy peace, one marked by propagandistic sniping. Moreover, France justified the taking of Germany's African colonies on the grounds that Germany had not civilized its natives, and therefore Germany was unworthy of colonial possessions. In addition to stationing an internationally unpopular Black occupying force in the Rhineland, if France was shown to be destructive in the colonies, it would lose the high moral position it had over the defeated Germany. What was at stake in Maran's preface was the reputation and very identity of the Republic, both domestically and internationally, and this was transparent to both him and his critics.

Maran also claimed that his novel and preface was timely: "*Il vient, par hasard, à son heure. La question nègre est 'actuelle.'*"[37] Maran noted that others had recently forced the "*question nègre*" into the public arena: he cited, for example, Paul Reboux's Romulus Coucou (1920) and the 1920 *grande enquête* in Eve on mixed race marriages.[38] In addition, a few recent studies of Africa in the press had proven to Maran that the misery and abuses he witnessed in the colonies were known in the metropole. The crime was not just that the abuses had occurred, but that the French had not tried to remedy the ills of colonialism.

Maran lost no time singling out the guilty: colonial officials. The African environment was harsh, lonely, and corrupting. It degraded the French: "*Rares sont, même parmi les fonctionnaires, les coloniaux qui cultivent leur esprit. Ils n'ont pas la force de résister à l'ambiance. On s'habitue à l'alcool.... Ces excès et d'autres, ignobles, conduisent ceux qui y excellent à la veulerie la plus abjecte.*"[39] But to rise in the colonial administration, officials remained silent about all the abuses: "[officials] *ont abdiqué toute fierté, ils ont hésité, temporisé, menti et délayé leurs mensonges.... Et, à leur anémie intellectuelle l'asthénie morale s'ajoutant, sans un remords, ils ont trompé leur pays.*"[40] Maran laid down the gauntlet, accusing the Republic and its representatives of the civilizing mission of decivilizing, base vileness, and abusive practices. Nevertheless, Maran did not indict the ideals of the Republic.

His *cri de cœur* was neither for African liberation, much to later critic's dismay, nor to abandon the colonial project. Maran simply demanded that France live up to its universal ideals. Writers, he claimed, were the one's to expose abuses and right wrongs.

> *Mes frères en esprit, écrivains de France... il vous appartient de signifier que vous ne voulez plus, sous aucun prétexte, que vos compatriotes, établis là-bas, déconsidèrent la nation dont vous êtes les mainteneurs.*

Que votre voix s'élève! Il faut que vous aidiez ceux qui disent les choses telles qu'elles sont, non pas telles qu'on voudrait qu'elles fussent.[41]

Maran, not unlike Zola before him, believed in the power of the written word to right wrongs. France was a great land with the highest of ideals. The true will of France was to expose abuses and set the nation back on its noble path in history. This enlightened patriotism, from a Black man, was not lost on Maran's supporters, but it was overlooked by his critics as they battled over French ideals, truth, and the Black soul.

The Sharpened Pens

Maran and Batouala inflamed passions in both the colonies and the metropole. After it won the Prix Goncourt, *indigènes* in Senegal, René Trautmann smirked, "*se promènent triomphalement par les rues de la ville en exhibant un Batouala revêtu du portrait de l'auteur, sur la bandes*!"[42] Their triumphal celebrations would be short-lived: the novel was banned in the colonies in 1928.[43] In the metropole, however, the novel not only elicited numerous reactions, but also continued to generate responses for a decade. These initially took the form of criticism, but then very quickly Maran was addressed in fiction, in non-fiction, and even in the Chamber of Deputies. Although the responses to Maran's *cri de cœur* were political, ideological, or, occasionally, aesthetic in nature, they were all manifestations of a contested relationship between notions of race and French civilization.

With a number of notable exceptions, for it appeared that few had yet to read the novel, the announcement of the Prix Goncourt winner for 1921 met with initial praise--on racial grounds. The Black French community was small in the metropole in the 1920s and had few public figures; two, however, were filled with racial pride when the *Académie* announced its vote. Gratien Candace, the

Black Deputy from Guadeloupe, recalled that he was pleased with Maran's victory because it demonstrated that Blacks could be the equal of whites in any endeavor.[44] For Félix Eboué, it was a "'*minute divine*'" when his friend won the prize.[45] They may have been citizens and fully assimilated, but Blacks also felt, as *congénères*, that were still not the equal or rather not considered the equal of white Frenchmen.

Metropolitan Blacks were not alone in identifying the importance of the color line in French cultural life, and in fact, they were neither the first to view Maran in terms of his race nor alone in their racial pride when the Goncourt Prize was announced. Whites invariably identified Maran as a "*nègre*" or an "*homme de couleur,*" and for many this was a mark of honor. In popular culture, but not official political culture, race formed a crucial nexus for ordering the world--and French identity. Thus journals from the left to the right applauded the awarding of the prize to a Black man for the statement it made about both Blacks and French universalism. L'Humanité revelled in Maran's exposure of the social injustices that "'*nos frères noirs*'" suffered, and Léon Daudet, writing for L'Action Française, praised Batouala and claimed it exposed the lie of the Black race's inferiority.[46] France took pride in the awarding of the prize to a man of color: it symbolized the meritocracy won in the Revolution. Le Petit Parisien, the popular and somewhat sensational journal, in a mixed review emphasized Maran's color and that "*c'est la première fois qu'un écrivain est candidat au prix Goncourt sans le savoir, et l'obtient sans sollicité.*"[47] Truly, Maran won on his merit, and all of France could be proud that the meritocracy that was so integral to republican ideals still flourished.

But Maran's critics thought otherwise. Maran, these critics complained, was singled out for having an unfair advantage--his skin color.[48] Ten days before the prize was even awarded, Le Cri de Paris expected Maran, whom

they inaccurately called a *Sénégalais*, to be victorious: "*Comme l'art nègre est à la mode, il ne serait pas étonnant du tout que ces visions des tropiques...*[will obtain] *la majorité des voix.*"[49] It was true that the "*question nègre*" was timely and worked in Maran's favor, but probably not as much as the critic of Le Petit Parisien believed: "*Car -- et c'est là peut-être, avec sa qualité de nègre, ce qui a séduit les Dix de l'Académie Goncourt--, épris de couleur et d'étrangeté.*"[50] Maurice Delafosse, the esteemed Africanist, concurred but without trying to appear racist:

> *Je veux dire que ce n'est point parce que sa peau n'est pas de la même couleur que la mienne que j'oserais estimer M. René Maran indigne d'une récompense quelconque ni lui dénier un talent que je m'empresse au contraire de lui reconnaître.... Mais je demeure persuadé que c'est parce que l'auteur de Batouala est noir que les Goncourt l'ont couronné...*[51]

Delafosse's self-serving liberalism, however, belied the fact that he believed there was a double standard in the treatment of Maran.

> *Si c'était moi qui eusse écrit ce soi-disant roman et sa préface, -- supposition toute gratuite, bien entendu, --pour avoir traîné dans la boue mes camarades et même leurs femmes et avoir traité indistinctement d'ivrognes et de bêtes malfaisantes les fonctionnaires que la République charge d'administrer ses colonies, j'aurais d'abord été révoqué par l'autorité supérieure, ce qui eût été justice; ensuite, l'Académie Goncourt, ayant à disposer d'un prix... ne me l'aurait certainement pas attribué, ce qui également eût été justice.*[52]

Indeed, few could countenance the award to Batouala on merit alone, as Rachilde, the critic for the Mercure de France sarcastically demonstrated. Arguing that if a Black won in 1921, a short white, an acquaintance of Maran's, could win the following year, "*Espérons que l'année prochaine ce sera son tour de prix... à moins qu'un peau-rouge au teint couleur d'ocre et de vermillon n'arrive en brandissant une hache de combat.*"[53]

Despite the belief in the meritocracy and the universality of French ideals, the color line was real and meaningful to many in the 1920s. Although

there were a few Black professionals in the metropole in 1922 and only a couple in the Chamber of Deputies, most Blacks were workers and domestics, and some even complained about employment discrimination.[54] With the exception of Black musicians and dancers, none benefited from being Black in the metropole in the 1920s. The color line that Maran truly crossed was the one of French letters--the bastion and preserve of French civilization. Privilege died hard, even in the land of *égalité* and *fraternité*.

Maran's color was of consequence to the French for a second reason: it demonstrated the efficacy of the civilizing mission and the expectations the French had for their benevolence. Many in France believed that the Black was not capable of abstract thought. Thus Maran's achievement could not be solely a result of his inherent genius. Rather, in the French mind, it was the product of French civilization. A number of critics proudly provided the biographical information that Maran graduated from *lycée* in the metropole. Paul Souday, the influential, pro-colonial, and, towards Maran, hostile literary critic for Le Temps, made explicit the subtext of this information: "*M. René Maran, homme de couleur, avait fait ses études au lycée de Bordeaux, et le prix Goncourt n'a pas été pour lui le premier bienfait de la civilisation, envers laquelle il se montre un peu ingrat.*"[55] The Black, even if he was a citizen and served the government loyally, was supposed to be forever grateful, like a child, to the civilization that evolved him. Furthermore, the Black citizen, ostensibly part of the universal mission and ecumenical French culture, was considered an outsider and not inherently equal to the French: "*Et voici M. René Maran qui étudia notre civilisation et nos lettres au lycée de Bordeaux,*" wrote J. L. for Le Temps, undoubtedly Jean Lefranc, a journalist who later attacked Maran's morality for the daily.

> *En vingt années, cet 'homme de couleur'--comme on dit de lui par courtoisie, alors que, pour lui complaire, il faudrait dire nettement: ce nègre--s'est initié à nos vingt siècles de civilisation. Le fruit de son étude est un roman.... Tous les hommes seraient-ils originairement égaux? Batouala ne suffit pas à le démontrer. Mais nous pouvons prudemment conclure de la lecture de cet ouvrage que toutes les races peuvent fournir des êtres exceptionnels.*[56]

Maran was effectively ostracized and belittled when it was asserted that he studied French civilization, "*notre civilisation*," and not also his civilization. Despite being a Frenchman, a citizen, Maran was represented as the Other and informed that he could make no claims to French civilization. In addition, *égalité* was suggested to be only the province of whites. Blacks were not seen as inherently equal to whites, nor could they ever be equal: even the civilizing mission, though considered necessary, could never raise the *indigène* up to the level of the French. What's more, not all metropolitans even agreed on the inherent and objective genius of exceptional Blacks: "'*M. Maran est sans doute un homme de génie pour les nègres de l'Oubangui,*'" wrote Jacques Boulenger for the rightist L'Opinion, "'*mais ce n'est qu'un écolier dans le pays des lettres.*'"[57] In one strong vein of French thinking, no matter what the Black did, he would always be a *grand enfant*--he could be no more.

The *grand enfant* could never be a civilized man because he was imagined to express, or carried the potential to express, some atavistic trait. Maran's detractors understood his attack on colonial officials neither as an impassioned plea for the exportation of the best French ideals nor as misguided social analysis. It was, these critics argued, the manifestation of residual hatreds dating back to the days of slavery. Carl Siger, the pseudonym for Charles Régismanset, a colonial publicist and columnist for the Mercure de France, accused Maran, and other Blacks, of violent hatred towards whites. Discussing how he would address an article on Batouala, Siger stated,

> *Je ne trouvais finalement dans ma chronique comme explication du réquisitoire Maran que le fait de la haine incoercible et violente que les Noirs, certains Noirs du moins,--car il ne faut jamais généraliser, --éprouvent pour le Blanc. C'est là un phénomène atavique. M. Maran descend des noirs des Antilles.... Peut-être se souvient il encore des souffrances de l'esclavage.... Descendant des esclaves des 'Isles,' M. Maran doit encore haïr.*[58]

The Black must hate, or alternatively love, the white for it was not conceivable within the Manichean constructions of the *nègre* to be an intellectual in the loyal opposition.[59]

Critics may not have liked Maran's polemic, but in the best tradition of the Republic, he, as a Black man and a citizen, was defended with great seriousness and humor by the very bastion of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen: the Chamber of Deputies. Just two days after the announcement of the Goncourt prize, Paul Souday suggested in Le Temps that the award could, perhaps even should, be debated in the Chamber. The book, Souday claimed, was an affront to the French and should have been passed over in silence, but it could no longer be ignored:

> *Le retentissement du prix Goncourt et les milliers d'acheteurs qu'il procurera à cet ouvrage, en France et à l'étranger, rend désormais le silence bien difficile. Qui sait si le vote des Dix ne déterminera pas une interpellation à la Chambre, avec enquête et ordre du jour sévère pour l'administration, si l'auteur a dit vrai dans sa préface... ou pour ce préfacier lui-même s'il avait par hasard exagéré un peu?*[60]

Souday got his wish, in part. Georges Barthélemy, a Communist Deputy and paradoxically a strident colonialist, further politicized Batouala by calling for an *interpellation* that was held in the Chamber on 21 December 1922.[61]

Barthélemy's goals were to attack Maran and demand that Albert Sarraut, Colonial Minister, be stronger both in his defense of colonial administrators and in his actions against Batouala. What he did not anticipate was that some in the Chamber would be principled in the grandest of French traditions. Maran's principal defenders, it turned out, were Gratien Candace

and René Boisneuf, both Black Deputies from Guadeloupe. The only other Black deputy was Blaise Diagne from Senegal; in addition, a couple of mulattos sat in the Chamber, albeit they were not identified as *nègres* by L'Illustration.[62] Candace was a graduate in sciences and was an active pro-assimilationist, pro-colonial Deputy. Boisneuf was a lawyer and a socialist. Though politically at odds with each other, both Deputies responded eloquently to Barthélemy and defended intellectual freedom, especially for Black citizens who indicted French practices.

Barthélemy began his assault by bellowing to the Chamber that Maran "*a craché sa bile sur toute la grande famille coloniale française indistinctement*," and Sarraut did nothing to stop him.[63] Candace withdrew from Barthélemy's bait and elevated the *interpellation* to a level worthy of the Republic, high principle: "*M. Barbusse, qui a écrit de belles pages sur la guerre, a publié certains livres que nous n'approuvons pas, mais il s'agit de la liberté de la pensée.*"[64] Cheers greeted his retort, and then Léon Daudet, writer, critic, and Deputy added: "*Le ministre des colonies n'est pas administrateur de la littérature française. Que vouliez-vous qu'il fit?*"[65] Before Barthélemy could respond, Candace added that he also did not like some of what was in Batouala, but the proper response was to address the book in print, as a critic, not in parliament, as a Deputy. Furthermore, Candace quipped,

> *Mais vous avouerez qu'il est singulier qu'un homme comme vous, qui siège à l'extrême gauche et qui ne dit rien lorsque les journaux de son parti attaquent avec violence le Gouvernement et le régime républicain, lorsque l'Humanité fait l'apologie du crime (Très bien! Très bien à droite), vienne attaquer un écrivain, qui a fait un livre peut-être critiquable...*[66]

Candace went on to say that Maran was a loyal, honest man who expressed his ideas in good conscience. Barthélemy, on the defensive but not at a loss for words, now claimed that all he wanted was the errors in Batouala exposed. Finally, Boisneuf stole the show with applause and laughs: "*Depuis des*

siècles, depuis toujours, ce sont les blancs qui écrivent. Ils écrivent tout ce qu'ils veulent sur les nègre. Pour un fois qu'un nègre a écrit quelque chose qui vous déplaît, ne le pendez pas!"[67] The heat and humor in this debate does not negate the fundamental principles that a few Deputies upheld: Batouala and Maran had to be defended on the freedoms sacred to all Frenchmen--the right to think and publish freely. Candace made a heroic effort to universalize the central issue for him in the *interpellation*, freedom of speech. In this way, he tried to take Maran's racial identity out of the debate. He was only partially successful. Boisneuf's choice words played off of principle but reintroduced race. Even when France was at her Republican best, she could not but help to see things in black and white.

Maran was defended and attacked not just for his novel and preface, but also for his book's subtitle: "*véritable roman nègre.*" At issue was the very definition of *l'âme noire* as the Other, and how the Black Other was defined was important for how the French defined themselves. Maurice Delafosse spared no words criticizing Maran's intent: the work, he claimed, was neither truly a novel nor genuinely *nègre*. The characters, he argued, were not authentic: "'*Quant aux personnages, ce ne sont pas de vrais nègres, tels au moins que la masse de ceux que l'on rencontre en Afrique et plus particulièrement dans l'Oubangui -Chari.*'"[68] Delafosse stated that Maran's *indigènes* sometimes acted like real *nègres*, but "'*ils parlent tout autrement et les nombreux vocables empruntés à la langue banda dont ils émaillent leurs discours n'empêchent point ces derniers de ne pas être des discours de nègres.*'"[69] Maran gave his *indigènes* the dignity of speaking perfect French, symbolically perfect Banda, and he melded traditional stories with rational, critical insights about whites and colonial rule. Delafosse objected to this new construction of the *nègre*, one that

may have been primitive but not childlike, savage but not unthinking, subordinate and weak but not without agency. The *nègre* Maran constructed was not one that confirmed French political exigencies or cultural needs and desires.

The colonial mission was dependent on a particular view of the *indigène* that mediated the inherent contradictions of colonialism with republicanism.[70] Maran's *nègre* upset that equilibrium--if he was to be accepted as the *vrai nègre*. Delafosse, like other critics, could not conceptualize or accept a new construction for the *indigène* in 1922. Delafosse stated that he admired other colonial novels: La Randonnée de Samba Diouf by J. and J. Tharaud and Koffi by Gaston Joseph. Delafosse concluded, "'*Voilà de véritables romans nègres, dont les héros, quoique étant des échantillons spéciaux du monde noir, pensent et parlent comme de vrais Noirs.*'"[71] In the French imagination, these novels constructed one representation of the true Black Other: a naive childlike creature who was without agency and in awe and in need of French civilization. This construction was no less accurate because it was made by whites: "'*Il est vrai que ce sont des Blancs qui ont interprété leurs pensées, mais Emile Zola avait prouvé déjà qu'il n'est pas nécessaire d'être mécanicien pour parler congrûment d'une locomotive ni pour traduire fidèlement l'état d'âme de celui qui la conduit.*'"[72] Whites alone defined the world and alternative perspectives, even those stemming from imagined affinities between *congénères*, were denied the power of truth. It could be no other way: for colonialism to co-exist with French Republicanism, the French had to define the Other and not let the Other define himself to the French.

This process of defining the Other had significant cultural consequences. Firmin Roz, the literary critic for the Revue Bleue and a prolific writer on United States history, accepted that Maran as a Black had insight into the Black soul

but rejected that his work had much truth. Roz suggested that a "*véritable*" novel of Blacks may only be written by Blacks: "*nous devons croire que les affinités de race l'ont singulièrement aidé à pénétrer l'âme de ses personnages, à saisir et à exprimer dans sa vérité tout le détail de leur vie physique et morale*."[73] Even though Maran was educated in France and from a family that had several generations of "*civilisés,*" Roz claimed that Maran offered a perspective that whites could not, but then Roz rejected it because it did not serve French cultural needs. Roz argued that Maran saw *nègres* quite well; he just did not understand them. "*Imaginez-vous une de ces jeunes sauvagesses disant à sa compagne*: '*J'ignore pourtant qui tu vises par ton allusion*?'"[74] The metropolitan could not accept that the *indigène* had a sophisticated language and was capable of rational thought. Roz's objection to Maran's *indigène*, although racist, was also about French identity and cultural needs: "*Si c'est là du style 'vraiment nègre,' il ne vaut pas qu'on aille le chercher dans l'Oubanghi. Et l'Oubanghi ne diffère pas assez, à mon goût, de nos plus voisins faubourgs...*"[75] Roz wanted, indeed needed, to preserve a primitive exotic Other so that there would be a clear boundary between France and sites where edenic and sexual fantasies flourished--sites that were critiques and imagined outlets from the straight jacket of modern morality and restraint. Maran's crime was that he destroyed access to the fantasy world the French had constructed for themselves.

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Maran and Batouala continued to unleash French anxiety throughout the 1920s. First, literary critics published a flurry of reviews within a few months of the Prix Goncourt announcement. Following this, entire books were devoted to refuting Maran. In 1922, René Trautmann, a doctor working for the colonial troops in Africa and writer of vulgar ethnographies of French West Africa,
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published Au Pays de "Batouala," Noirs et Blancs en Afrique, one of three books published that year in response to Batouala. Pierre Mille's preface to Au Pays de "Batouala" established the tone and perspective of Trautmann's refutation of Maran: "*Le noir du Congo est, comme je le disais tout à l'heure, une espèce d'homme quasi-préhistorique, un 'sauvage,' et même un sauvage que l'alcool a fait dégénérer. Il est à l'avant-dernier degré, en tous cas, sur l'échelle des races humaines.*"[76] Trautmann represented the *nègre* as a savage using the prevailing stock of images to argue that the Black Other could only climb up the ladder of the human race with French assistance, for the French loved the *indigène* as a parent loved the child he raised. The *indigène*'s love of the white was more problematic.

Trautmann argued in the most sensational of ways that the French were needed in Africa. Before the French arrived, he claimed, cannibalism was rampant. In the Congo, cannibalism was not just ritualistic, incorporating qualities of the deceased, as Batouala recounted. Rather, cannibals simply liked human flesh: "*Abattre un humain ou un gibier quelconque ne présentait qu'une simple différence de commodité.*"[77] Game was hard to catch, Trautmann argued, but man was readily available: "*Les esclaves et les prisonniers ne sont-ils pas destinés?*"[78] In fact, he contended that cannibalism was so rooted in the Congo that slaves were fattened before being consumed.[79] Trautmann based his statements on first-hand evidence or anecdote of "*scrupuleuse exactitude.*" Perhaps, but what was most revealing were Trautmann's conclusions. Cannibalism had decreased since French colonialism took root and since the French taught that it was a frightening and shameful crime. With its elimination, *nègres* were set on the path towards civilization. In a lightly veiled reference to Maran, Trautmann concluded: "*N'auraient-ils rendu que ce service à l'humanité, les Blancs devraient en être*

glorifiés eternellement par les nègres. Et il s'en trouve pourtant pour oser accuser la civilisation européenne. Ils sont peut-être plus à plaindre qu'à blâmer."[80] Trautmann created an image of the *indigène* that necessitated the noble French civilizing mission in Africa, notwithstanding Maran's complaints, which childlike were to be pitied. Since French morality, bourgeois Christian morality, was considered universal, cannibalism--the very definition of barbarism--had to be eradicated. This was a universal good, and when the *nègre* became an *évolué*, he would be civilized enough to know to praise, not admonish, whites for their efforts. Drawing sharp distinctions between the African and the European, Trautmann's self-congratulatory message reaffirmed what Maran began to dissolve: the boundary between the primitive and the civilized.

In the cognitive sphere, Trautmann argued, that boundary was clear. *Indigènes*, he generously claimed, possessed intelligence. All one had to do was to look at a little Black baby with eyes open wide to know they had capabilities. Their intellectual evolution was, however, arrested at adolescence. "*Ensuite, on constate généralement une régression notable des facultés intellectuelles du plus grand nombre des individus.*"[81] At adolescence, he argued, the *indigène* surrendered himself to all sort of excesses, namely sexual ones, and fell under the sway of *féticheurs*. If the *indigène* survived till maturity, it would be possible for him to regain his equilibrium and wits. This schema explained, internal to the Black Other, how the *nègre* was destined to be a *grand enfant*: promiscuity retarded his intellectual development. That was not to suggest that the *indigène* was not perfectible. The individual was perfectible. In the metropole, Trautmann claimed, there were many professional Blacks who proved that the Black individual was capable of civilization, but "*les aptitudes collectives purement intellectuelles des nègres sont nulles.*"[82]

Trautmann was thus able to account for the few but visibly apparent professional Blacks in France, indeed even Maran, as those who were civilized and integrated into the Republic as individuals. The mass of *indigènes* could not be integrated. As a group, they could not be perfected, only individuals could--and probably only in France. Moreover, Trautmann suggested that given the resources available in the colonies, the individual *indigène* should not be perfected. Advocating teaching elementary oral French and not necessarily written French, Trautmann argued, "*j'estime qu'un bachelier noir ne vaudra jamais dix nègres sachant simplement parler et écrire le français. Je suis persuadé, même, qu'il ne rendra pas plus de service que chacun de ces primaires.*"[83] Trautmann thus rationalized the *grand enfant* while acknowledging individual potential, and therefore he reconciled the colonial project with the ideals of the democratic republic.

The *indigène*'s natural demeanor furthered this reconciliation. He was, Trautmann argued, lazy and had an incapacity to work. He had simple tastes and a natural insouciance. The *corvée* which Batouala violently disliked was not problematical to Trautmann or his *nègres*. First, he claimed that one should not exaggerate it; it was not a hardship. *Indigènes* volunteered for it out of their good will, for a little money, and especially if a "*bon Blanc*" led them. "*Sont-ils vraiment si malheureux qu'ils le disent de toutes ces corvées imposées? Je ne le crois pas. Pourvu qu'ils mangent, qu'ils boivent et qu'ils dansent, le reste leur importe peu, même les ordres ou les injures du 'Commandant.'*"[84] With food in his belly, Trautmann suggested, the *nègre* was content to dance, and he had no need or aptitude to create, to learn, or to master nature like the European. Trautmann succeeded in reestablishing the happy, *grand enfant* as the dominant image of the *nègre*. The Banania Bonhomme was a real man or rather race of men in the French imagination.

This childlike, happy, carefree representation was reassuring for the French especially as they nervously gazed eastward across the Rhine in the 1920s.

The French needed the *nègre* and his exotic lands much more than the *nègre* needed French tutelage. Africa was a strange and difficult space, and yet it was powerfully attractive: "*Mieux qu'en France, la personnalité peut s'y affirmer parce que moins limitée par les contingences extérieures. La liberté y est plus grande...*"[85] For the active man, for more men then women went to the colonies, Africa was available to escape European constraints. It was hard to be *blasé* in the colonies. "*Elle donne à la plupart des 'Blancs' des satisfactions qu'ils n'éprouveraient jamais en France...*"[86] The active, virile man had the primitive and nature available to conquer. One's strength was tested daily, both physically and morally, and in the aftermath of World War I, there was a need to relocate the locus of heroism: savage Africa filled this adventure quest.[87] Freedom from constraints, what Trautmann called individualism, could, however, lead to *libertinage* and decivilization. Africa's danger thus furthered its appeal. Trautmann, like Roz, fought against Maran's depiction of *l'âme noire* and recycled standard representations of Africa and Africans not just to defend colonial officials, colonialism, and European civilization, but to preserve a fantasy world for the French either to sublimate or to realize their exotic adventure quests.

Trautmann concluded by asserting that he knew the Black soul as well as Maran, perhaps better. Maran, he claimed, addressed his "*frères noires*" and therefore could not be objective. Trautmann, on the other hand, was so scrupulously objective and sympathetic to the *indigène* that he proudly stated, "*Je risque d'être traité de 'négrophile.' Tant mieux.*"[88] Trautmann was a *négrophile* but one who loved a particular primitive construction of the *nègre*: "*La race noire est en retard sur les autres, sur la nôtre en particulier, d'un*

nombre respectable de siècles."[89] Representing the Black African as some sort of regression, morally and culturally, if not physically, Trautmann's sympathies went out to the *nègre* who reflected back to him his metropolitan superiority and the righteousness of the civilizing mission. In the cultural arena, the *nègre* who was loved was only the *nègre* who nurtured imagined French physical, moral, and sexual adventures in an exotic land.

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The first novel written in response to Batouala was Gaston Joseph's Koffi, roman vrai d'un noir, published in 1922. Gaston Joseph was a colonial official in Africa, former student of the Sorbonne and l'Ecole Coloniale, and a well published author of ethnographies of Africa. His novel, an *entrée* in the war of subtitles, was about a "true" Black African living happily under colonial rule, trying to do good, but weak in the face of the mysterious powers of *féticheurs* in Africa. Gaston Joseph did not so much attack Maran as present an alternative representation of the *indigène* to the one of the hate-filled Batouala. Although Koffi was formulaic, predictable and of little lasting literary worth, its cultural importance was that it employed a metropolitan sensibility and many stereotypes to represent the "true" Africa and *indigène*. And in what was becoming standard in these literary battles, the polemic against Maran was engaged in the preface.

Gabriel Angoulvant, former interim Governor General of the colonies, penned the preface, an attack on Maran and a discourse on the veracity of the Black African hero, Koffi. Koffi, Angoulvant claimed, was a composite of the many *indigènes* in West Africa who left their native villages, became quasi-civilized, then returned to direct the evolution of their village but fell victim to regressive forces and tendencies. What made Koffi admirable, Angoulvant argued, was that it "*comble une lacune de notre littérature exotique coloniale*,"
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and it was constructed with all the colors of reality.[90] The subtext in this statement was transparent. Maran's "*veritable roman nègre*" was deemed unfaithful to the Black African's true condition or mentality. Second, and more generally, colonial exoticism as a genre had failed to be faithful to the true *indigène*. The idealized noble savage, for example, was the basis of some exoticism, but Angoulvant rejected this formulation of the savage. Using Batouala as an example in a simple but not entirely inaccurate reading of him, Angoulvant argued the savage was not inherently and monolithically noble. Conversely, he was not solely degraded--full of faults and vices. Moreover, Gaston Joseph, Angoulvant contended, did not write about the *indigène* with cruelty, as he claimed of Maran, nor represent the *indigène* in a subordinate role merely to frame, in an exotic manner, an essentially European story. Gaston Joseph's contribution to exoticism, Angoulvant claimed, was both to study *indigènes* in their "*milieux naturels*" without preconceived ideas and to demonstrate that "*sous la sauvagerie se cachent souvent des qualités réelles de loyauté, de devouement, et de bonté.*"[91] Koffi, Angoulvant suggested, was the first *indigène* represented in literature as a multi-dimensional character, having noble qualities, faults, strengths, and weaknesses that could not withstand the mysterious dark forces of Africa. This was the "true" *nègre*, not Batouala. Which representation became hegemonic would define one of the distorted mirrors for the French to define themselves.

Koffi was an episodic novel about a simple African, an *indigène* every man, who was shaped by his environment. Koffi Nguessan was born and raised in an isolated, disease ridden and impoverished village in the Côte d'Ivoire. But Koffi dreamed of escaping his traditional world for another world: the white world that he learned about from Yao, the house boy of a European temporarily stationed in Konan Kuassikro. Koffi, owning only a simple *pagne*,

was seduced by Yao's stories of city life and, most of all, "*par l'élégance de Yao dont le complet, le faux-col, le chapeau mou, les chaussures et la canne faisaient un être incontestablement supérieur...*"[92] Clothing, especially the wearing of shoes, was an important visible marker distinguishing *évolués* from *sauvages*, and Koffi, after Yao's example, wanted to be an *évolué*. In French popular culture, however, the *nègre* in clothing was a comical figure, one whose veneer of civilization could not mask his true primitivism (as seen in chapter 6).[93]

With dreams of a *complet*, Koffi fled his village after the elders slept off another night of beating the tam-tam, drinking, and dancing. He was just nine, but having acquired indirect knowledge of civilization, or at least its material manifestations, he chose it over tradition. Once he arrived in the city, he was not disappointed. He found his friend Yao and, as luck would have it, arrived just in time for the French *fête nationale*. *Indigènes* in the city, Gaston Joseph stated, loved France as the motherland and celebrated the 14th of July with all their force: "[it was an] *occasion particulière de réjouissance pour tous les indigènes des colonies, date à ce point marquante dans leur esprit que, pour déterminer un événement important de la vie, tel l'âge d'un enfant, ils comptent fréquemment le nombre de quatorze juillet.*"[94] France, Gaston Joseph suggested, was the true surrogate parent to Koffi and all *indigènes* who marked their age not by the seasons, as Batouala did, but by the number of national holidays they experienced. Indeed, Koffi was symbolically reborn at the *fête*, leaving primitivism behind for the path of evolution.

In the city, Koffi became a kitchen boy in white man's house. He became an excellent worker, and work, Gaston Joseph suggested, transformed primitives into good subjects. After about a year of service, Koffi saved ten

francs. He wanted to use the money to pay the capitation tax, but he was told that he was too young to pay the tax.

> *Koffi déclara travailler comme un homme, et par conséquent avoir le droit de verser l'impôt comme un homme.... Il se retira le cœur gros, attristé de n'avoir pas été pris au sérieux. Il eût été si fier d'être en possession d'un ticket d'imposable, d'avoir un 'papier,' un reçu portant de gros cachets ronds! car dans son esprit, ce papier officiel l'aurait grandi et fait sociallement l'égal* [of other Blacks].[95]

In Koffi's eyes, paying the tax would have marked him as an *évolué*, a desired status. Unlike Maran who marked Batouala's status by sexual prowess, wealth, and wisdom, ostensibly traditional markers, Gaston Joseph marked Koffi's status solely by a subordinate relationship to the colonial power, and this relationship was constructed to be a loving one between the *nègre* as a *grand enfant* and the French as the benevolent parent.

After a youthful indiscretion of stealing a few cigarettes, Koffi learned a lesson about the sanctity of private property and thus, by extension, the right of the *mise en valeur* of the colonies, but this lesson cost him his first position. Koffi, inherently good, soon found work for a benevolent white. He worked very hard, and he was rewarded with "*deux petits complets de toile kaki*" and was sent to school part-time to learn French.[96] This kindness, or rather paternalism, Gaston Joseph claimed, was not unusual: "*L'homme blanc, dans la solitude de l'exil et l'éloignement de sa famille, livre volontiers son affection aux noirs parmi lesquels il vit.*"[97] In direct opposition to Batouala's example, Koffi valorized and warmly accepted white paternalism and sought to adopt European ways.

The *indigène*'s mimicry of whites not only demonstrated white superiority, but was constructed to prove that the Black African was a comical, good natured child. Koffi, like other *indigènes* in the service of whites, was smitten by French culture, especially clothes, which he studied in department

store catalogs. With the little money he had, the *indigène* purchased what provided him a sense of well-being:

> *Mais la conception qu'il a de ce bien-être est singulière. Il suppose pouvoir l'acquérir en singeant l'homme blanc. Pour être satisfait, il lui faut avoir des vêtements étriqués, chauds et malcommodes dont cependant le climat le dispense; il lui faut des chaussures alors que la nature prévoyante et généreuse le dota de semelles inusables...*[98]

Whereas Maran's *nègre* wanted nothing to do with whites, Gaston Joseph's comically aped the white. His mimicry was a source of amusement not just because he appeared buffoon-like in his *complet*, but because he was not even physically evolved enough to necessitate the symbolic accouterments of civilization. In Gaston Joseph's imagination, the *nègre* was not a dangerous being but a happy and ridiculous servant and, on occasion, toy. Indeed, Koffi's employer, ever generous, taught him to be an amusing distraction for European guests at dinner parties: "*Pendant qu'il débarrassait la table des apéritifs, le maître l'appela, pressa son nombril du pouce, et 'Sourir d'Avril '* [Koffi's nickname] *imita à la perfection la sonnerie d'un timbre électrique. On rit...*"[99] And Koffi, Gaston Joseph's embodiment of *l'âme noire*, was proud of his performance; if this was the true Black African, France had nothing to fear from Batouala.

Koffi's master soon left for France, and after a brief experience working for a drunken dissipated master, Koffi, in one of the few times he demonstrated much agency in his relations with whites, left this European and became kitchen boy to a colonial administrator. The administrator was stationed in the bush, and in a direct refutation of Maran's thesis, Gaston Joseph stated that he, like all administrators, "*se consacrait tout entier à un métier éminemment divers. Il avait conscience de la noblesse de sa tâche obscure. Avec passion, il s'imposait de mener dans la voie du progrès les peuplades attardées du territoire placé sous son commandement.*"[100] The administrator was the

benevolent agent of the noble civilizing mission, and good administrators were rewarded with loyal service. Koffi worked long and hard for his new master, learning new skills and gaining prestige among the other *indigènes* for his honesty and diligence. In service to whites, Koffi evolved, but his personal evolution was far from complete: "*Mais, si sa mentalité avait évolué, l'atavisme n'en ressuscitait pas moins quelquefois par à-coups avec puissance, et il aurait suffi que les circonstances s'y prêtassent pour ramener la force de sa domination totale.*"[101] Even in the noblest, most evolved Black soul, Gaston Joseph declared, atavistic behaviors were latent. Evolution could never be more than tenuous for the *nègre*, and it was this characteristic of the *nègre* that made exoticism so appealing in the 1920s, especially in its sexual manifestations.

The *nègre*'s primitivism was imagined to be never far below his surface aping of the European, and primal instincts were easily aroused with a drum beat. Koffi lived in a small hut in the bush adjacent to the colonial administrator. He planted a garden filled with flowers, like Europeans, but the *indigène*, Gaston Joseph claimed, had no refined sense of aesthetics:

> *Car, en somme, qu'est-ce que la beauté pour le sauvage des grandes forêts denses de l'Afrique tropicale? Est-ce l'harmonie des formes? Sa compréhension comporte-t-elle un sens esthétique? Non. La beauté, c'est la vigueur de reproduction de tout ce qui est matériellement utile à l'être. C'est la plante portant les plus volumineux tubercules... c'est le mâle robuste et la femelle féconde...*[102]

Like the natural world, Koffi was becoming robust himself. He was seventeen, much like Bissibingui in Batouala, handsome and possessing an elegance that was not repulsive to the European aesthetic: "*Le visage régulier ne présentait pas cette déformation accentuée, commune aux négroïdes, d'une bouche trop lippue et d'un nez épaté...*"[103]

Although Koffi's cultural evolution transformed his physical presence, beneath the veneer of the semi-civilized young man was a *nègre* bursting with sexual energy that civilization could not control. One evening a tam-tam was held to celebrate the administrator's stay and departure. Koffi attended, not in his khaki but in a *pagne*. When the tam-tam beat, a *féticheuse* made an extraordinary dance that brought out the primal in the *indigènes*: "*Gagnés par une suggestion collective et par des forces secrètes, ils menaient une bacchanale infernale...*"[104] Koffi was easily infected. He danced with a young girl of, perhaps, thirteen. She danced nonchalantly; he moved with great vigor. His blood got hot; his heart beat faster and faster. The girl left the dance circle for a dark place. Koffi followed her, instinctively. "*Il la saisit en lui entourant le cou de son bras robuste si fortement qu'elle s'inclina en arrière comme si elle allait choir.*"[105] Then she fled. "*Il la redressa, l'amena vivement à lui la pressa contre sa poitrine brûlante.... Leurs regards se rencontrèrent et se fixèrent dans une volupté bestiale...*"[106] And his *cri d'amour* was heard throughout the forest. The next day, Koffi left the village with the administrator, dreaming of his first conquest. The *nègre* that Gaston Joseph constructed, a "true" one, was sexually uninhibited and burning with primal desires that the tam-tam elicited, and European exoticism reflected this in its fetish of the tam-tam and the dancing Black.

Village girls were fine for conquest, but not for marriage for a semi-civilized *indigène*, and Koffi, in his *complet* and speaking French, felt he was well above the primitive *nègre*. Gaston Joseph's *nègre* was thus constructed to confirm the European hierarchy of races. Koffi, a male, was evolved through work, skills, and clothes. By contrast, in the French imagination, one tainted by misogyny, the Black female, especially the *petite épouse*, was evolved through insemination. Koffi met a pretty young woman, Afoué, who was the concubine

of a white businessman. She received lots of gifts and was happy, but, like Koffi, she knew that her master would return to France and life would change. Koffi agreed: "'*Quand on a vécu comme nous avec les Blancs... il doit être impossible de reprendre au village l'habitude de vivre parmi des ignorants et des 'savages.'*"[107] The two then began an affair and Afoué became pregnant. She did not know if the child was to be the white man's or Koffi's, "*café au lait*" or "*noir.*" The child turned out to be Black, and the white man was enraged at Afoué's infidelity and threw her out. Koffi happily married this semi-civilized woman.

But just as she lost her white protector, Koffi lost his. His administrator returned to France so Koffi and Afoué went to a city where he became a cook to a white couple. In the city, Koffi gathered together weekly with other *évolués*. *Évolués* were low-level, poorly educated, non-Christian *indigène* functionaries who, despite their pretensions, were considered more African than European in culture. Caricatured, they wore European clothes, tried to speak French, and "*dansait à la manière des Blancs au son d'un accordéon qui rendait tant bien que mal* Viens Poupoule *et* La Madelon."[108] Koffi, ever the faithful worker, now had a difficult master and mistress. He performed poorly and was frequently reprimanded; the true Black, Gaston Joseph demonstrated, had little innate initiative or sense of excellence--he was dependent on his leadership. "*Mais un Noir dont tel Européen réussit à obtenir une fidélité à toute épreuve et de remarquables services donne les déceptions les plus inattendues en passant au service de tel autre. C'est là une question de doigté, de psychologie, de caractère, d'accoutumance.*"[109] Indeed, Koffi got drunk on the job and was fired.

Fortunately, Koffi's former master, the administrator, returned to Africa, and Koffi was once again given the tutelage he needed to behave civilized. He

went into the bush with the administrator and was eventually stationed near his natal village. With a noble master, Koffi repressed his regressive tendencies and appeared to be an *évolué*, especially to his primitive village, to which he returned for the first time since he fled it a decade previously. Upon returning, Koffi embraced his parents and told his village of the benefits that would come from whites:

> *Je vis depuis longtemps avec les Blancs, fit Koffi. Je puis vous assurer qu'ils veulent notre bien, rien que notre bien.... Ne restez pas les esclaves de vieux préjugés, et ne faites pas obstacle à leur action. Laissez-vous guider par eux. Ils savent tout. Vous ne savez rien.*[110]

In Gaston Joseph's imagination, unlike Maran's, the *nègre*, not the white, extolled the civilizing mission. Koffi's words and sentiments were believed by all, save the *féticheurs*. With his good will, hard work, and noble supervision, Koffi became a respected colonial functionary, an interpreter. Eventually, though, Koffi's protector left, and he became interpreter for a series of good and bad administrators. Though he was always professional and loyal in his service, Koffi was never again inspired in his devotion to his work or administrator. In Gaston Joseph's vision, the *nègre* responded to his master, not to his task. Therein lay one conflict between colonialism and exoticism: who would be the master of the *nègre*.

After Koffi reestablished himself in his village as a servant for the French, the chief of his native peoples died. Needing to fill the position, the villagers, especially its younger members, chose Koffi to lead them. Koffi left the colonial service to be, he thought, a modern chief: to replace tradition with the reforms the French desired. But unbeknownst to Koffi, the *féticheurs* opposed him and secretly acted in concert to preserve their traditional and mysterious power. Koffi fell ill shortly after being chosen to be chief. Not getting well, he was convinced by his mother to see a healer. The healer admonished Koffi to

respect traditions: "*Tu étais éloigné de tes ancêtres, déclara la vieille doctoresse, tu les avais abandonnés, tu n'y pensais plus même. Ils ont voulu ton retour auprès d'eux, et, maintenant, c'est leur âme qui est en toi...*"[111] Following the healer's instructions, Koffi was cured but lost both his courage and his ambivalence to indigenous religion. Traditional rituals began to frighten Koffi, since he had not seen them since becoming civilized, and he soon put *fétiches* in his hut and wore them on his body: "*Ah! oui, la réadaptation était définitivement faite. Koffi était à la merci des cultes de sa tribu.*"[112] His master was no longer the French but the dark, savage, and timeless forces believed to dwell in Africa.

For some time, Koffi sincerely tried to carry out his responsibilities to the whites. Simultaneously, he tried not to alienate the *féticheurs*, but his work was difficult: "*Mais il se sentait peu à peu débordé, et lui apparaissait que la domination étrangère exigeait du milieu une évolution trop hâtive, non en rapport avec la mentalité des autochtones peu préparés à subir une transformation aussi brusque.*"[113] If the civilizing mission was to fail, Gaston Joseph argued, it was not because of colonial officials and their proxies, as Maran argued, but because the object of these efforts, the *nègre*, was too backward for civilizing. Indeed, unable even to convince his villagers of the benefits of the *corvée*, Koffi increasingly lost his influence. Without a strong white to guide him, the well meaning Koffi found solace in drink, which weakened him further: "*Il devint alors la proie facile de ses adversaires nombreux et triomphants.*"[114] One day, for example, when the colonial administrator demanded some porters, Koffi was too drunk to deliver any, and his villagers revolted against white demands. Koffi was arrested and exiled for five years but with a pension for his former dutiful service to the government. In exile, away from the *féticheurs*, Koffi regained his *esprit*, became industrious,

and died comfortably. To the end, "*il gardait pour les Blancs et leur œuvre la même admiration qu'il avait à leur service.*"[115]

Koffi was a predictable novel that confirmed the necessity and righteousness of the civilizing mission, and for this, it won the Grand Prix de Littérature Coloniale in 1923. It was also a salvo in the war against Batouala. Koffi, the Black hero, was neither traditional nor fully an *évolué*. Under the guise of being a complex and true representation of the African *nègre*, he was really an intermediary figure: a "*pseudo-civilisé*." If this was the true state of the most civilized of *nègres*, then France's colonial project, despite its efficacy, preserved Africa and the Black African Other as a site for French exoticism. If the *nègre* could only be partially civilized, then the Black African would retain access to the primitive, and more importantly, the French would have access to the primitive through the exotic *nègre*, a compliant partner to metropolitan wishes, unlike the hostile, ignoble savage, Batouala.

Conclusion

Batouala was a *cause célèbre* in 1921-1922, generating much heat in the political and cultural arenas. Politically, Batouala was instrumental in publicizing colonial abuses, and for this, Maran was viciously attacked in print. After his opening salvo, a number of French authors, as Maran desired, exposed additional colonial abuses. André Gide, for example, traveled to A.E.F. in 1925-1926, and then he publicly denounced concessionary company practices and led a political campaign to reform the most egregious aspects of French colonialism (see Chapter 9). Thus Maran was politically vindicated. But never answering his critics, just waiting for justice, Maran's vindication was bittersweet, as he suggested in 1927:

> I pass, not without a certain disdain tinged with bitterness, over all that I have had to suffer in silence since 1921.... I can laugh at the hypocrisy of the bourgeois virtues scandalized by my candor; I can laugh at all those so-learned dabblers in science, and really they are ignoramuses, who take authority from their ignorance... I knew that I was right. I knew that justice would one day be mine through public opinion...[116]

Maran found his justice: corroboration that French colonial practices needed reform. But the justice he spoke of in public opinion was fleeting. Despite his prolific committed literary career, Maran, since the *négritude* movement, has been marginalized and all but forgotten. Frantz Fanon, for one, and other anti-imperialists stridently attacked Maran's French humanist stance. As an assimilationist, Maran's ideology not only lacked the radical cachet of anti-imperialism, but was politically on the losing side. Perhaps to the glee of long deceased French colonialists and radical Black intellectuals alike, Maran and Batouala has become all but a footnote in the French grand narrative.

But the scorn of political history must not be allowed to overshadow Maran's importance in the cultural history of the interwar years. In late 1921, when Batouala was first published, post-war exoticism was fluid. In many ways, the French were experiencing the *nègre* for the first time. Who the *nègre* was imagined to be--a *grand enfant*, a husband, an angry rational, Other--would be as contested as French identity, which in fact the Black Other refracted. The singular importance of Batouala was that it challenged the representation of the serviceable, accessible Other who was exotic enough to locate metropolitan desires and dreams, ones impossible to realize given the self-imposed constraints of metropolitan morality. As the 1920s progressed, however, Maran's representation of the *nègre* did not resonate in popular culture, save *négrophobisme*. But exoticism flourished, and the *nègre* became better defined, both positively and negatively, in the French imagination as the Other

who was a means both for sublimating French desires and for helping to rebuild the cultural categories that the Great War undermined, as we will see in exhibitions and iconography of the Black African Other in the following chapters.

Endnotes

[1]L. B., "M. René Maran, Prix Goncourt," Le Petit Parisien, 15 décembre 1921, p. 1.

[2]Emile Henriot, "En attendant le prix Goncourt," Le Temps, 13 décembre 1921, and Anonymous, "Le Prix Goncourt," Le Temps, 15 décembre 1921. See also Keith Cameron, René Maran (Boston: G. K. Hall & Company, 1985), 15-16, for a good and brief discussion of the voting for the 1921 Prix Goncourt.

[3]The biographical information on Maran is a synthesis of Cameron, René Maran, and John Alfred Dennis, Jr. "The René Maran Story: The Life and Times of a Black Frenchman, Colonial Administrator, Novelist and Social Critic, 1887-1960" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, September 1986).

[4]See Cameron, René Maran, p. 4, and Femi Ojo-Ade, René Maran: The Black Frenchman, A Bio-Critical Study (Washington, D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1984). Dennis, "The René Maran Story," argued that Maran synthesized his race and cultural nationality. The debate over whether Maran was French first and Black second or vice versa is important to those who are concerned about the genealogy of *négritude* or about Maran's intellectual stance. Since this chapter is concerned with the French response to Maran, which was primarily a response to him as Black Frenchman, the intricacies of the debate will be left to others.

[5]See Cameron, René Maran and Ojo-Ade, René Maran: The Black Frenchman. Cameron and Ojo-Ade both cited René Violaines's, "Un Kipling Français: René Maran," Le Travail, 26 mai 1929, as one of the first sources of this comparison. Cameron argued that Maran's animal novels were similar to Kipling's; Ojo-Ade rejected the comparison and argued the animal novels were used to denigrate Blacks.

[6]See Cameron, René Maran, 141.

[7]For a particularly harsh assessment of Maran, see Frantz Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967). In addition, Ojo-Ade, René Maran: The Black Frenchman, builds off of Fanon and was an extended attack on Maran to prove that he was not one of the progenitors of *négritude*. Léopold Sédar Senghor differed; he argued that Maran's *œuvre* was crucial to the development of *négritude*. See Léopold Sédar Senghor, "René Maran, Précurseur de la Négritude," Hommage A René Maran (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1965), 9-13. For recent rehabilitations of Maran, see Cameron, René Maran and Dennis, "The René Maran Story."

[8]René Maran, Batouala, véritable roman nègre (Paris: Albin Michel, 1921), 21-22.

[9]Ibid., 31.

[10]Ibid., 31.

[11]Ibid., 46.

[12]Ibid., 46.

[13]Ibid., 85.

[14]Ibid., 89-90.

[15]Ibid., 90.

[16]Ibid., 92-93.

[17]Ibid., 188.

[18]See Ojo-Ade, René Maran: The Black Frenchman.

[19]Ibid., 175.

[20]See Maran, Batouala, 96.

[21]See Ojo-Ade, René Maran: The Black Frenchman; Ojo-Ade argued that Maran denigrated the Black African, recycling harsh stereotypes of him and holding the white European to be far superior to the Black.

[22]Léopold Sédar Senghor, "René Maran, Précurseur de la Négritude," 13.

[23]Maran, Batouala, 77-78.

[24]Ibid., 30.

[25]Ibid., 76.

[26]Ibid., 21.

[27]Ibid., 76.

[28]Ibid., 73-74.

[29]See Alice L. Conklin, A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 20; in addition, see pages 169-173.

[30]Maran, Batouala, 78.

[31]See Conklin, A Mission to Civilize, 170.

[32]Maran, Batouala, 78.

[33]I am unsure of the origin of the phrase "*la bombe*," but it was used in quotations by Philippe Dewitte, Les Mouvements nègres en France, 1919-1939 (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1985) and in translation by Dennis, "The René Maran Story."

[34]Maran, Batouala, 10.

[35]Ibid., 11.

[36]Ibid., 11.

[37]Ibid., 11-12.

[38]See my discussion of Paul Reboux, Romulus Coucou (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1920) and the 1920 survey in Eve on mixed race marriages, chapter 2. Maran only mentioned the existence of these two works; see Maran, Batouala, 12.

[39]Maran, Batouala, 13-14.

[40]Ibid., 14.

[41]Ibid., 13.

[42]René Trautmann, Au Pays de "Batouala": Noirs et Blancs en Afrique (Paris: Payot et Cie., 1922), 42.

[43]See Dennis, "The René Maran Story," 154. Dennis does not state why after seven years the book was banned nor does he provide references to research the decision to ban Batouala. I assume, however, the decision to ban the book was made by the Minister of Colonies.

[44]See Iheanachor Egonu, "Le Prix Goncourt de 1921 et la 'Querelle de Batouala,'" Research in African Literatures 11 (Winter 1980): 530.

[45]Ibid., 529.

[46]Ibid., 530-531. It is interesting to note that for two journals, Maran's race was of secondary importance: l'Echo des Sports and l'Auto. Both of these sporting journals emphasized that Maran was an accomplished athlete and thus there was no "*incompatibilité entre les sports et la littérature*!" See Mercure de France, 1 janvier 1922, 276. This is the only reporting of Maran that I have seen that subordinates his racial classification to other identities.

[47]L. B. "M. René Maran, Prix Goncourt," Le Petit Parisien, 15 décembre 1921, p. 1.

[48]It is interesting to note that critics who attacked Maran's skin color as beneficial to his winning the Prix Goncourt made statements analogous to those made by late twentieth century affirmative action critics in the United States.

[49]"Prix littéraires," Le Cri de Paris, 4 décembre 1921, 9. Two weeks later, Le Cri de Paris was hostile to Batouala, primarily for the signal it sent to the United States and to Germany about the civilizing mission.

[50]L. B. "M. René Maran, Prix Goncourt," Le Petit Parisien, 15 décembre 1921, p. 1.

[51]Maurice Delafosse, Broussard ou les états d'âme d'un colonial suivis de ses propos et opinions (Paris: Émile Larose, Libraire-Éditeur, 1922), 173.

[52]Ibid., 172.

[53]Rachilde, "Les Romans," Mercure de France, 15 janvier 1922, 462.

[54]See "Notes d'Argus," La Race Nègre, novembre-décembre 1927, p. 2.

[55]P.S., "Autour de prix Goncourt," Le Temps, 16 décembre 1921, 1.

[56]J.L., "Coïncidence," Le Temps, 17 décembre 1921.

[57]Jacques Boulenger cited in Egonu, "Le Prix Goncourt," 534.

[58]Carl Siger, "Questions Coloniales," Mercure de France, 15 fevrier 1922, 200.

[59]For a discussion of manicheanism in colonial literature, see Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," in "Race," Writing, and Difference, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985, 1986), 78-106.

[60]P. S. "Autour du Prix Goncourt," Le Temps, 16 décembre 1921, p. 1.

[61]See chapter 4 for more information on Georges Barthélemy; later in the 1920s, he was involved in bringing Africans to France and putting them on exhibition at fairs and in zoos.

[62]See Jean Lefranc, "Nos Parlementaires, Coloniaux noirs et coloniaux blancs," L'Illustration, 19 janvier 1924, 65-66. It is interesting to note that Lefranc made it a point to call the Deputies "*nègres*," claiming that "*homme de couleur*" was a useless euphemism.

[63]Journal Officiel (Débats Parlementaires) no. 138, Chambre des Députés: 1re séance du jeudi 21 décembre 1922, 4391-4393.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Ibid.

[67]Ibid.

[68]Delafosse, Broussard, 171.

[69]Ibid.

[70]See Conklin, A Mission to Civilize, for an extended discussion of how the Governor Generals in Africa mediated the contradictions of colonialism and republicanism.

[71]Delafosse, Broussard, 174.

[72]Ibid.

[73]Firmin Roz, "Le Roman: Le Prix Goncourt," Revue Bleue, 7 janvier 1922, 23.

[74]Ibid, 24.

[75]Ibid.

[76]Trautmann, Au Pays de "Batouala," 12.

[77]Ibid., 96.

[78]Ibid.

[79]Ibid., 96-97.

[80]Ibid., 106.

[81]Ibid., 45.

[82]Ibid., 64.

[83]Ibid., 234.

[84]Ibid., 196.

[85]Ibid., 163.

[86]Ibid., 164.

[87]See Michael B. Miller, Shanghai on the Metro: Spies, Intrigue, and the French Between the Wars (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1994) for a discussion, albeit brief, about how the loss of a locus for heroism after the Great War led many to seek adventure in Africa and Asia.

[88]Trautmann, Au Pays de "Batouala," 246.

[89]Ibid., 247.

[90]Gaston Joseph, Koffi, roman vrai d'un noir (Paris: Aux Éditions du Monde Nouveau, 1922), 7.

[91]Ibid., 10.

[92]Ibid., 23.

[93]For iconography representing the *nègre* as a buffoon in European clothing and a brief discussions of the issue, see, Raymond Bachollet, Jean Barthélemi Debost, Anne-Claude Lelieur, Marie-Christine Peyrière, eds., NégriPub: l'image des Noirs dans la Publicité (Paris: Éditions Somogy, 1992, 1994) and Jan Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

[94]Gaston Joseph, Koffi, 34.

[95]Ibid., 54.

[96]Ibid., 66.

[97]Ibid., 66.

[98]Ibid., 67.

[99]Ibid., 73.

[100]Ibid., 102-103.

[101]Ibid., 103.

[102]Ibid., 112.

[103]Ibid., 114.

[104]Ibid., 117.

[105]Ibid., 120.

[106]Ibid., 120.

[107]Ibid., 136.

[108]Ibid., 157.

[109]Ibid., 184.

[110]Ibid., 177-178.

[111]Ibid., 198.

[112]Ibid., 202.

[113]Ibid., 214.

[114]Ibid., 218.

[115]Ibid., 228.

[116]René Maran, "Batouala n'avait pas menti," Le Journal du Peuple, 4 juin 1927 quoted and translated in Cameron, René Maran, 37.

CHAPTER 4

"SAVAGES" IN THE GARDEN: THE *NEGRE* ON EXHIBITION

The first flourishing of exoticism after the war produced ambivalent representations of the Black African Other: was he a *Bonhomme*, a Batouala, or both, simultaneously? As the decade progressed, the Black Other would become well defined but still ambivalently. Indeed exoticism demanded a range of representations to provide for escapism, self-criticism, and to begin redrawing the French self after the war, which the exhibition did only too well. Didactic and amusing, glitzy expositions, like the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris, were officially sponsored showcases for La Grande France. But there were also numerous small exhibitions in the 1920s held, not paradoxically, at the Parisian zoo. Like the larger ones, these exhibitions, intimately connected to exploration and conquest, commodified the *nègre* as an ethnographic specimen and entertaining object of a spectacle. And through the exhibited *nègre*, the post-war French clarified the boundaries of the their identity and their mission in the world.

A Legacy From Columbus

Exhibitions of the other in Europe date at least to the earliest explorations of the New World and were held for both amusement and scientific purposes. It appeared that a disproportionate number of the first non-Western people put on exhibition were native to the Americas. Columbus, himself, brought back an Arawak from the Caribbean, who was then displayed in the Spanish court for two years.[1] In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Native Americans were put on exhibition in France and England, and they inspired Montaigne's Of Cannibals as well as Shakespeare's character,

Caliban. Blacks in the *ancien régime*, on the other hand, were, on occasion, given as gifts to the nobility. The Comtesse du Barry, for example, had a house slave who was required to play the jester for her amusement.[2] The early private and public displays of the Other were important in a number of ways. The Other provided evidence of the superiority of the Occident and inspired new thinking, like the concept of the noble savage, which was important in Enlightenment thought. Finally and perhaps most importantly, representations of the non-Western Other, whether in literature, iconography, or in live displays, facilitated the transference of attributing savagery in all of its manifestations from Europeans to non-Western people.[3] In the late nineteenth century, the *nègre* became the favored Other for exotification, denigration, and commodification.

Exhibitions From the Fin-de-Siècle to World War I

In August 1877 Carl Hagenbeck, the German wild animal and circus impresario, sent to the Parisian zoo, the Jardin d'Acclimatation, an African animal exhibition and fourteen Nubian caretakers. The Nubians, not the giraffes, camels, or rhinoceros, it turned out, were what most interested both the Parisian crowds and the French savants. Albert Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, son of Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, the zoologist, had become the director of the zoo in 1865, five years after it opened to the public, and he lost no time in realizing a money making venture when he saw one. A few months after the Nubians left, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire brought to the zoo an exhibition of Eskimos from Greenland. The success of this spectacle suggested to him that the popularity of the ethnographic exhibition was no fluke. In a shrewd financial move, and, of course, in the interest of ethnographic science, Geoffroy Saint-

Hilaire inverted the relationship of exotic animals accompanied by humans to one where the humans were accompanied by animals.[4]

From 1877, the year of the first ethnographic exhibition at the zoo, to 1883, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire put on a dozen exhibitions of the primitive and exotic Other. With the exception of two groups of Nubians, the exhibitions were of non-African *indigènes*: Eskimos, Lapps, Gauchos, Fuegians, Galibis, Ceylonese, Araucans, Kalmouks, and American Indians were brought to the zoo to the delight of the Parisian populace.[5] Attendance figures demonstrated the popularity of the exhibitions: the Fuegians, alone, attracted 400,000 visitors in 1881, and in 1883 over 900,000 visitors saw four different exhibitions.[6] These early exhibitions were not especially theatrical: the *indigènes* were set up on the great lawn of the zoo where they would live for a few weeks or even months. They lived in native huts, built on the lawn, and were surrounded by a fence to separate them from the French. During the day, the *indigènes* would go about their daily activities, cooking, tending animals, and watching children, all under the gaze of the French spectator. These ethnographic exhibitions, adjacent to the zoo's displays of exotic animals and plants, constructed the Other as an animal-like savage low on the evolutionary scale: the French, Girard de Rialle wrote in 1881 for La Revue Scientifique, came to see and touch "'*l'homme primitif et se faire un idée de ce que furent les débuts de l'humanité.*'"[7]

The ethnographic exhibition, popular as it was, should not be seen as inconsistent with the mission of the zoo; rather, it furthered the zoo's mission. The Jardin d'Acclimatation had been founded to popularize the botanical and zoological sciences, and it had true scientific pretensions. Under Napoleon III's reign, for example, the Jardin worked closely with, and at times under the direction of, the Imperial Zoological Society. When the Nubians arrived in 1877,

Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire found it opportune to reach out to a new scientific society: the Paris Anthropological Society. In an era when virtually all anthropology was "armchair anthropology," the savants of the Society welcomed the opportunity to study exotic and primitive people without giving up the security of their armchairs. Under the direction of Paul Broca, the Anthropological Society visited the Jardin d'Acclimatation numerous times to study the *indigènes* on exhibition. Studying the Other in the nineteenth century, of course, meant taking physical measurements, and the anthropologists subjected the primitives to as many as fifty different physical measurements. In addition, though to a lesser degree, the social characteristics of the exhibited peoples were studied. The scientific finding were detailed in the Society's Bulletin as well as in the many popular scientific journals of the time, like La Nature, La Science populaire, or Science et Nature.[8]

The Anthropological Society's initial favorable response to exhibitions had a profound and lasting impact on the popular appropriation of exhibitions. In the 1880s, however, the scientific community began raising a number of reservations about exhibitions and eventually disavowed them. Society members lamented that the *indigènes* on display did not match reports written about them by travelers: apparently, the *indigènes* had acquired too much civilization on their journey to the Jardin or in their interaction with the Occident to be considered truly savage. Indeed, Clémence Royer, who translated Darwin, deplored this after viewing the Galibis in 1882: "'*Il n'y a plus de sauvages authentiques qui n'aient été plus ou moins atteint par les influences de la civilisation.*'"[9] In addition, there were complaints that the zoo did not accurately reflect the primitives' indigenous environment, and therefore the ethnographic data collected from them would not be accurate. There were

even concerns that the very zoo setting made the *indigènes* into "savage animals," rather than, one could only suppose, true savages. Despite these reservations, the Paris Anthropological Society and the popular scientific journals that discussed the exhibitions provided a very important function: they authenticated the exhibitions and manner of appropriating the *indigène*, associating behavioral characteristics with visible morphologies. What then started out as a circus impresario's gimmick, and which could have easily been turned into a side-show, rather quickly received scientific validity as an ethnographic exhibition. The *indigènes* displayed were therefore certified as authentic primitives, and their visible presence provided ample evidence of evolution and the superiority of both the white race and the Occident. Through the authority claims of science, and later the state, the Other was essentialized as a primitive, low on the evolutionary scale, and as a commodified object vulnerable to the Western gaze and the exotic desires of the metropolitan.

Africans on Exhibition and the Other as Spectacle

In 1886, after two years of not hosting an ethnographic exhibition and suffering declining revenues, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire reorganized the Jardin d'Acclimatation and severed his formal ties with the French scientific community. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire was now free to make exhibitions of the Other more of a spectacle than of anthropological importance. The first exhibition after the reorganization established a long-standing pattern: some seventy Ceylonese put on a circus-like event, complete with an elephant show, chariot races, and snake charming. Although entertaining and circus-like, this spectacle still had the cachet of being an ethnographic, and therefore authentic, exhibition of the Other.

The reorganization of the zoo and the new style of exhibitions coincided with the European conquest of Africa after the Berlin conference of 1884-85, and the exhibitions of the 1880s and 1890s shifted from a preoccupation with primitives from the Americas, and therefore the Enlightenment Other, to displays of the exotic Black African, the modern Other. In the decade after the Ceylonese spectacle, the Jardin d'Acclimatation hosted exhibitions of Ashanti, Hottentot, Senegalese, Somali, Dahomean, and Egyptians. In addition, there were spectacles involving Dahomeans, Tuareg, Sudanese, and Malgache on the Champs-de-Mars in Paris. These exhibitions were similar: *indigènes* lived in huts on the zoo grounds and went about their daily life, but they also had a set schedule for dancing to the tam-tam, performing traditional rites, or recreating African battles--including colonial battles against the French in which the *indigène* inevitably lost. The African was represented as an exotic savage in type and ways, but unlike the earlier primitives on exhibition, they were also depicted as warlike and in need of pacification. In popular culture, the French were introduced to the *nègre* in a spectacle that maximized his alterity and ferocity as well as servility, dependence, and primitive nature. These exhibitions, which helped the French define themselves, were also about pure amusement: "'*Decadents ou primitifs, tous ces types nous étonnent et ces races arriérées nous font sourire.*'"[10] Indeed, what confident bourgeois Frenchman or child wouldn't be amused throwing coins to savages, as one would peanuts to monkeys?

In the context of the conquest of Africa, these exhibitions were an important means for representing to the French the undeniable efficacy of the Occident and the need for extending European progress and ideals to Africa. Moreover, as the civilizing mission took hold, the French exhibition of the exotic Black African was more than timely. Some saw the exhibitions as the last

opportunity for the Occident to witness natural savagery: "*Mais un jour*," wrote Fulbert Dumonteil, author of a number of programs for exhibitions at the Jardin d'Acclimatation, "*écartant ces fetiches misérables d'une main souveraine, la Civilisation fera disparaître à jamais ces taches de la barbarie comme des graines de poussière emportees par le vent.*"[11] The *nègre*, Dumonteil suggested, had no chance of persisting in a world subject to French benevolence. He underestimated, however, the power of the French imagination to reify the Black Other as a primitive, in part to preserve the ideal of the civilizing mission and a stable social hierarchy.

Although it is true that organized exhibitions of Black Africans seemed to have ceased to capture the fancy of the French after the 1900 Paris World's Fair, they did not cease to exist. In fact, there were five ethnographic exhibitions at the Jardin d'Acclimatation in the decade prior to World War I, two of which involved Africans. The last exhibition before the war was organized by Fleury Tournier, a professional impresario of ethnographic exhibitions from, at least, 1904 through the 1920s. This 1912 exhibition at the Jardin was titled, very simply, the "Village nègre." This exhibition was remarkable for coalescing the many themes developed in exhibitions over the previous three decades. First and perhaps most striking about this exhibition was its very title: there was nothing to distinguish the ethnic identity of the individuals on exhibit.[12] Although evidence suggested that the Black Africans displayed were from Guinée, they were represented as just *nègres* in the French imagination. By the time of the Great War, the Black African was seen neither individually nor in terms of an ethnic identity; rather, he was understood in terms of a mass, unworthy of distinction. The *nègre* had become an ideal type and was titled

and displayed as such, assuming whatever image or counter-identity the French needed of him to support their own image of themselves.

The "Village nègre" was remarkable for its banality, a pattern that would continue after the war. Léon Werth, a well published literary critic and author, visited the exhibition in 1912 and wrote that the *nègres* evoked emotions in him simply because of how very ordinary they were: "*Ce n'était pas des nègres extraordinaires... Ils font tam-tam, dansent, vendent des cartes-postales et sollicitent des cigarettes.*"[13] The *nègres* displayed were represented as any and every *nègre*, which in the French imagination meant being exoticized. The women, for example, danced half naked, and Werth felt that they "*ont la sagesse sauvage du corps, la grâce animale et primitive sans laquelle aucune femme, noire ou blanche, n'est désirable. Nous sommes aussitôt complices de tous leurs mouvements.*"[14] The *nègre* elicited exotic and erotic fantasies in the metropolitan. But the *nègres* in the exhibition, Werth argued, were also visible markers that, through their degradation, demonstrated the superiority of the Occident for the French whose identity needed reassuring in a rapidly changing society. After watching many of his compatriots view the *nègres*, touch them, and laugh at an ill women stretched out on straw, Werth concluded: "*Tous les spectateurs ont un hautain sentiment de leur supériorité blanche. Tous ces gens qui, la semaine ont peiné à des tâches misérables et sur qui la civilisation n'a passé que comme un dressage, ont des instincts de marchands d'esclaves.*"[15] Werth suggested that the exhibition, like social imperialism, allowed the French to displace their own miseries and social anxieties on the Black African Other, but in doing so, the French degraded themselves. By the time of the Great war, the *nègres* in exhibitions were touchstones to express French anxieties, desires and identity, and in the popular imagination, the *nègre* had ceased to be worthy of individual status. World War I both altered and

strengthened this pattern of making the *nègre* a representative of everything but himself.

Post-war Exhibitions

Ethnographic exhibitions of Africans appeared to have ended for the ten years following the 1912 "Village nègre." Although the war brought many Frenchmen into contact with the African Other, these encounters did not seem to lessen the French desire to view the *nègre* in exhibitions. In the 1920s many opportunities were created to display Black Africans. There were, of course, Colonial Expositions in Marseille (1922), Strasbourg (1924), and Paris (1931). In addition to these large expositions, there were a great many small or regional expositions, fairs, and public events, including exhibitions at the zoo that have not been well studied. Like the grand expositions, these small ones became opportunities for provincials and Parisians alike to gaze upon the Black African both as a commodified exotic Other for pleasure and to support the reconstruction of French identity in the aftermath of the Great War.

Impresarios or *Négriers* and the State

In the 1920s, unlike the pre-war years, there appeared to be just a few individuals responsible for staging the majority of the African villages, and they did their work with the consent of the government. Although there is little information about these exhibitions in the press or in the Archive nationales, section Outre-mer, I will argue that the exhibitions in the 1920s resembled the one in 1912 and, moreover, that the *nègre* on exhibition was represented in a manner that maximized alterity and the distance between the civilized Occident and primitive Africa.

The impresarios of exhibitions in the 1920s were a small group of men, sometimes in competition, who held at least one thing in common: a desire to make money, but in this, they were not always successful. Perhaps the most active impresario before the War and after, until his death in late 1928 or 1929, was Fleury Tournier. Tournier's operation, "Villages Exotiques," dated to at least 1904. He was responsible for a number of exhibitions before the war, including the 1912 "Village nègre," and international ones, like the quasi-official "Village sénégalais" at the 1908 Franco-British Exposition celebrating the Entente cordiale.[16] In the 1920s, Tournier reappeared, organizing one of the exhibitions at the 1922 Colonial Exposition. In addition, he organized numerous traveling exhibitions, including some for the Jardin d'Acclimatation, under the titles, "Village nègre," "Village africain," or "Village sénégalais." Tournier's chief competition in the mid 1920s was from Aimé Bouvier and René Blum; in the late 1920s, Maurice Fontenay essentially took over all of their operations. All four individuals turned up in the colonial archive because they frequently needed official authorization for their activities.

The French government was involved in the exhibition of Africans on at least two levels: recruiting *indigènes* in Africa and administering travel documentation. I have found scant information on the recruitment of Africans for exhibitions. It is clear, however, that the colonial governments had to approve of the recruitment of their *indigènes*. On at least one occasion, the colonial government directly aided an impresario. In response to Bouvier's difficulty recruiting a troupe, Dirat from the office of the Governor General of A.O.F. wrote on 6 May 1926, "*J'ai prié les lieutenants-gouverneurs du Sénégal et de la Guinée de faciliter le recrutement des indigènes que vous vous proposez d'engager pour l'Exposition de la Navigation Fluviale de Bâle.*"[17]

After a troupe was recruited, the government assisted the impresarios by issuing passports. All of the *indigènes* coming from Africa, it appeared, required documentation to enter France. With rare exception, the government issued the papers. Furthermore, impresarios often sent their troupes to other European countries to be put on exhibition in foreign fairs and zoos, The Service de Contrôle et d'Assistance en France des Indigènes des Colonies Françaises almost without fail issued the passports for these international exhibitions. The C.A.I.'s primary concern, and it was a concern invoked with great frequency, was to ensure that the Africans would not remain in either the hexagon or Europe. To guarantee the Africans passage back to the colonies, the government demanded that the impresarios deposit with steamship lines or with the Ministry of Colonies funds sufficient to repatriate the troupe, no small sum for a troupe which in the 1920s could number well over a hundred individuals.

Although I have been unable to locate any detailed descriptions of these small traveling exhibitions, a general picture of them can be pieced together. First, exhibitions were both about promoting the French colonies and about entertainment. In fact, René Blum called one of his troupes the "Tournée Franco-coloniale" or "La Tournée de Propagande Coloniale." He argued that his goal was to promote the interests of the colonies at exhibitions. Blum wanted to exhibit his troupe of Africans adjacent to colonial products to excite "*la curiosité naturelle des individus, de vulgariser et de developper la connaissance et le goût des Colonies françaises.*"[18] Though less commercially oriented, Fleury Tournier stated that his troupe of *indigènes* "*sont destinés à representer les mœurs, travail et coutume de la colonie dans ces expositions.*"[19] Given that the impresarios seemed to have little trouble

attracting sites to visit, it appeared that throughout France and Europe these sort of exhibitions were popular.

Their popularity was probably due less to the colonial products displayed near the *indigènes* than to the spectacle of the *indigène*. The villages were just that: small huts clustered together in which Africans lived, on metropolitan fairground. The French had the opportunity to regard the Africans going about their daily routine as well as engaging in handicrafts; jewelers and other artisans typically constituted part of a troupe. The most valuable members of a troupe, contracts indicated, were the musicians, tam-tam and balafond players, and dancers. Blum, for example, contracted in 1929 to pay his tam-tam players 200-300 francs per month, a dancer 125 francs but a jeweler only 75 francs per month.[20] Impresarios paid performers the most to reward what most contributed to the popularity of an exhibition.

In addition to performing regular shows, special events, *rites de passage*, were important towards the ethnographic ends of the exhibitions. At the XIIIe Foire Internationale et coloniale de Bordeaux (1929), the local paper colorfully described "Un Baptême Au Village Noir." A four month old received "*le sacrément du baptême... à la mode de son pays*," complete with a ritual slaughter of a sheep.[21] The spectacle, a staged event, was designed to ring authentic and exotic to the French, and it did: "*Cette cérémonie se déroula en présence d'une très nombreuse foule, qui se trouva transportée, sans avoir fait grand déplacement, au fin fond de l'Afrique Occidentale Française.*"[22] The exhibition, it appeared, evoked the same exotic escapism as the silver screen or colonial literature.

Exhibitions may have lent themselves to exotic fantasies for the French, as was intended, but it was not uncommon for them to end in crisis for the

Africans. In October 1925, for example, Fleury Tournier had a troupe of "Foulahs" (Fulani) at the Jardin d'Acclimatation. Although he was trying to repatriate half of his group, he was orchestrating to send the remaining Africans to a zoo in Buenos Aires, which he ultimately did. The government, however, was concerned about the health of the Foulahs. Deputy Luis Marin, who visited the zoo, wrote to the Minister of the Colonies with his findings: "*je me permets d'appeler votre plus bienveillante attention sur la situation des Foulas qui se trouvent actuellement au Jardin d'Acclimatation et qui ne supporteront pas le froid des nuits s'ils continuent à être aussi mal protégés...*"[23] Other troupes were not fortunate enough to have the choice between going to another zoo or returning to Africa. They had to be rescued. René Blum, for example, went broke in 1929 and deserted his troupe of Africans in Belgium without food or money. Maurice Fontenay rescued, fed, and housed the abandoned *indigènes*. Ever the opportunist, Fontenay then contracted with the troupe to put on shows in France so they could earn money not just to return to Africa, but to pay back his *largesse*.[24]

It was rare to hear public outrage about the chattel-like treatment of Africans, but when Aimé Bouvier abandoned a troupe in Bordeaux in 1928, leaving them without money or shelter, at least one Frenchman was offended. Georges Delfau wrote to the Minister of Colonies to protest the inhumane treatment of French subjects:

> *Je viens protester de toute la force de mon cœur, de toute la force de mon âme, au nom de notre Belle France, au nom de la civilisation contre un nommé Bouvier qui après avoir amené de Dakar... et après en avoir profité en les faisant voir à Brest les a ramené à Bordeaux...et les a parqué comme on parque des moutons sous un des hangards...[où] ils sont exposés aux courants d'air et à la pluie...*[25]

Delfau demanded help for the *indigènes* not solely for them but for the honor of the Republic. Delfau was indignant at the treatment of the Africans, but what

was most remarkable in his letter was that he suggested that the reputation of the Republic, the ideals of the Revolution, and "*la civilisation*" itself were undermined when such practices were allowed to continue. Worse could occur.

Les Femmes à Plateaux

Women with labrets, ornaments in one's lip, were a great curiosity to the French. Le Monde colonial illustré, for example, published many photographs of such women in the 1920s. Not all labrets were large; some were simply small pieces of metal or bone inserted in the *indigène*'s lips. What most fascinated the French, however, was the large wooden *plateaux*. In 1924 and 1925 the widely documented La Croisière noire, an automobile trek through Africa (see Chapter 9), introduced to the French Africans with large labrets, the Sara-Djingé of the equatorial forests of the Ubangui-Shari [Figure 5]. In 1926, Léon Poirier's documentary film of the automobile expedition, La Croisière noire showed these same women on the silver screen. It was only a matter of time before some would be brought to the hexagon and put on display--both as an ethnographic specimen and as a freak of human nature.

In June 1929, a troupe of at least eight Sara-Djingé women from French Equatorial Africa were brought to metropolitan France by Georges Barthélemy, a Mr. Pourroy and a Professor Bergonié. Barthélemy was an ex-Deputy and considered an expert on the colonies. He was also President of the Fédération Française des Anciens Coloniaux. The Federation had a distinguished committee of patronage which included Poincaré, Lyautey, and Gaston-Joseph. I am unsure of its range of activities; however, the Federation was involved in at least a couple of ethnographic exhibitions in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In fact, Barthélemy, Pourroy, and the Federation were involved in a notorious 1931 exhibition of Canaques as Cannibals at the Jardin d'Acclimatation.[26] I

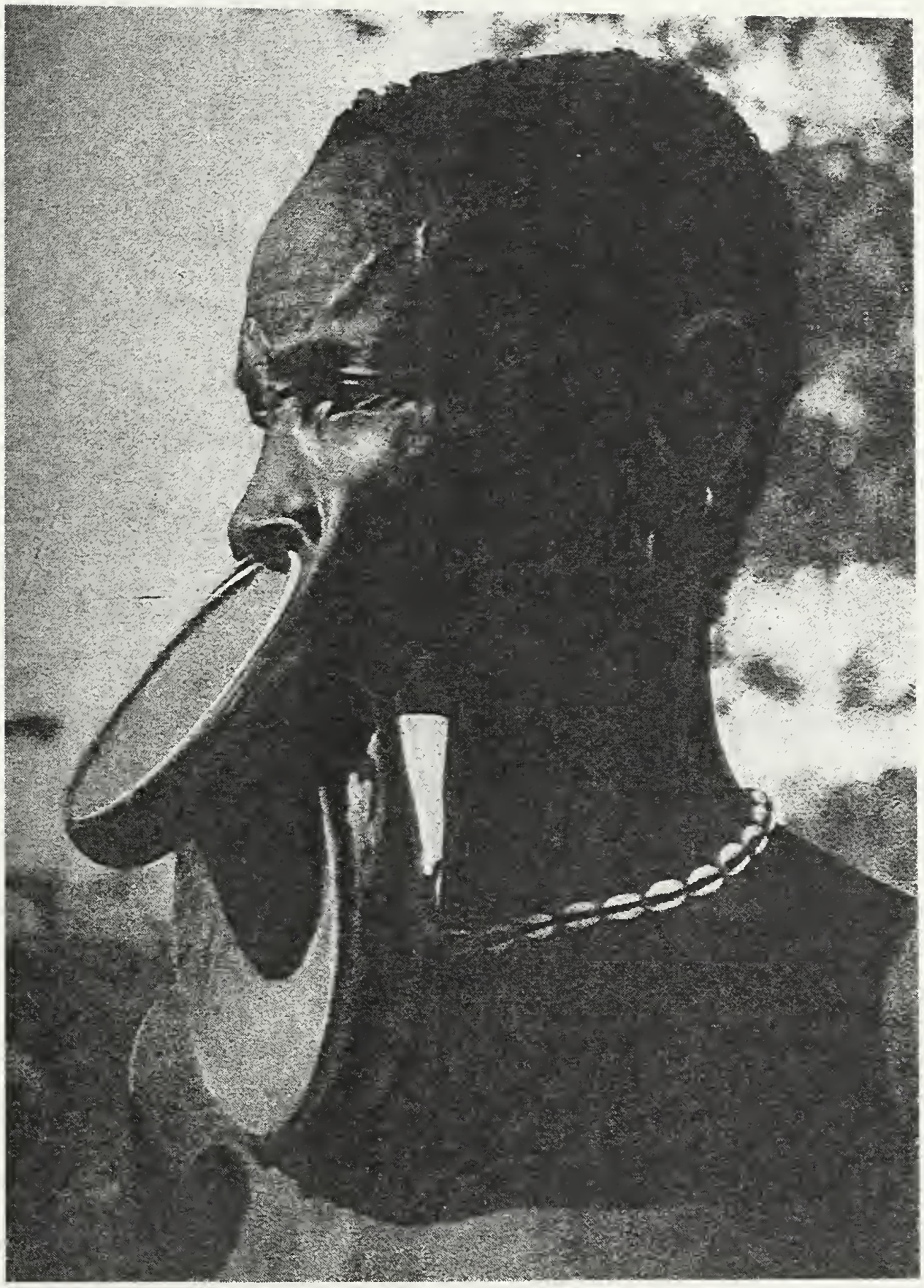

Figure 5. Sara Djingé woman, 1927.

have not yet found any additional verifiable biographical information on Pourroy and Bergonié. Nonetheless, with their air of distinction, these distinguished Frenchmen, like the scientists of the nineteenth century, authenticated the troupe of women brought to the Parisian zoo in 1929.

At the Jardin d'Acclimatation and around town, the women with labrets were a sensation, and they were a sensation whose very existence reinforced, through contrasts, the French understanding of their own advanced civilization. The provincial press even noted the women's popularity. La Petite Gironde, for example, ran a picture of the Sara-Djingé and claimed they were the latest attraction in Paris:

> *Vif succes de curiosité à Paris, pour une troupe de nègres et nègresses, ces dernières ayant, pour ornement principal, d'énormes plateaux de bois encastrés dans leurs lèveres élargies progressivement depuis leur enfance. Comme on le voit ici, les jeunes nègresses ne se sentent nullement incommodées par leur assiettes de bois pour fumer...*[27]

Smoking long pipes between large wooden labrets, the women's otherness clearly marked boundaries between the Occident and primitive Africa, but it was also a constructed alterity. On 20 June 1929, L'Excelsior, a popular illustrated daily, ran a photograph of eight Sara-Djingé in front of an airplane. The women, the article stated, had never before seen an airplane. A few of the women even took their maiden flight, but only after viewing a tirailleur sénégalais fly the plane. The photograph and brief article in Excelsior emphasized the radical otherness between the French and the *femmes à plateaux*. The women were depicted as outside of world history and technological progress. Their "*baptême de l'air*," then, was represented as a *rite de passage* in two ways: first, their actual flight, first flight, was seen as a right of passage. Second, and more importantly, the civilizing mission of the French brought the women out of their traditional life and into the modern twentieth century. The French could feel secure in the belief that it was their

role to bring all of Africa out of its timeless past and into a history that was progressive.

But where otherness was at its maximum, the French conflated ethnographic curiosity with side-show mockery. On June 29, 1930 in the heat of a hot summer, there was a beauty contest between Miss America and Miss Europe at that bourgeois playground, Deauville. On the first night of the competition, there was much excitement when the lights went down.

> *Enfin silence. Tous les projecteurs braques sur le triple rideau de la scene. Une fanfare héroique... M. André de Fouquières qui parait, un papier a la main: 'Mesdames, Messieurs... les deux célèbres beautés mondiales...' Mais que se passe-t-il?... Ah! il a bien choisi son moment. On se lève, on se presse. C'est M. Van Dongen qui fait son entrée, devinez comment... ayant à son bras une nègresse à plateaux, une des négresses du Jardin d'Acclimatation...*[28]

Van Dongen, the society artist and at Deauville, beauty pageant judge, was clearly having fun at the expense of the African woman, but his puerile sense of humor was telling of European attitudes towards the Other. The Black Other was an object for amusement, especially when they could not fully understand that the joke was on them. Moreover, the Other helped define the ideals of the Occident: by contrasting the *femme à plateau*, for they were never referred to by their Sara-Djingé ethnic identity, with the two most beautiful women in the Western world, the classical ideal of beauty was enhanced in the French imagination. Finally, in Michel Georges-Michel's sketch of Van Dongen and the *femme à plateau*, the woman was depicted topless. In the beauty contest, however, Miss Europe and Miss America showed all the modesty of Judeo-Christian civilization, even when the body was being celebrated. The naked body was only for show-girls and *négresses* imagined to have no civilization or knowledge.

Where otherness was at its height, the French could not fully integrate the Other into the social space constructed for the savage in the garden.

Rather, a new space was needed: one that mixed humor with scorn and degradation. Fantasio, a humor magazine, for example, published in 1929 a cartoon sketch of three modern women smoking, one flicking her ashes on the labret of a half-naked, barefoot Sara-Djingé woman [Figure 6]. The caption read: "'The true maid. Batoualette, very practical ashtray during drinks.'"[29] Calling the Sara-Djingé figure, "Batoualette," was obviously, a play on René Maran's eponymous hero, Batouala. Representing the woman on her knees, subservient before the metropolitan, was a means of attacking the Batouala figure, re-imagining him as a *grand enfant*. For the real *femmes à plateaux*, they suffered a scorn worse than Batoualette's. After leaving the Jardin d'Acclimatation, the *femmes à plateaux* were found every evening for at least two months in a *cabane* at Luna Park, an amusement park that housed a popular freak show.

Conclusion

The Black African during the Great War was a heroic figure, if also a *grand enfant*. He was fêted, feared, and imagined to be what he was not. After the war, the Black African returned to France in small and large exhibitions, but instead of developing his heroism and universal humanism, the French consistently represented him as a primitive and savage Other. Set up in "ersatz habitats," the Black African was reduced to easily apprehended stereotypes that were authenticated at the exhibition.[30] Thus the tam-tam, nudity, and living close to animals became representative for the exotic primitive *nègre*. Moreover, the representation of the *nègre* served an important function for the French: creating an ordered cosmos for the French to inhabit and delimiting French cultural categories.[31] The *nègre* was distanced from the metropolitan and represented in opposition to him, creating a narrative of progress from

Figure 6. Sara Djingé parody, 1929.

savagery to civilization on the great lawn of the zoo or the midway of a fair. When an African village was set up adjacent to exhibits of automobiles and airplanes, as one was at the 1929 Bordeaux fair, the French Self could not but view itself with a sense of triumphalism, a triumphalism missing at the end of the Great War but available through many manifestations of exoticism in the 1920s.

Endnotes

[1]See Coco Fusco, English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas (New York: New Press, 1995).

[2]See Roi Ottley, No Green Pastures (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952).

[3]See Jan Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992) and Fusco, English is Broken Here.

[4]The information about expositions at the Jardin d'Acclimatation comes from three main sources: William H. Schneider, An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa 1870-1900 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982); Isabelle Gala, "Des sauvages au jardin (Les exhibitions ethnographiques du Jardin Zoologique d'Acclimatation de 1877-1912)" Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaire, Paris; and Benoît Coutancier et Christine Barthe, "Au Jardin d'Acclimatation: représentations de l'autre (1877-1890)" in L'Autre et Nous, <<Scènes et Types>>, eds. Pascal Blanchard, Stéphane Blanchoin, Nicolas Bancel, Gilles Boëtsch, et Hubert Gerbeau (Paris: ACHAC et SYROS, 1995), 145-150.

[5]See Schneider, An Empire for the Masses, 130.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Girard de Rialle, quoted in Gala, "Des sauvages au jardin," 18.

[8]See Schneider, An Empire for the Masses and Coutancier and Barthe, "Au Jardin d'Acclimatation," 146.

[9]Clémence Royer, quoted in Gala, "Des sauvages au jardin," 21.

[10]Flier for the Somali exhibition at the Jardin d'Acclimatation, quoted in Gala, "Des sauvages au jardin," 44.

[11]Fulbert Dumonteil, quoted in Gala, "Des sauvages au jardin," 46.

[12]See Gala, "Des sauvages au jardin," for one of the few treatments of this exhibition.

[13]Léon Werth, "Les Nègres du Jardin d'Acclimatation," La Grande Revue, 10 août 1912, 609-610.

[14]Ibid., 610.

[15]Ibid., 611.

[16]See Annie E. Coombes, Reinventing Africa, Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994) and Archive nationales, section Outre-mer (ANSOM), Slotfom serie 4, carton 6, sous dossier "Villages exotiques."

[17]ANSOM, Slotfom serie 4, carton 6, sous dossier, "Troupe de Bâle."

[18]ANSOM, Slotfom serie 4, carton 6, sous dossier, "Groupes sénégalaises," memo dated 13 fevrier 1930 from Maurice Fontenay to the Governor General of A.O.F. regarding Blum.

[19]ANSOM, Slotfom serie 4, carton 6, sous dossier, "Villages exotiques," memo from Fleury Tournier to the Minister of Colonies, 12 mai 1928.

[20]ANSOM, Slotfom serie 4, carton 6, sous dossier, "Tournée Franco-coloniale."

[21]La Petite Gironde, 23 juin 1929.

[22]Ibid.

[23]ANSOM, Slotfom serie 4, carton 6, sous dossier, "Villages exotiques," memo from Louis Marin to the Minister of Colonies, 7 octobre 1925.

[24]ANSOM, Slotfom serie 4, carton 6, sous dossier, "Groupes sénégalaises," memo from Maurice Fontenay to the Minister of Colonies, 13 fevrier 1930.

[25]ANSOM, Slotfom serie 4, carton 6, sous dossier, "Troupe de Bâle," handwritten memo from Georges Delfau to the Minister of Colonies, 29 juillet 1928.

[26]Joël Dauphiné, "Les Canaques et L'Exposition Coloniale de 1931," in L'Autre et Nous, eds. Blanchard, et. al, 163-166.

[27]La Petite Gironde 22 juin 1929.

[28] Michel Georges-Michel, "Competition de beautés," L'Excelsior, 30 juillet 1929.

[29]Fantasio 1 novembre 1929, reprinted in Pieterse, White on Black, 161.

[30]See Zeynep Çelik and Leila Kinney, "Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the Expositions Universelles," Assemblage: A Critical Journal of Architecture and Design Culture (13 December 1990): 35-59 and Raymond Corbey, "Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930," Cultural Anthropology 8 (August 1993): 338-369.

[31]See Corbey, "Ethnographic Showcases."

CHAPTER 5

SCENES AND TYPES: PHOTOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE *NEGRE*

"It seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human." --Edward Said[1]

Exhibitions of the Other were popular and frequent throughout the 1920s, but they were not always accessible. Moreover, some metropolitans preferred the opportunity to appropriate the *nègre* in the private sphere, far away from public encounters with the live Other. There was no lack of opportunity to do this. In the 1920s, the Black Other was amply represented in metropolitan iconography. Blacks, like the Bonhomme Banania, were highly visible on advertisements and legally deposed trademarks (as seen in the following chapter). Perhaps even more widely disseminated were representations of the Black Other on photographs--postcards and in the illustrated press. Le Monde colonial illustré, for example, had pictures of Africans in virtually every issue in the 1920s, and L'Illustration, also favorable to *la plus grande France*, featured many photographs and stories of Africans and the colonies. These journals, in addition to postcards, introduced to the French the genre of iconography, "Scènes et Types."[2] Images of "types" (I am not concerned with scenes) were not neutral or objective ethnographic recordings of the Other. Rather, images of Black African "types" in the 1920s were ambivalent representations of alterity, fleshing out French fears and desires, identities and counter-identities. Thus I will argue that the stereotypical images explored below of the savage, the cannibal, and the erotic Other published in Le Monde colonial illustré revealed more about the French Self than they did the exotic Other.

The idea that visible morphologies defined human "types" with set behaviors was fixed in the French social imagination well before World War I. From at least the mid to late nineteenth century, it was a *concept opératoire* in the French medical, criminological and anthropological sciences, and just when anthropology began abandoning the idea of "types," the popular genre of images, "scenes and types," took hold in France. The genre "scenes and types," in fact, predated the commercial use of photography in illustrated journals and on postcards. In the nineteenth century, illustrators traveled to exotic sites, including Africa, and sketched the picturesque geography, "scenes," and inhabitants, "types." These polychromatic illustrations, found in books, were of didactic and aesthetic value, but they were not mass produced popular images.[3] The scramble for Africa, however, coincided with the explosion in the popularity of the postcard, and from 1885 postcards from Africa employed and popularized the genre, "scenes and types." Postcards allowed for the private consumption of images of the Other, important since many of the postcards sent from Africa were less about ethnographic curiosities than erotic desires. In the twentieth century, especially after World War I, journals began using photographs instead of sketches to illustrate their stories--or sometimes simply to create a pictorial narrative. Le Monde colonial illustré adopted a version of the genre "scenes and types" to teach its readers about the colonies and *indigènes*. "Scenes and types" was a powerful genre of representation: under the guise of ethnographic objectivity, it created the Other as a "type" with attributes that reflected, if not refracted, the post-war social imagination of the French themselves.[4]

Le Monde colonial illustré

In the first issue of Le Monde colonial illustré, October 1923, J. Guyon, Governor General of the colonies, wrote that France was suffering from a range of social ills. "*La guerre a aggravé le mal. Le remède,*" he wrote, "*la mise en valeur de nos colonies... par efforts solidarisés des capitalistes et des hommes d'action.*"[5] The journal, founded by the Marquis de Saint-Légier and edited throughout the 1920s by Stanislas Reizler, promoted Guyon's active colonialism. The large-format monthly devoted most of its space to the commercial development and exploitation of the colonies. The journal also defended the interests of the colonists and attempted to develop support for the colonies in France. In addition, Le Monde colonial illustré published many articles about "men of action": heroic stories about travelers and explorers, automobile adventurers, and aviators crossing Africa all received their due. Finally, the journal devoted considerable space to describing the inhabitants and cultures of the colonies.[6]

The ethnographic information in Le Monde colonial illustré came in two general sorts of articles: photographic essays, almost devoid of text, and articles on a general region or a people accompanied by photographs of representative "types," customs, and rituals. Unlike ethnographic exhibitions and exotic literature in the 1920s, which generally lumped all Africans under the term *nègre*, an ideal type, Le Monde colonial illustré under Reizler's editorship took pains to distinguish the distinct peoples or "races" of Africa. Nevertheless, the representations of non-Western people in the journal were always ambiguous. The photographs and essays did not lend themselves to a single reading: the representations allowed for many gazes and a range of interpretations, reflecting the span of the French imagination in the 1920s. Indeed, the photographs, like the text, were generally not taken by professional

photo-journalists. Rather, travelers, civilians, governmental officials, and military personnel sent to the journal their first-hand experiences, impressions, attitudes, and, of course, photographs of Africa. There was, therefore, no rigid style to the ethnographic photographs published. But most of the representations of Africans were posed, not candid, portraits of individuals or small groups, and the captured images reflected the dominance of the genre of "scenes and types." Le Monde colonial illustré, for its part, obviously exercised control over the selection, placement, and framing of the photographs, as well as the captions and text that imposed constraints on the readings of the images. The journal's popular and vulgar ethnography lends itself to an analysis of how exoticism was manifested in visual representations of the Black African Other and what function these images may have served in post-war French culture.

"Savages"

In the post-war period, colonialism needed support and therefore a justification for the skeptical and disinterested French public. To be sure, the imperial adventure appealed to the perceived economic and strategic-military interests of some in France. French colonialism in Africa was, however, as much about markets and military potential as it was about national image and the civilizing mission. In the cultural arena, one of the starting points for talking about African colonialism was the perceived problem of the stubborn persistence of the "savage" Black African. This was made visible in Le Monde colonial illustré in regular pictorial spreads, "Promenades Ethnographiques." One such typical article from 1927, "Les populations Voltaïques," represented in words and images not only the huge chasm between civilization and savagery in Africa, but also that savage Africans resisted civilization.[7] To illustrate these

themes, the journal claimed, for example, that if a man from the Haute-Volta had not killed another man, he was unlikely to be married: he would be deemed unworthy of a marriage. The persistence of such behaviors made the distance between France and Africa almost unbridgeable and, more important, the civilizing mission necessary. Where civilization did not eradicate savagery, the journal was quick to blame the Black Other: "*il a été difficile de les pénétrer et de les amener progressivement par notre action civilisatrice à renoncer aux pratiques sauvages de leurs coutumes ancestrales.*"[8] It was typical of articles in Le Monde colonial illustré to posit the existence of uncivilized behavior in Africa. It was also typical of these articles to lack any sociological or historical analysis.[9] After the butchery on the Western Front, it was cathartic for the Occident to locate savagery where it surely belonged--on the Other. Contrasting their own enlightenment and culture with the Other, the French chose to imagine African "types" as regressive beings, frozen in time, endlessly repeating what their forefathers did--despite the enlightened efforts of the French.

The photographs supporting the article on the Volta were portraits of "types." The central image was of a "Femme Oulé," represented in a posed close-up [Figure 7]. The ethnographic photographer established a relation of unequal power to control the body and image of his subject, emphasizing alterity. The women was posed to highlight difference: the tattoos on her cheeks and the pierced points of bone through her lips dominated the photograph. Furthermore and central to the evocative power of this image was that there was no real background to the woman. She was represented without any socio-historical references. We see only her upper body and head, and her gaze was out of the picture frame, looking down and slightly submissive. Though she appeared vulnerable, if not available to the spectator, she was not

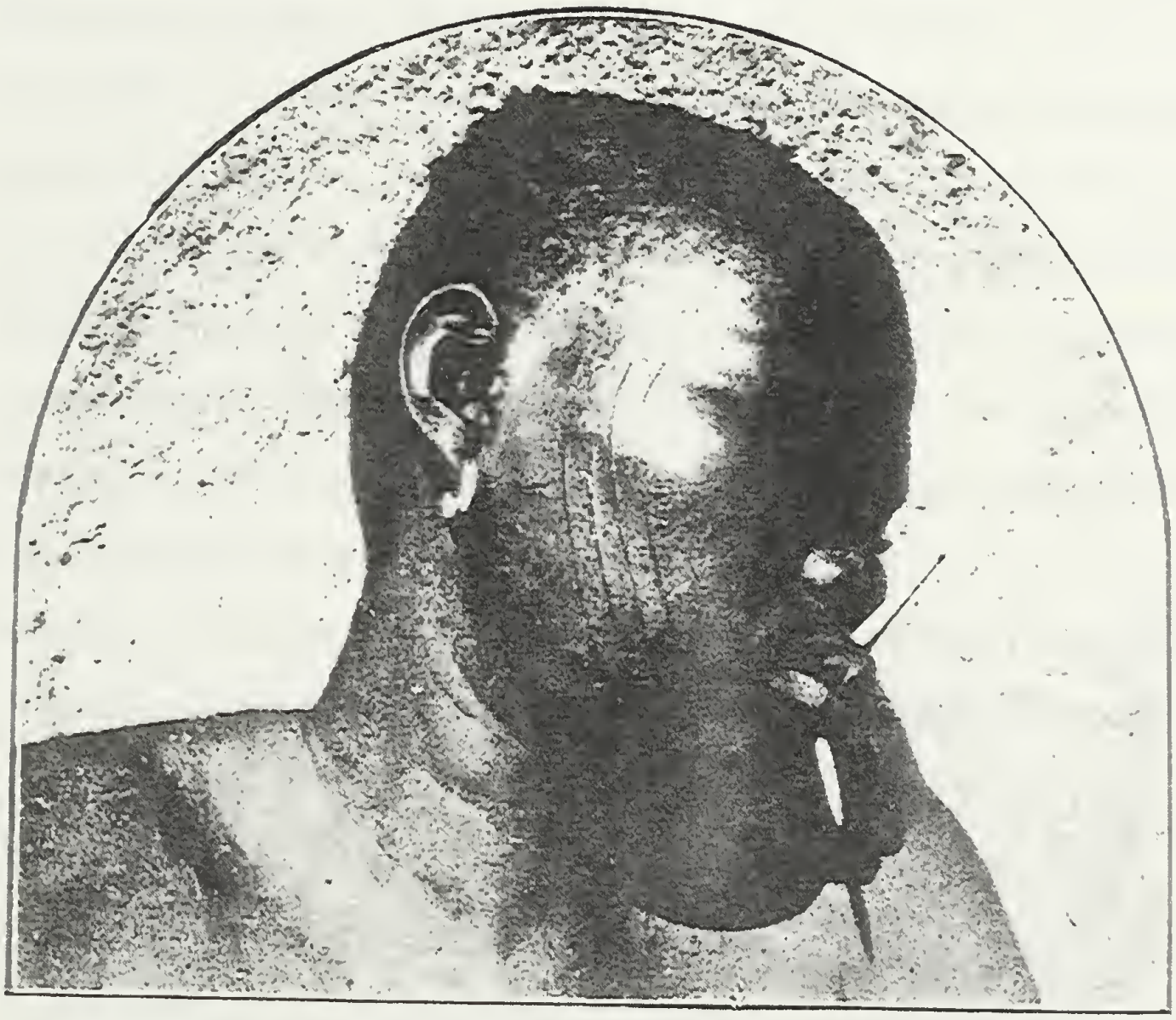

Figure 7. Femme Oulé, 1927.

eroticized. Rather, she appeared as the French imagined her: as a primitive and frozen in time. Indeed, there was nothing in the photograph to indicate time: she could have been a contemporary ethnographic specimen or a thousand years old. Last, Le Monde colonial illustré cropped and framed the image as if in a diptych or stained glass window, contrasting the primitive Oulé of traditional beliefs and religion with universal Christian ideals of civilization, beauty and modesty.[10] Photographs that constructed radical otherness were not neutral. Images of "types" like the "Femme Oulé" reinforced not just the otherness of Africans, but also the way the French liked to view themselves in world history and in relation to others. Through classifying, categorizing, and distancing the Other from the French Self, social hierarchies were imagined and power relations visualized. In contrast to the African, the French confirmed their exalted place on the social and biological evolutionary scale.[11] They also represented the necessity of the civilizing mission: without France's aid, the primitive would remain outside of time and history, and more importantly, France would not realize its potential for extending its universal ideals.

"Cannibals"

Savages, the French believed, inhabited much of Black Africa. Savages, when exoticized, could be noble and the object of Occidental romantic quests. At the other extreme was the cannibal: there was nothing noble about him, but he too was a constructed figure in the French social landscape, delineating boundaries and identities. Le Monde colonial illustré employed the image of the cannibal, albeit infrequently, in an ambivalent manner. The journal tried to tantalize the reader, but it also stated that such barbarism no longer existed in French Africa. In a photograph of a "Birifor type," a consciously posed primitive was presented to the metropolitan [Figure 8]. At a close focal length and

Figure 8. Birifor *indigène*, 1927.

without any background, the savage's head was tilted back and the sharp upper teeth--the teeth of a cannibal--were prominently displayed. Posed thus, the Birifor man was almost comic in effect, and the cannibal's gaze, which could frighten, was rendered impotent to the West.[12] Le Monde colonial illustré further subverted the cannibals ferocity: it claimed that the sharpened teeth of the Birifor man was not an indicator of cannibalism but rather was a widespread style among certain peoples and certain religious groups in the Haute-Volta.[13]

The idea that cannibalism existed among Africans and other primitive peoples, especially Pacific islanders, was prevalent in the 1920s. There may have been no recent documentary evidence of such practices, but in the popular imagination of the French, it still existed. This belief was reinforced by humorous cartoons, the 1930 feature film Mangeurs d'hommes, and the 1931 Jardin d'Acclimatation exhibition of cannibals, really a troupe of Canaques from New Caledonia.[14] In the popular imagination, cannibalism had to exist. It functioned to create a moral hierarchy and moral geography.[15] Cannibalism marked the boundaries between the civilized world of the Occident and the savage, Hobbesian world of man in nature. Here, the exotic was made into a counter-utopia and the West, though far from a utopia, was represented as the height of man's achievements, only to reach new heights through progress. This was reassuring in light of the recent war when Western values became hard to regard as the exemplar of civilization. Cannibalism, even when just evoked but denied, not only helped to reestablish the boundaries, morally and geographically, between the Occident and the Other, but also was appalling enough to generate sympathy for the civilizing mission and colonialism.

Although the supposed existence of cannibals, on the one hand, affirmed French identity, on the other hand, cannibalism had to be made acceptable to the French public for at least two further reasons. First, cannibalism rendered

Africa as a counter-utopia--less exotic than dangerous. If Africa was not a desirable site for development and tourism, the colonial project could not progress. Thus difference, the trace of the cannibal's sharpened teeth, was treated by the journal as an aesthetic ornamentation. The Black African was then not quite dwelling at the lowest depths of savagery. Like other practices, this type of African ornamentation was not analyzed historically or socially. It just existed, timeless like the African.

In addition, the cannibal had to be made ornamental or impotent in order to strengthen France's international image, especially in response to Germany's anti-French propaganda. After the Armistice, the French sent a number of colonial units into the Rhineland as an occupation force. This was an efficient use of the French military's forces, but it was also seen as psychological warfare: the Black occupying force made clear to the Germans their abject defeat. In truth, there were only an average of some 5000 Black African soldiers in the Rhineland from 1919 until their withdrawal in June 1920.[16] The "Back Horror" so well publicized by Germany and German sympathizers really was a conflation to the French mind of Black Africans with North Africans, who composed most of the indigenous forces in the Rhineland, though they were still a sizable minority of all French occupying troops. Regardless, by 1920 the non-white occupying force was a public relations problem for the French. France was accused of sending cannibals and rapists to Germany, and great lengths were taken to prove that the troops were well behaved, which indeed they were, and that the children born out of African and German unions were from consensual relationships. (This, of course, did not prevent Hitler from sterilizing these children in 1937.[17]) To further complicate the propaganda war, ever since Germany lost its African colonies to French gain in the Treaty of Versailles, the French were concerned about the image of their custodianship

over the colonies. The French felt that they had to demonstrate that they were capable of civilizing the savage, while the Germans were not. This theme even became an explicit goal of ending the exhibition of Canaques as cannibals in 1931: French officials did not want Germans ridiculing them for not being able to civilize the primitives under French tutelage.[18] Le Monde colonial illustré, reflecting this cultural tumult, created representations of primitives, even cannibals, but then subverted their savagery to serve the multiple needs of the French imagination and *realpolitik*.

Man or Regression

Post-war French culture, fluid as it was, launched efforts to rebuild bourgeois confidence. The civilizing mission in Africa was one visible manifestation of the righteousness of national ideals, but this mission needed to be accepted at home. Where the colonies were in revolt, the civilizing mission could come into question, which was rare after the war. More often, the *indigènes* in revolt, like those in the Sangha in 1930, would be considered neither enlightened enough nor human enough to accept French tutelage. Le Monde colonial illustré, following themes developed in exotic literature, like Gaston Joseph's Koffi, took revolts in Africa out of their social and political context to claim they were the work of evil secret forces and to preserve the fiction that *indigènes* had neither history nor much culture. Thus the Sangha revolt, it was claimed, was the work of secret societies, conspiracies, and *féticheurs*. To reinforce the mystery of a dangerous Africa, the secrets shared by Africans, guarded by penalty of death, were imagined to be tinder for the fury of the savage.

> *Mettant à profit ce répit accordé par la civilisation occidentale, les vieux dieux de la Sangha ont relevé leurs têtes sanglantes, ils ont ravivé les feux mal éteints des festins cannibales. Au grondement des tam-tams*

> *magiques, une frénésie de crimes rituels et de folie mystique éclata comme un incendie de brousse, et, descendant le cours des rivières, vint s'éteindre en brasillant au cœur de la sombre forêt équatoriale.*[19]

This was regressive behavior at its worst: using the order from the civilizing mission to create chaos and attack civilization.

To illustrate the power of *fétichisme* and the African's regressive tendencies, the journal published two photographs. The first showed an alleged clandestine society doing a sacred dance. Only occult forces, it was suggested, could drive primitives to rebel against progress and civilization. Left unstated, of course, was how Le Monde colonial illustré contrived to capture an image of a secret, sacred dance. The second photograph was as interesting for its generic composition as it was for the caption that defined it. The photograph was a portrait of an "*indigène de la Sangha*" [Figure 9]. The Sangha *indigène* was posed as a man of nature: he belonged not to civilization but to the natural setting seen in the background of the photograph. The *indigène*, with furrowed brow, had his gaze set outside of the frame of the picture; the metropolitan spectator did not confront this image as a man but as an object of ethnographic study. Furthermore, the journal told us how we should appropriate the image: "*C'est un primitif dont l'angle facial se rapproche davantage de celui du gorille que de celui de l'Homo sapiens. La cruauté est peinte sur son visage.*"[20] In the context of the article on the Sangha revolt, one imagined that only those regressive Africans, living "missing links," would revolt against French rule and Occidental culture, and given the imagery in the journal, any Black, it would appear, could have atavistic potentials and be a danger to French culture. The *indigène* was therefore a means for confirming the French view of himself; where he failed to reflect positively on the French and their ideals, he was rendered subhuman so that the edifice of French identity remained intact.

Figure 9. Sangha *indigène*, 1930.

The Universal in Man--or Rather, Women

Although the French viewed Africans sometimes as almost ape-like primitives, they also knew that they were humans and sought to find "types" that represented the universal in humanity but not too much of the universal. The *indigène* still had to be represented as being in need of French tutelage. Perhaps the most appealing "type" representing universal ideals was the mother and child: the Madonna and child motif. In the African case, it humanized the primitive. Underneath her black skin was something common with the French. In a family scene from 1926, the metropolitan saw, for example at long focal length, a few naked children and three women pounding grain to make couscous in front of their hut. A fourth women was seen standing next to the three holding a large flat basket, and a little child was hugging this woman. The journal interpreted this image for the French: "[*un*] *petit enfant s'accroche à la jupe de sa mère du même geste charmant et confiant qu'un enfant de France ferait avec sa maman.*"[21] Even amidst the poverty of Africa, which was shown in this image by naked children and a half-dressed mother, the child's bond to his mother was universal, and it was one of the foundations of civilization.

What was universal in African mother and child representations helped the French mediate fears about their demographics, African colonization, and the new post-war woman. Population size in nineteenth and early twentieth century thought was associated with strategic strength. With an eye on a still strong Germany, the French were alarmed at their low birth rate and losses from World War I, and many concluded that France was suffering from a demographic crisis even worse than in the late nineteenth century. *Puériculture*, a marginal movement in the late nineteenth century and one once associated with animal husbandry, became a popular and influential social

hygiene movement after the war. Doctors, and the state, promoted it to improve the health of infants.[22] In modified form, *puériculture* was extended to Africa; however, it was done ambivalently, maybe not so much in the interest of improving the number and quality of Blacks as it was to negotiate social unease. One of the central problems of colonizers was to recognize some level of respect for the Other and still dominate him.[23] The savage mother was just such a vehicle for promoting both respect and domination. Reflecting upon a large photograph of an African mother breast feeding her child, Le Monde colonial illustré wrote: "*Les mamans noires aiment bien leurs enfants, mais ignorent souvent les premiers principes de l'hygiene infantile. Le Berceau Africain est appelé à sauver bien des petites existences.*"[24] Imagining the Other to be naturally loving but fundamentally ignorant, the French positioned themselves to exercise their power through knowledge over the most basic thing in life: motherhood. Respect and domination were reconciled and the civilizing mission was exalted. Furthermore, the maternal, almost archetypal image of a mother and nursing child addressed the post-war crisis of the modern woman in France. As Mary Louise Roberts recently argued, the modern woman, *la garçonne*, symbolized freedom and the decadence of a morally corrupt bourgeoisie.[25] Images of motherhood in Le Monde colonial illustré, however, symbolically reestablished the biological and moral order for the French. The Black woman, close to nature, embodied what was and should be natural and essential to all woman: traditional motherhood.

The Naked Black Woman

Although Le Monde colonial illustré was careful in its depictions of "types" to distinguish the various "races" of Africa, for many Frenchmen the racial or ethnic ethnographic information provided was secondary to the

pleasure of viewing the Black body, and on postcards and in journals, ethno-erotic images of Black women came to constitute for the French the very idea of Africa.[26] Ethno-erotic fantasies of Africa were manifested in the prominent, almost ubiquitous, display of half-naked young Black women. France, it was true, had a long tradition of valorizing the female nude. In classical French art, the female nude was and still is the very ideal of beauty, but the Black nude did not necessarily represent classical ideals. Orientalist painters in the early to mid nineteenth century, for example, employed black and brown skinned women, often in harem scenes, for exotic and erotic ends. The Black body was easily sexualized but not aestheticized like the white body. What was thus repressed in France was imagined available in the sexually uninhibited Other.

In the twentieth century, ethno-eroticism was readily found on postcards purporting to be ethnographic examples of "scenes and types."[27] These slightly pornographic images were formulaic: young women with firm breasts were posed at a short focal length, often with their arms raised to uplift their breasts, as exemplified by an image of a "Femme de Timbo" [Figure 10]. This image, taken by Fortier, probably the single most prolific postcard photographer in West Africa, like most erotic representations, was easily appropriated.[28] Rather than learning about an African people, even a "type," this sexualized image of a young woman created a fantasy world where Africa became the metropolitan's ethno-erotic playground, peopled with available and desirable women. Since these women were also considered primitive, the metropolitan could imagine himself escaping the constraints of modern morality and, through the exotic Black body, accessing the vital sexualized life source that civilization had repressed. The naked *négresse* was thus constructed and appropriated as a means for bourgeois renewal.

Figure 10. Femme de Timbo, reissued, c. 1920s.

French ethno-eroticism imagined Africa to be an erotic dream world, a harem for the Occident, even in a journal like Le Monde colonial illustré. The journal, for example, frequently presented half-naked African woman for no ostensible reason, save for the pleasure of the viewer. These images were often portraits of a single woman, commonly under the guise of displaying some aspect of female ornamentation, a distinguishing feature of a "type." But since not all the photographs were professionally taken in the journal, a few anomalous ones were also shown, teaching us more about exoticism. In a poorly posed group portrait for Le Monde colonial illustré, three young women from Guinée were shown, bare breasted and with head scarves [Figure 11]. A fourth partially hidden younger girl appeared behind the main subjects. This photograph was interesting for its composition and the gazes of the both the photographer, a Dr. Chauvelot, and his sexualized objects. The girls were young, attractive and seen in front of a natural setting which suggested their primitive sexuality. These young women were clearly displayed only for the sexual enjoyment of metropolitans. Le Monde colonial illustré described them pithily: "*Trois beautés foulah, au corps sculptural...*"[29] The women, however, seemed to subvert the ethno-erotic structure of their representation. One woman's gaze was down, and with a hand raised to her mouth, she seemed neither proud nor embarrassed by her portrait--simply resigned. A second woman stood erect but stiff, and a third looked right into the camera and at the spectator with a gaze almost of amazement. In a rare moment, the metropolitan photographer lost some control over his object, and the available Black women were shown not to imagine the French to be what the French imagined themselves to be. Here, the domination over the exotic and erotic Other was subverted, and Africa became more of a distant dream world of fantasy quests than real experiences.

Figure 11. Three Foulah women, 1929.

Conclusion

"Exoticism is a luxury of the victors and one of victory's psychological comforts," writes Jan Nederveen Pieterse. "The Other is not merely to be exploited but also to be enjoyed, enjoyment being a finer form of exploitation."[30] The Black African was most easily enjoyed when eroticized, as she often was in the genre of images, "scenes and types." Ethnographic images were indeed pleasurable, but they also had a pedagogic intent. Under the authority claim of ethnography, African "types" taught the French all that they imagined they desired to know about the Other. When ethnography was devoid of all sociology, the French reduced all visible difference to sensationalized stereotypes and abolished all singularity to represent the very ideal of Africa and the African--savage, cannabalistic, primatively maternal, erotic. Although there was a contradiction in French exoticism between truly desiring to know the Other and simply exploiting the Other, in most popular manifestations of exoticism in the 1920s, enlightened curiosity was not just subordinated to but put in the service of the French sublimating their post-war anxieties and truly enjoying themselves--at the Other's expense, as I will further argue in the following discussion of the *nègre* in advertisements.

Endnotes

[1]Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 93.

[2]See Pascal Blanchard, Stéphane Blanchoin, Nicolas Bancel, Gilles Boëtsch, et Hubert Gerbeau, eds., L'Autre et nous, <<scènes et types>> (Paris: ACHAC et SYROS, 1995).

[3]I "researched" these nineteenth century polychromatic sketches of African "scenes and types" at the *bouquiniste* stalls along the Seine in Paris. For a more scholarly treatment, see Gilbert Beaugé, "Type d'image et images du type," in L'Autre et nous, eds. Blanchard, et. al., 45-51.

[4]My interpretation of photographic iconography and Le Monde colonial illustré in particular was modeled on the work of Lutz and Collins. See Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, Reading National Geographic (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[5]J. Guyon, "Où en est notre politique coloniale," Le Monde colonial illustré, octobre 1923, 3-4.

[6]Information about Le Monde colonial illustré was culled from researching the journal itself, from 1923 through 1930. I have not discovered any detailed secondary sources on the journal.

[7]Baoulé Kambiré, "Promenades ethnographiques à travers nos colonies, types et mœurs, Les Populations Voltaïques," Le Monde colonial illustré, juin 1927, 132-33.

[8]Ibid.

[9]On the timeless nature of representations and their lack of sociological contextualization, see Lutz and Collins, Reading National Geographic and Panivong Norindr, "L'<<Indochinois>> dans d'imaginaire occidental," in L'Autre and nous, eds. Blanchard, et. al., 33-38.

[10]Jacob Pandian argues that Judeo-Christian ideals define the true self and that the Other, the untrue self, is always understood in contrast to the ideals of the Judeo-Christian deity. See Jacob Pandian, Anthropology and the Western Tradition, Toward and Authentic Anthropology (Prospects Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1985).

[11]See Gilles Boëtsch, "Anthropologues et <<indigènes>>: mesurer la diversité, montrer l'altérité," in L'Autre et nous, eds. Blanchard, et. al., 55-60.

[12]Comic representations of the cannibal were not unknown in the 1920s. See Raymond Bachollet, Jean-Barthélemi Debost, Anne-Claude Lelieur, Marie-Christine Peyrière, eds. NégriPub: l'image des Noirs dans la publicité (Paris: Editions Somogy, 1992, 1994) and Jan Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

[13]Kambiré, "Promenades ethnographiques," 132-133.

[14]See Archives nationales, section Outre-Mer, Slotfom serie 4, carton 6, sous dossier, "Troupe Canaque" and Joël Dauphiné, "Les Canaques et l'Exposition colonial de 1931," in L'Autre et nous, eds. Blanchard, et. al., 163-166.

[15]See Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black, for a discussion on the imagining of moral boundaries.

[16]Sally Marks, "Black Watch on the Rhine: A Study in Propaganda, Prejudice and Prurience," European Studies Review 13 (1983): 297-334. See also Keith L. Nelson, "The 'Black Horror on the Rhine': Race as a Factor in Post-World War I Diplomacy," Journal of Modern History 42 (1970): 606-627.

[17]Marks, "Black Watch on the Rhine," 322.

[18]See ANSOM, Slotfom Serie 4, carton 6, sous dossier "Troupe Canaque" for memos that expressed concern about France's public image in Germany if some of its subjects were displayed as cannibals.

[19]"La Révolte des vieux dieux de la Sangha," Le Monde colonial illustré, avril 1930, 84.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Le Monde colonial illustré, mars 1926, 52.

[22]See William H. Schneider, Quality and Quantity: The Quest for Biological Regeneration in Twentieth-Century France (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[23]See Alice L. Conklin, A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) and Malek Chebel, "L'<<Arabe>> dans l'imaginaire occidental," in L'Autre et nous, eds. Blanchard, et. al., 39-44.

[24]Le Monde colonial illustré, fevrier 1927, front picture, upaginated.

[25]Mary Louise Roberts, Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[26]See Raymond Corbey, "Alterity: The Colonial Nude," Critique of Anthropology 8 (1988): 75-92 and Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black.

[27]See Corbey, "Alterity: The Colonial Nude" and Malek Alloula, The Colonial Harem, trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Ethno-eroticism seemed to be prevalent on postcards of "types." Philippe David agued, however, that postcards of Africa and Africans were much more devoted to daily life scenes than exoticism. Undoubtedly true, but he goes on to argue that after World War I, the exotic was increasingly represented on postcards. See Philippe David, "La carte postale sénégalaise de 1900 à 1960, Production, édition et signification: un bilan provisoire," Notes Africaines (janvier 1978): 3-12.

[28]For a discussion of Fortier, see David, "La carte postale sénégalaise."

[29]Le Monde colonial illustré, avril 1929.

[30]Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black, 95.

CHAPTER 6

A PLASTIC SIGN: THE *NEGRE* IN ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE 1920S

The phrase *tumulte noire* accurately characterized the *négrophilisme* and *négrophobisme* of the 1920s. Cultural interest, spectacles, and representations of the *nègre* were disproportionate to the actual numerical presence of African descendants in the hexagon. Although it was true that many metropolitans experienced the *nègre* first-hand, they did so often at a distance, as a spectacle, on a stage, dance floor, or bandstand. Most metropolitans experienced him through iconographic representations: "scènes et types" ethnographic photography (see Chapter 5) and on advertisements and product labels, *marques*. Advertisements employed the *nègre* to add a dash of piquant exoticism to a product; more frequently, though, advertising images playfully and grotesquely caricatured him, selling products and evoking denigrating myths of the *nègre*.[1] Although publicity images connected the *nègre* to colonial products and the colonial endeavor, the dominant mythology which advertisements promoted were of a deterritorialized *nègre*, one whose essence was shaped by the stain of Ham and was ridiculous, lazy, sexualized, and uncivilized. These advertisements ripped the *nègre* out of the stream of history and naturalized various fictions of him, or his essence so as to stabilize cultural categories that World War I and modernity had undermined.

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The academic study of Blacks in French advertising is of recent date. It was only in 1987, after ten years of collecting, that the Bibliothèque Forney assembled the first comprehensive exhibition examining the role of Blacks in French publicity. The catalog from this exhibition, NégriPub: l'image des noirs dans la publicité (1992), has become the definitive, and virtually only, published
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collection of French advertising images from the late nineteenth century until the present.[2] Although a fine collection and resource for scholars, NégriPub suffered from a serious omission: it did not include the many legally deposed product *marques* that are archived at the Institut National de la Propriété Industrielle.[3] *Marques*, or trademarks, were the legally copywritten images that adorned consumer goods on product labels and were visible on advertising posters. *Marques*, which were brought into the privacy of one's home, constitute as rich a source for cultural history as the more visually striking advertising posters that were plastered to kiosks, walls, and stores. Second, in NégriPub and in related literature, there is, to date, little cultural analysis of the function and meaning of the image of the *nègre* in French material culture.[4] This lack of scholarship is perhaps due to scholars' sense that publicity featuring representations of Blacks was not important quantitatively: these images constituted less than one percent of all French advertisements and legally deposed *marques*.[5] Although few in number overall, representations of the *nègre* appeared disproportionately in advertisements for certain product lines: rum, shoe polishes, hygiene products, and exotic foods. These advertisements provide not just an archive of representations of the *nègre*, but also a lens into understanding how the French represented, reconstituted, and stabilized identities after the Great War.

Advertisements, following Roland Barthes, are a type of speech that comprise what he called myths. Myths, Barthes argued, result when a sign in a first order semiological system, that is the "associative total" of a signifier and its signified, becomes the signifier in a second order semiological system.[6] The *nègre* in publicity, a sign, functioned as a signifier in a myth making system. In Barthes' conception of myth, the signifier, or here the *nègre*, conjures up a concept that reduces everything to simplistic essences. Myth, Barthes argued,

naturalizes representations by effectively effacing the complexity in history. Representations that were ambivalent and had formed in a web of historical situations and with specific, individualistic historical meanings were thus understood only in terms of essences. Myth, Barthes claimed, "organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves."[7] The *nègre* in advertisements did just that: he represented the dirty, the cannibal, the lazy, the happy, the sexualized--the exotic Other, in a form more than a fiction, what Barthes called a myth.

Advertisements as texts evoke myths that are an intimate part of consumer culture, infusing meaning into goods and expressing the symbolic meaning of goods.[8] Beyond need and economy, individuals make consumer choices based upon the meaning advertisements and culture ascribe to products. These meanings have become especially important in the collective anonymous modern republic: they structure social identities and, most significantly, make visible and stable cultural categories. Cultural categories, Grant McCracken has argued, create a system of distinctions for the self where all is rendered intelligible. Outside of these categories, the self perceives experiences as without order, system or comprehension. Cultural categories are our conceptual grid or scaffolding that lets the self negotiate the flux of modern life.[9] Advertising images and the meaning and myths they promote helps to stabilize cultural categories. Representations of the *nègre*, the Other, were important for reconstructing the scaffolding of French culture after the destabilization of the Great War.

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Although there was a great deal of interest in the Blacks in the 1920s, and advertisements disproportionately employed the image of the *nègre*, there
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is still relatively little data about the advertisements. NégriPub collected advertising posters from the 1920s, but it provided no information of the print run of the posters or where or how long the posters were displayed. Similarly, *marques* may have been employed for years, frequently entering French homes, as were popular ones like the Banania label, but we do not know how many people saw the images. My analysis of legally deposed *marques* in the Bulletin officiel de la propriété industrielle et commerciale, in chronological order through the 1920s, offers only a few general conclusions. It is true that the *nègre* was used a bit more frequently on *marques* after mid-decade than in the early 1920s, but the range of products he represented remained stable: mainly rum, polishes, and hygiene and colonial products. Second, *marques* and advertisements almost always employed the image of a Black male, typically alone and rarely adjacent to whites. Black women were less frequently shown in *marques* and advertisements; although they were occasionally sexualized, they never appeared with a white male. Finally, the *nègre* was usually a grotesque image, unlike publicity representations of other colonial subjects. Indeed, *marques* from the 1920s reveal that the Indochinese type or the Arab type were typically represented as a civilized and exotic Other. Though types, the Indochinese and the Arab were rarely subjected to grotesque caricature.[10] The *nègre* was a much more plastic image: the French took the liberty to caricature him to promote a mythology of the Other and, by reflection, the self.

The Grotesque *Nègre*: Oléo

Oléo was a company that manufactured automotive spark plugs, oil, and industrial and household hygiene products. Its trademark image, dating to 1910, was artist Raoul Vion's grotesque disembodied *tête de nègre* [Figure 12]. The company renewed its trademark in the 1920s and continued to use

Figure 12. Bougie Oléo advertisement, 1910.

Vion's representation of the *nègre* throughout the decade. Oléo and the French were not original in using the *tête de nègre*: it had been a common motif in Europe. The "gaper," for example, was a male Moor with an open mouth who advertised apothecary shops from at least the sixteenth century in the Low Countries. A decapitated Moor's head was also found on placards advertising taverns and inns, and one has adorned, to date, the Corsican coat of arms for some five hundred years.[11]

Early European images of the *tête de nègre* carried both positive and negative references of the *nègre*, but in the 1920s in France, it ceased to have many positive attributes and became a representation that evoked myths. Indeed, the Oléo head was constructed to imagine the essence of the *nègre*. The *nègre* had billiard ball eyes, an enormous mouth with thick red lips and large white teeth, a prominent flattened nose, protruding ears, childlike cheeks, and a compressed triangular skull. With bright eyes and dark oily skin, the Oléo *nègre* lent itself to advertising spark plugs and engine oil, as stated on the advertising poster. But the Oléo image, humorous and grotesque, was also of a stereotypical *nègre* whose distorted features drew natural correspondences to certain products. Enormous lips and prominent teeth were the mouth of a gourmand; food products, especially dark colonial food products, like coffee and chocolate, were easily associated with the *nègre*. White teeth and white eyes suggested contrasts that associated the *nègre* with whiteners, including dental pastes. Dark skin, considered dirty skin, was in the 1920s a natural tie-in for advertising soaps and hygiene products. And finally, the absurd head suggested little intellectual capacity: the *nègre* could only be associated with products that were easy to use.

The Oléo *marque* was an extreme denigrating caricature, but it was not an anomaly. Virtually all images of *nègres* employed some of the distortions so

prominent in the Oléo *marque*.[12] The essence of the *nègre* became associated with large lips, bulging eyes and a small head. And since the face, indeed one's whole body, was a lens into the soul in French aesthetic, physiognomic and vulgar anthropological thought, the *nègre* was thus a buffoon-like, simple Other, poorly capable of acquiring civilization. Moreover, this image rendered the *nègre* impotent and safe to the metropolitan. The imagined powerful Black sexualized body, prominent in exotic literature and in dance hall fantasies, was amputated here. Only the distorted features that corresponded to the *nègre*'s primitive and aberrant soul were represented. The Oléo image, like other images, naturalized the *nègre* as a plastic childlike type, where each feature was a synecdoche for an essentialized fantasy of the Other who could not threaten the identity of the self. This and related representations became the image of all *nègres*, denying each his individuality and personhood as he was rendered a sign for all that the French needed him to be.

The Ridiculous *Roitelet*

In the 1920s, Viator, a manufacturer of shoe products, consistently ran artist René Vincent's cruelly humorous advertisement for its replacement heels [Figure 13]. In this image, an African chief, a *roitelet*, was represented with great scorn. The light-skinned kinglet was shown wearing an open collar, bow tie, and cuffs but no shirt, and his pants were short and striped. He wore ankle bracelets, carried a cane and smoked a cigar. A diminutive boy in shorts was prominently screwing Viator heels directly onto the oversized feet of the smiling *roitelet*. The *roitelet* was not screaming out in pain. Rather, he was amused, smiling like a carefree buffoon.

This advertisement, playing off of scornful incongruous humor, essentialized the semi-civilized Black Other, especially the pretentious light-

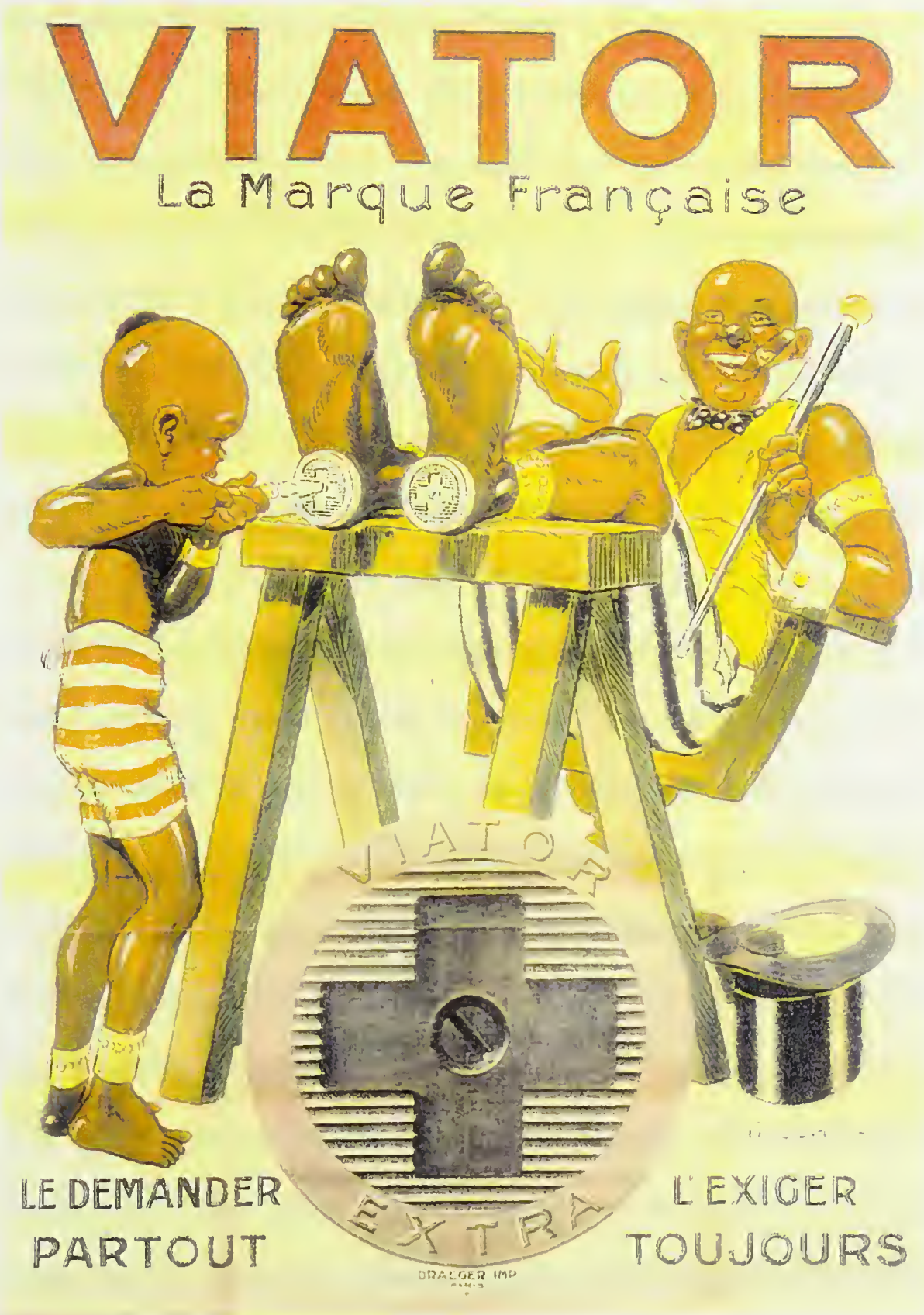

Figure 13. Viator advertisement, c. 1920s.

skinned Black, as no more than the *nègre*. The primitive, a man close to nature and without much culture, was defined by his lack of clothes and especially his bare feet. The *nègre*, in fact, was almost never represented with shoes or even sandals. To the French, the absence of footwear defined the *nègre*, especially in opposition to other slightly more esteemed colonial subjects, like Arab and Indochinese "types" who the French typically represented with sandals. Shoes on a *nègre* were more than humorous. They made him an *évolué*--semi-civilized and beyond his natural station, potentially causing *déracinement* and a tragic fall.[13] Finally, Viator did not even put its heel on the shoe of the *nègre*; it put it directly on his foot. The semi-civilized *roitelet* was not even worthy of a shoe, just a heel, which he was as well in some representations. That the heel was screwed directly into the foot of a *nègre* must have struck the metropolitan as funny. This absurd image was entirely comprehensible: it was commonly assumed from at least the late nineteenth century that the *nègre* had fewer nerves than the white and was almost impervious to pain.[14]

This advertisement did more than mock the semi-civilized *nègre*; it helped the French negotiate the extension of their ideals to their subjects. Justifying colonialism when the French Republic was founded upon the notion that its ideals were universal was problematic, to say the least. In the 1920s, official colonial policy promoted association rather than assimilation, the original colonial ideal.[15] Association demanded that the French preserve African culture and use local institutions and *roitelets* to help administer the colonies for the French. Association, like assimilation, was imperfectly implemented. Though it was more appealing to the French than assimilation, it was disturbing. The preservation of kinglets or village chiefs was the acceptance of intermediate sources of authority and the violation of the very republican ideal of meritocracy. Laughing at the *indigène*, especially one partially clothed and in

striped shorts, was thus a way to express the contradiction in the colonial endeavor. It was also a mechanism for denigrating those with hereditary title, especially if one was a *nègre*, and thus a way to preserve French ideals. Advertisements like Viator were obviously designed to sell a product, but as a text, they were multivalent. Here, the *nègre* reinforced the myth that French civilization was the province of the white alone. Though the French were conflicted in their understanding and relations with the *nègre*, boundaries between the French and the Other were clear.

The *Nègre* at Work

In the French imagination, the *nègre* was a lazy, happy child without bourgeois discipline. He had no initiative and no industry. Before the Great War, it was not uncommon to represent the *nègre* working for a white metropolitan as a servant in livery, often diminutive in size. After the war, this genre of advertisements fell out of favor and the *nègre* ceased to be represented as working at all, save in colonial tableaux. In 1923, the Ducousso & Cie of Bordeaux deposed a *marque* for its Rhum des Deux Colons [Figure 14]. In this advertising label, two white colons were seen standing on a ledge above a field of sugar cane. A number of *indigènes,* half naked, were shown harvesting the cane. Colonial relations were obviously apparent in this image; in addition, the *marque* conjured up myths of the *nègre* and the metropolitan.

Most prominent in this tableau were the two white colons. Large in size, the colon's authority, the authority of the white, were well represented. One colon wore the casque colonial, and the other sported a sun hat. Both dressed in their sharp white colonial outfits. These were sturdy, manly men: their bush mustaches symbolized their colonial, and perhaps military, experience. One colon carried a riding crop, not for riding but for authority and discipline over the

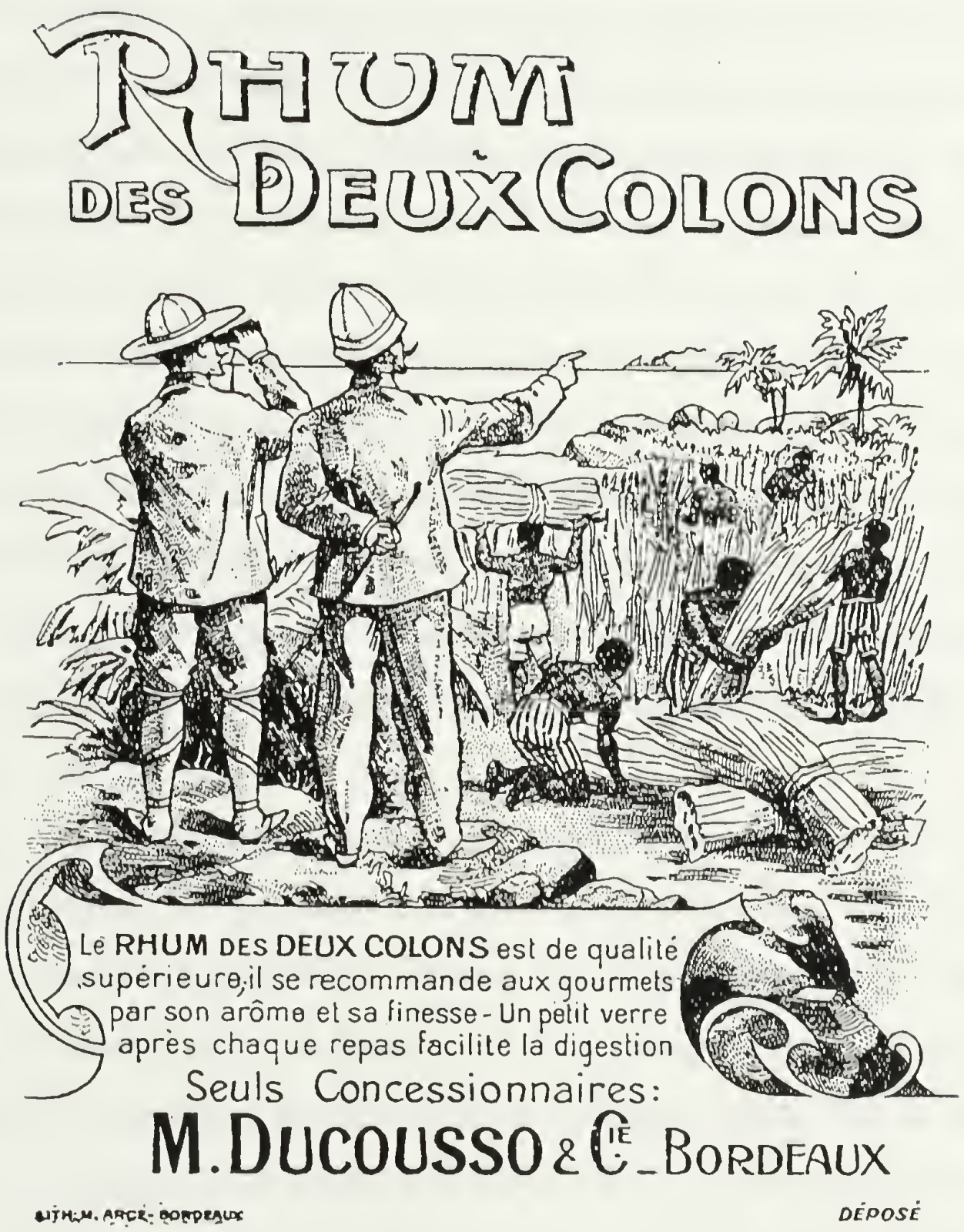

Figure 14. Rhum des Deux Colons advertisement, 1923.

native worker. The second colon looked through binoculars to a distant steamship--one which transported the harvest to the hexagon. The steamship was emblematic of the modern civilization of the Occident: scientific, rational, technological and superior. It was the province alone of the white.

By contrast, the *nègre* was without status, authority or associated with technology. In this image, reminiscent of archaic scenes, the *nègre* was a diminutive figure, dwarfed by the colon, culture, and the sugar cane, nature. He worked without the benefit of technology. He was too simple to use anything but his back--as have all primitives since time immemorial. The *nègre* was represented cutting, bundling, and moving cane to make rum, but he was not truly a worker, a modern construct. Indeed, the *nègres* were barefoot and wearing nothing but striped slave culottes. While the colons stood erect and authoritative, the *nègres*, with one exception, were all in various bent poses, weak and servile. The only one who was erect and powerful was represented carrying a bundle of cane, but his force was subverted by placing him under the large arm of the colon.

Advertising images for rum, and to a much less degree coffee and some rubber products, were virtually the only representations depicting the *nègre* at work. What was represented, however, was never a modern industrial worker or professional. Rather, the *nègre* was shown essentially as a slave, half-naked, sometimes in loin-cloth, barefoot and typically under the watchful eye of the metropolitan. The message was clear: the lazy *nègre* would work only if the metropolitan prompted and disciplined him. Furthermore, the *nègre* was in service only to the metropolitan: colonial products were not for him. With a few notable exceptions, like Banania, the *nègre* was not represented consuming the products he produced. He was servile and in need of the metropolitan to teach

him how to work and to be raised to a level where he too could consume the luxury products of his labor.

Roland Barthes argued that mythologies not only simplify history into fictional essences, but even deny history in the promotion of a mythology. In both the Ducousso and most other rum publicity, advertising tableaux were situated in the French Antilles. But the Antillais was both a voting citizen and a French speaker in the 1920s. Yet in these advertisements, visual throwbacks, he was represented in terms of his past slave history and no different than the African: a *nègre* was a *nègre*. Why Republican and commercial France chose to promote these images and respond to them favorably was not just a function of thinking in terms of myths. The illusive and often promised *mise en valeur* of the colonies could be a reality, if the French would teach their colonial subjects industry and provide them with culture, as they did for the old colonies. The metropolitan thus secured his place in the cultural and economic hierarchy in these representations: he imagined his prestige and made visible and necessary his dominance.

The Sexualized Exotic

Most advertisements in the 1920s represented the *nègre* as hilarious and grotesque. Few such images eroticized the Black male. He was more often an emasculated *grand enfant* than potential Caliban. Where the Black male was dapper, even semi-civilized, he was typically also diminutive and servile, sexualizing the metropolitan. In only a rare few *marques* from the 1920s was the African male represented with any sculptural beauty and virility. The Black woman, by contrast, made far fewer appearances in advertising than the male, and she was rarely caricatured. She was, however, an eroticized

figure, but in the 1920s the erotic Black women in advertisements was not just any *négresse*: she was an Antillaise.

In 1928, Le Sorcier ran J. Stall's advertisement for its portable heater using as its visual "hook" an attractive Antillaise domestique [Figure 15]. The Antillaise was light-skinned with fine features and an attractive smile. She was dressed in the simple elegance of a proper bourgeois domestique: she wore a low cut dress, yellow stockings, pumps, and a creamy white apron. Her hair was black, full and thick--not kinky, and was held back by an oversized hair scarf, a *tête-madras*. A snowy urban scene was visible outside of the woman's window. Inside, however, the warmth of the radiator evoked in the Antillaise a vision of tropical islands. The radiator, a modern convenience, associated itself with natural exoticism, but by employing the Antillaise, the advertisement also sold itself through the "libidinal economy" of the exotic Other.[16]

The Antillaise, more so than the ideal type of *négresse*, was a highly eroticized figure in the French imagination. She was neither black nor white, dangerously ambiguous racially and defined by the crossing of racial boundaries. She was beautiful in fantasy, and in the late nineteenth century, Souquet-Bassiège claimed the Antillaise comprised the "'*plus beaux spécimens de la race humaine.*'"[17] She was also carefree in an imagined sensual, tropical way. Lafcadio Hearn, who wrote on the Martiniquaise in the 1920s, asserted that the Antillaise lived only for "'*d'amour, de rires et d'oubli.*'"[18] Her proclivity to love, her very sexuality, was legendary. She was considered even more lascivious than her Black mother, and, claimed the prurient Dr. Jacobus X in L'Art d'aimer aux colonies, she had eyes only for white men--and they for her.[19]

The Antillaise in the Sorcier advertisement evoked these French ethno-erotic myths. She was depicted as a civilized Other: she wore shoes and stockings and respectable attire. But her proper depiction was subverted. Her

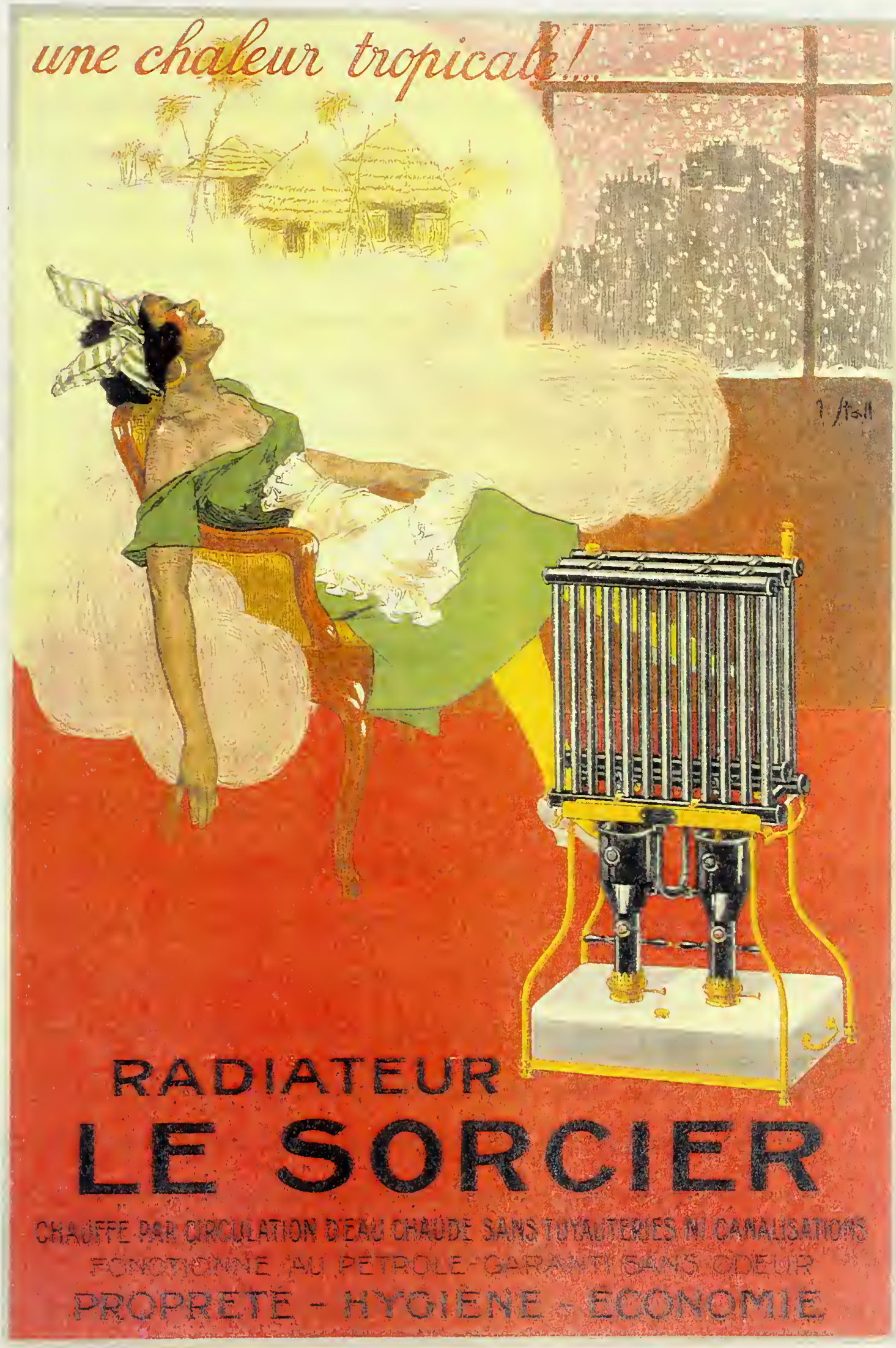

Figure 15. Le Sorcier advertisement, 1928.

tête-madras, tied in large bunny ears, was known to be a code for love.[20] Lying lazily back in a chair, her dress easily falling off one shoulder and just beginning to hint at her breast, her exotic sensuality was inviting. The Antillaise was civilized enough to be considered beautiful and desirable but also primitive enough to be feared, especially for seducing white men and rendering the color line ambiguous.

The Antillaise's ambiguity both fascinated and repulsed the metropolitan, as will be seen in Paul Morand's writings (see Chapter 10). Most of all, she cut an appealing figure in the French social imagination. She could be maternal and nurturing, as in the original Banania advertisement, or sexualized as in the many more, varied, rum advertisements. By definition a child of dangerous love, the Antillaise became a sign for sin--for liberating drink, as many advertisements suggested.[21] The Antillaise thus also functioned to displace French libertine desires, keeping them apart from the ideal of bourgeois propriety.

Soap, Bleaches, and the *Nègre*

In the nineteenth century, there was an image d'Épinal titled, "*À vouloir blanchir un nègre, le barbier perd son savon.*"[22] From at least 1895 until 1930, a few French producers of hygiene products humorously developed the theme of the whitened *nègre*. These grotesque and striking images appeared in at least five large advertising poster campaigns in the 1920s.[23] In addition, a half-dozen manufacturers of soaps and bleaches deposed *marques* with iconographic representations of the *nègre* being whitened in the 1920s. In 1925, Savon à l'Épée was advertised employing humor and fear in a complex and incongruous tableau [Figure 16]. Set in a desert oasis, ostensibly in Africa, two *nègres* were seen dueling, wearing long striped pants, dress shoes with

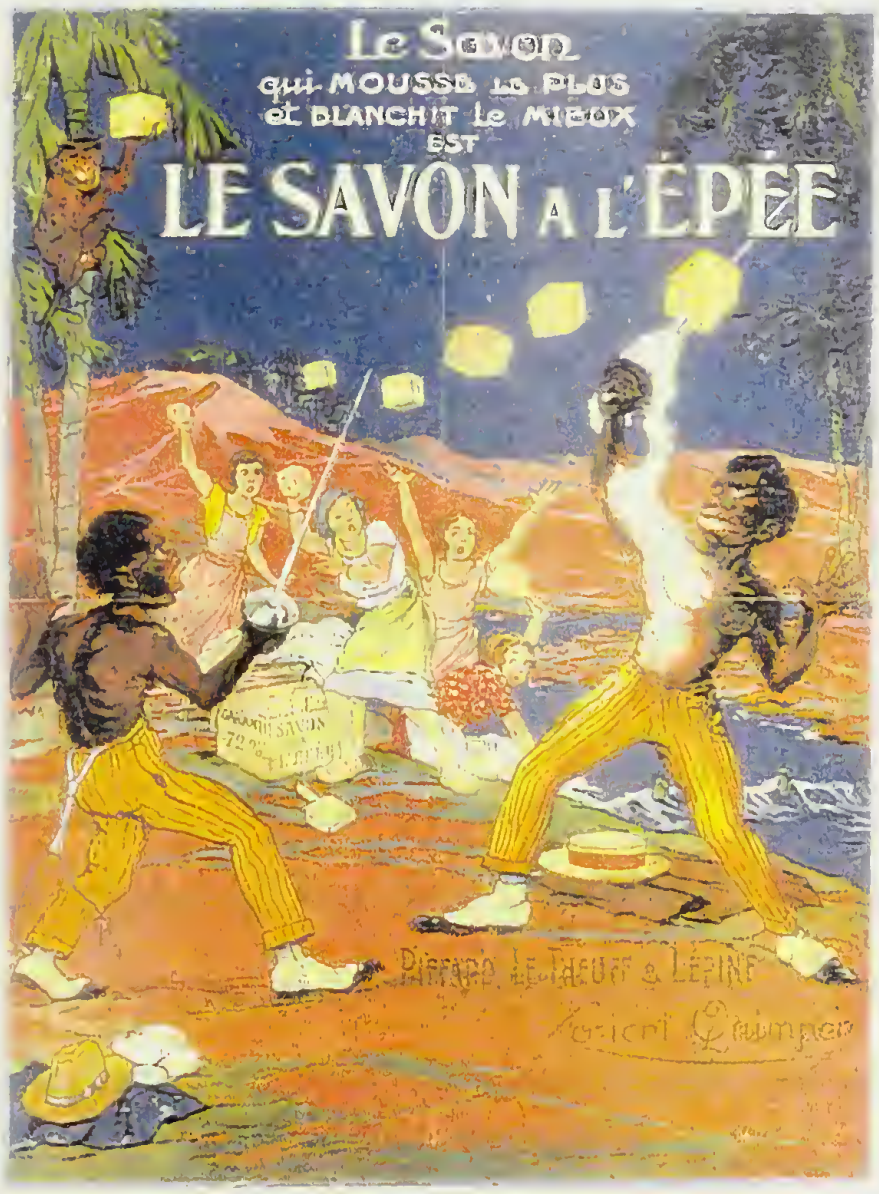

Figure 16. Savon à l'Épée advertisement, 1925.

spats, and no shirt. In the background, four white women, domestiques, washerwomen, threw soap at the *nègres*. One bar of soap was skewered on a sword and its suds washed down the *nègre* and whitened him. Both *nègres* looked at the whitening of his skin in fright.

This advertising tableau sold soap by mocking those who violated class and race hierarchies, two cultural categories that structured interwar France. The *nègres* featured in this advertisement were, in part, dandies wearing spats and having cuffs and a boater hat. Although dueling was out of fashion, it was associated with manly aristocratic honor. But these men were *nègres*, marked by the curse of Ham, stained black and wearing the pants of a servant or slave. Even when being whitened, their social status was below that of a common washerwoman, even one who wore sabots in the fashion conscious 1920s. Though whitened, the *nègre* was still low on the evolutionary scale: a monkey watched the scene unfold, suggesting that the Black was closer to the primate world than the world of civilized man, even when ambiguously represented as a *nègre blanche*.

Racial boundaries may have been more porous in the 1920s than at any previous time in modern French history, but that did not mean that the racial socio-political hierarchy could be overturned. The *nègre* could not escape his biblical stain, despite humorous advertisements to the contrary. Obviously this advertisement played off of and affirmed the impossibility of such a project. Given the fluidity of culture in the 1920s, it was reassuring to the French that some absolutes remained. The color line was secure: it could only be transgressed in a carnivalesque manner. This grotesque humor, in addition, suggested reassuringly but also, paradoxically, unrealistically how the *nègre* could be politically and culturally integrated into the universal Republic. In 1930, for example, a *marque* was deposed for the hygiene product,

Rénovation. The graphic depicted a man's head, half white and half black. He who used the product could be renovated, civilized, assimilated, and integrated--in a word, he would become French, white.

The Biblical Stain of Sin

Conversely, some advertisements showed the *nègre* being darkened. In 1926, the artist Moritz created for Lion Noir shoe polish a very rich and complex social tableau to advertise its product in Le Petit Journal [Figure 17].[24] This advertisement made visible many of the prominent myths of the *nègre* in the 1920s. In the center of the tableau was a large Black woman, a bride, topless, wearing a fancy grass skirt, Parisian-style, fashionable pumps, and an elaborate music hall feathered head-dress, reminiscent of the later Josephine Baker. The woman was being polished black with Lion Noir shoe polish by a couple of women, and one horse-mouthed man was buffing her legs, not shoes, on a shoe shine stand. A simianesque man on the extreme left of the image was beating a tam-tam while a number of grotesque figures expressed their joy at seeing the women being made-up. One little boy was also polishing himself in a mirror while another, in loincloth, was tasting the polish. The bride even had the benefit of one woman holding up a mirror to her. To her right was, perhaps, her husband to be: wearing a top hat, collar, cuffs, and gloves, but no shirt, an ornamental loin-cloth and socks, but no pants, the man was ridiculous. He was made even more comic sporting a prominent bone through his nose. Two monkeys looked down on this scene with incredulity.

The metropolitan did not have to work hard to understand this advertisement: it was captioned. This tableau was supposed to represent an African marriage. The woman represented was a Mademoiselle Bamboula on her wedding day. Her Parisian attire came courtesy of an explorer who was

Figure 17. Lion Noir advertisement, 1926.

being grilled in coconut leaves for the wedding feast. Fortunately for the woman, the explorer traveled with a case of polish so she was able to "*se ravive le teint avec le merveilleux cirage qui équivaut.*"[25]

This tableau evoked one of the central myths metropolitans held about the *nègre*. Underlying many representations of the *nègre* in iconography and literature was the biblical curse of Ham as it came to be understood in early modern and modern Europe. Genesis (9:18-27) tells the story of Noah's sons. One night, Noah, who planted a vineyard, drank his wine and fell asleep, drunk and naked. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his own father naked and did nothing. Ham's brothers, Shem and Japheth, by contrast, covered their father. When Noah awoke, he praised Shem and Japheth but cursed Ham: "cursed be Canaan; the lowest of slaves Shall he be to his brothers."[26] The curse of Canaan was not originally associated with Blacks: in biblical and ancient history, slavery was not racially based. In early modern Europe, by contrast, the curse of Canaan became a Christian theme for explaining black skin color and justifying slavery.[27] In Lion Noir's advertisement, the *nègre* seemed to be accepting of the stain of Ham, even reveling in it, making himself darker.

This tableau also poked fun at the level of civilization of the *nègre*. Mademoiselle Bamboula, a common personification of the *nègre*, appeared semi-civilized in this image. She wore shoes; however, this was subverted by her nudity. Moreover, she, like all *nègres*, were cannibals, or potentially cannibals. The *nègres* in this representation not only grilled the metropolitan explorer for their wedding feast, but also took his booty. Morally, man could fall no lower on the evolutionary scale, and thus monkeys appeared in the image to suggest the animality of the *nègre*. Finally, there were two mirrors shown in this tableau. Both suggested that the *nègre* was vain--or at least vain when improving her looks and skin color. In addition though, the mirror allowed for

self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-knowledge.[28] The *nègre* was imagined to have none of this, being outside of history. When she took the explorer's booty, and one of the little accoutermerits of modernity, Bamboula entered the stream of psychic awareness, but it was only a veneer, as thin as a layer of polish.

Conclusion

In an age that was increasingly defining itself as modern, representations of the *nègre*, including the grotesque *nègre*, evoked a peculiar modernity. The *nègre* was not an appealing representative for electric products, automobiles, or luxury goods--the defining goods of the modern bourgeoisie. Rather, he was naturally associated with colonial products, adding to their exotic appeal and conjuring up colonial fantasies. But this does not suggest why negative representations of the *nègre* were so prominently employed in advertisements. Perhaps, this was not how these advertisements were appropriated in the 1920s. The grotesque and buffoonish *nègre*, I wish to suggest, reflected positively on the metropolitan, reassuring the metropolitan of what he was not--and what he was: an enlightened, highly civilized Frenchman. Thus the *nègre* was a sign that when juxtaposed with the metropolitan could refract bourgeois cultural identities and reinforce imagined hierarchies.

These advertisements and my analysis of them raises a second question: were themes evoked in consumer culture reflected in the wider popular culture? Indeed they were. As previously shown, Louise Faure-Favier stated that provincials created representations of the *nègre* from images on shoe polish tins, and the respondents to the Eve survey on mixed race marriages considered the *nègre*'s skin to be so dirty it would soil linen. In addition, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, André Gide saw fit

to humble a pretentious *roitelet* on his trip through the Congo, and Paul Morand will be shown to be obsessed with the mulatto's racial ambiguity and sexual prowess.

As the 1920s progressed and the Black African Other assumed a more prominent role in exotic literature, exhibitions, photographs and advertisements, there was a growing confluence of representations of the *nègre*, increasingly confining him to the lowest level of humanity not just to bolster visions of Occidental supremacy, but also to restructure culture so that the modern world, one where Blacks made a visible cultural contribution, could become comprehensible and stable. While the French Self was changing after, and because, of the Great War, the *nègre* became a useful refracting device to help define and constrain the boundaries of change and identity. But in the hexagon enraptured by the exotic, these boundaries were not always as clear as they would become when meeting the Black African in the colonies, as Lucie Cousturier, André Gide, and the Croisière noire team discovered in their travels through Africa in the 1920s.

Endnotes

[1]See Roland Barthes, Mythologies, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

[2]See Raymond Bachollet, Jean-Barthélemi Debost, Ann-Claude Lelieur, et Marie-Christine Peyrière, eds., NégriPub: l'image des Noirs dans la publicité (Paris: Éditions Somogy, 1992, 1994).

[3]Product *marques* at the Institut National de la Propriété Industrielle are most easily accessed in the Bulletin officiel de la propriété industrielle et commerciale. This official government bulletin is a chronological record of facsimiles, in black and white, of all legally deposed trademarks.

[4]In addition to Bachollet et al., NégriPub, see also Jan Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992). Although more concerned with photographic representations of the Other, see also Pascal Blanchard, Stéphane Blanchoin, Nicolas Bancel, Gilles Boëtsch, et Hubert Gerbeau, eds., L'Autre et Nous, <<Scènes et Types>> (Paris: Syros et ACHAC, 1995) and Pascal Blanchard et Armelle Chatelier, eds., Images et Colonies (Paris: Syros et ACHAC, 1993). A recent contribution to this literature, especially on trademarks, is Dana Suzanne Hale, "Races on Display: French Representations of the Colonial Native, 1886-1931" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1998).

[5]See Bachollet et al., NégriPub, 12. Although my own calculations of the number of *marques* is not rigorously quantitative and after researching all legally deposed *marques* in the 1920s, my observations confirm the more quantitative observations made by Bachollet. Further research is needed to ascertain how prominent these advertisements were in both public and private spheres in France.

[6]Barthes, Mythologies, 113. See also his chapter, "Myth Today," pages 109-159 for a theoretical discussion of mythologies.

[7]Ibid., 143.

[8]See Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, The World of Goods (New York: Basic Books, 1979) and Grant McCracken, Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

[9]See McCracken, Culture and Consumption, especially chapter 5, "Meaning Manufacture and Movement in the The World of Goods." See also Douglas and Isherwood, World of Goods, 65.

[10]See Hale, "Races on Display." Hale systematically compared images of Black Africans, North Africans, and Indochinese on labels. My more cursory work comparing other ethnic types to the Black African is consistent with her findings.

[11]Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black, 189.

[12]An analysis of the advertisements collected in Bachollet et al., NégriPub, and *marques* in the Bulletin officiel de la propriété industrielle et commerciale suggest that the *nègre* was always subject to some artistic distortion except in some aestheticized and sexualized advertisements employing images of the Antillaise. This pattern did not change until the late

1960s in France and with a greater use of photography in advertisements; however, as shown in NégriPub, contemporary advertisements still caricature the Black body.

[13]For two minor treatments of this issue, see Ada Martinkus-Zemp, Le Blanc et le Noir: Essai d'une description de la vision du Noir par le Blanc dans la littérature française de l'entre-deux-guerres (Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1975) and Roland Lebel, Histoire de la littérature coloniale en France (Paris: Librairie Larose, 1931). In addition, for an example of a novel that addresses *déracinement*, see my own treatment of Gaston-Joseph's Koffi: Roman vrai d'un Noir (Paris: Aux Éditions du Monde Nouveau, 1922).

[14]The popular statement on Blacks' inability to feel physical pain just prior to the war was in Charles Mangin, La Force Noire (Paris: Hachette, 1910); for a brief discussion of Mangin, see Joe Harris Lunn, "Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1993).

[15]See Raymond F. Betts, Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914 (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1961). For a well researched study on how assimilation and association were subsumed by republican ideals in the colonies, see Alice L. Conklin, A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

[16]For a discussion of the "libidinal economy" in colonial fiction, see Abdul JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Fuction of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," in "Race," Writing, and Difference, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985, 1986), 78-106.

[17]Souquet-Bassiège quoted in Jean-Pierre Jardel, "Représentation des <<gens de couleur>> et du métissage aux Antilles," in L'Autre et Nous, eds. Blanchard, et al., 116.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Dr. Jacobus X, L'Art d'aimer aux colonies (Paris: Les Éditions Georges-Anquetil, 1927).

[20]Jardel, "Représentation," 116.

[21]See for example, Jean d'Ylen's 1920 advertisement for Rhum Pepita and the 20 mai 1926 *marque* no. 98891 in the Bulletin officiel de la propriété industrielle et commerciale for Séga-Rum.

[22]Bachollet et al., NégriPub, 69.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Le Petit Journal, 27 June 1926; this advertisement is reproduced in Bachollet et al., NégriPub, 102.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Genesis 9:25; Tanakh, (Philadelphia and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

[27]See Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black, 44 and Winthrop D. Jordan, White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North

Carolina Press, 1968), 17-20. Specifically for France, Philippe Dewitte suggests that the curse of Ham was an archetypal in the French *mentalité*; see Philippe Dewitte, "Le <<Noir>> dans l'imaginaire Français," in L'Autre et Nous, eds. Blanchard, et. al., 27-32.

[28]For a discussion of the function of the mirror in ethnographic photography, see Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, Reading National Geographic (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 207-211.

CHAPTER 7

LUCIE COUSTURIER IN AFRICA: FRATERNITY AND THE CHALLENGE TO EXOTICISM

By the turn of the twentieth century, France had colonized and "pacified" much of Sub-Saharan Africa, and the French imagined that they knew Africa: exotic novels were popular, the popular press had been printing sensational stories of the continent for years, and expositions and entertainers represented the primitive to the self-proclaimed civilized.[1] But in fact, Black Africa remained unknown to the French well into the 1920s, if not later. It was really only after World War I that more than a few metropolitans took the opportunity to penetrate Africa and have an authentic first encounter with the *indigène* Other. These encounters were the subject of many travelogues or reportages published after the Great War. Today, these works are rarely mentioned when analyzing the *négrophilisme* of the 1920s.[2] But they should be: they reflected the *mentalité* of the time as much as did the adulation of Josephine Baker and the jazz artists of the 1920s. Moreover, these works exerted a profound impact shaping the social imagination of metropolitan whites and the ambivalent representations of the *nègre* in the 1920s. In the following three thematically related chapters, I will examine how metropolitans, artist Lucie Cousturier, writer and intellectual André Gide, and adventurers Georges-Marie Haardt and Louis Audouin-Dubreuil of La Croisière noire expedition, mediated notions of self, Other, and exoticism in their first encounter with the Black African in Africa.

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"Il y a des personnes, en France, qui me prennent pour une vaillante exploratrice. Ils s'abusent. Je ne conquiers rien, je suis plus ou moins conquise..."[3]

On 13 October 1921 the middle-aged, respectable Madame Lucie Cousturier (1876-1925) disembarked at Dakar, Afrique Occidentale Française. For the next seven months Cousturier traveled through French West Africa without a metropolitan male escort in what was probably the first such trip for a French woman after the Great War. In Africa, Cousturier sketched her impressions of the land and people, and most importantly, she reflected upon Africa, *indigènes*, and her relationship to both in a journal. Fragments of her travelogue and some of her paintings were published in 1923; in 1924 a chapter of her work was excerpted in the literary journal Europe, and in 1925, the year of her death, her entire work was published in two volumes: Mes Inconnus chez eux: Mon ami Fatou and Mes Inconnus chez eux: Mon ami Soumaré. Cousturier's account of Africa was much more than a factual chronicle or amateur ethnography of the Guinée Française and the Soudan. It was a work of reflexive participant-observation. Cousturier's gendered experience and reflections were unique in French colonial and exotic writing in the 1920s. She desired, experienced, and described friendship with African women. In addition and unlike her male cohorts, she rejected personal conquest, preferring what I shall call the "oceanic" appeal of Africa. Most interestingly, Cousturier asked questions about her position and power as a white in Africa that could have subverted the dominant exotic and colonial paradigms. Although she almost presupposed a post-colonial stance in some of her reflections, Cousturier fundamentally accepted the colonial endeavor. Nevertheless, her high-minded humanistic response to the *indigène* had little popular emotive force: in the

popular arena, it proved less appealing than either the *négrophilisme* or the *négrophobisme* of the 1920s.

Although she was undoubtedly aware of *art nègre* before the war and knew something of the colonies from her husband's brother, Paul Cousturier, an ex-Governor in A.O.F., Cousturier's affinity for *indigènes* appeared to date only from the Great War. Her chance encounters with *tirailleurs* encamped near her *bastide* in Fréjus during and just after the war led to her warmly received Des inconnus chez moi (1920). This work and her affection for the soldiers came to the attention of the Minister of Colonies, and in 1921 Cousturier was granted an official *mission* to West Africa.[4] She described her *mission* in two modes: one for the French and a second for *indigènes* in Africa.

In her report of her mission to the Minister of Colonies, made available to the French in Les Continents, a short-lived, controversial and pro-assimilationist monthly newspaper directed by Kojo Tovalou Houénou and edited by Jean Fangeat, Cousturier claimed that she was charged with making an "*étude du milieu indigène familial et plus spécialement du rôle de la femme indigène au point de vue de l'influence qu'elle exerce sur la formation morale des enfants.*"[5] Her *mission* was thus consistent with the civilizing mission and the pronatalist policies of the time, especially the emphasis on *puériculture.*[6] Cousturier drew mixed conclusions about the condition of *indigènes* in Africa, locating problems both with the *indigène* and with the French colonial structure. African patriarchy was considered the first barrier to progress. The African woman, she claimed, was bright and innately capable of rising to the level of other women, but the African male both held her back and retarded the civilizing mission: "*les institutions patriarcales qui régissent les indigènes ne leur permettent pas de vivre dans les conditions nouvelles que l'occupation*

européenne a créées. Ils ne peuvent satisfaire ni leurs aspirations, ni les exigences de la métropole..."[7] Although she could also be extremely critical of colonial attitudes, officials, and the economic exploitation of Africa, Cousturier located many of the ills *indigènes* suffered and the hope for a better future with the noble *indigène* himself. "*La société nègre,*" she wrote,

> *est maintenant à l'état de chrysalide et il faut que la mue qui la transformera s'opère d'elle-même. Il serait aussi puéril et dangereux de précipite la rupture des enveloppes que de les maintenir de force quand ses tissus gonfleront.... si la cristallisation persiste, la race mourra asphyxiée. Si, en présence de ce formidable excitant, la civilisation européenne, le noir ne réagit pas, c'est la signe de son intoxication et de sa mort prochaine, et c'est la ruine de l'œuvre que si généreusement la métropole veut édifier.*[8]

Her official *mission* and conclusions from her trip ostensibly located Cousturier as a sympathetic colonial critic, reformer, and apologist for the civilizing mission, if not colonialism itself.

But it would be simplistic and mistaken to emphasize only what formed the outer boundaries of Cousturier's thought. Within the colonial paradigm came new thinking about the white's relationship to the *indigène*--and this was reflected in a second and no less important, nor official, aspect of her mission. Cousturier claimed that she was an ambassador of good will from the women of France to the women of A.O.F. Speaking to a number of women in Labé, Cousturier stated, "*le ministre des colonies, content des tirailleurs venus en France, m'a envoyée pour venir saluer leurs mères, leurs sœurs et leurs épouses de sa part et de la part de toutes les dames françaises.*"[9] Cousturier greeted the women of French West Africa, tried to understand their lives, especially their role under patriarchy, and offered them the sympathetic ear of a metropolitan woman--but little else. Indeed, she rarely spent more than a few days with any one person and consciously avoided entangling herself in the redress of any colonial ill. Though she sought to enact no change directly,

Cousturier's mission was unique culturally. It imagined a new relationship between the white and the Black.

This new relationship was forged on her very first day in Dakar. Initially fortuitously and then later by design, Cousturier made efforts to experience directly the *indigène*. Straight from the steamship, Cousturier visited a cousin of one of her former African student's, and she let him know that she had no lodging. He offered her a room--in his home. His offer, Cousturier claimed, was "*tout a été trop simple et trop miraculeux.*"[10] She not only spent the night with this family, but ultimately spent two weeks with them, in "*Dakar indigène*," the "*sein authentique*" of Dakar.[11] After this experience, Cousturier rarely stayed in white districts or hotels, both of which could be strictly segregated in French Africa. She lodged at almost every stage of her trip with an *indigène* family. Cousturier was aware of the distance most metropolitans kept between themselves and the *indigène* in Africa, and she consciously chose to eliminate that distance as much as possible, and to have, as she imagined, an authentic experience in Africa. But in 1921 there were limits to what was imaginable. Although she lived with families for friendship and study, she did so on her terms. Even as a guest in another's house, she had her African *boy*, Mamady, ensure her well-being and cook her meals, separate from the family pot. In addition to her singular approach to lodging, Cousturier even traveled in second-class cars on trains to speak with *indigènes* who either could not afford or were not allowed in the first-class cars. Furthermore, Cousturier rejected the company of white officials for conversations with common *indigènes*. Although she was at ease with the *indigène*, they were not always comfortable with her. Her interpreter explained in simple terms why many Africans were afraid of her: "'*ils se méfient de vous puisque ce n'est pas votre place.*'"[12] Cousturier

crossed boundaries with the utmost sincerity, naturally and consciously, and she never questioned the universality of *fraternité*.

Fraternity in Republican France was not conceptually independent of liberty and equality. In colonial West Africa, however, it was. Rather than reflecting on this anomaly, Cousturier defined a fraternity consistent with colonialism. Cousturier's friendship was ephemeral, like that of a respectful, kind tourist, but it fell well short of forming the bonds of communitas, even for her eponymous heroes.[13] Fatou, for example, not quite twenty years old, was the daughter of her host in Dakar, and Cousturier lodged with her for two weeks, the longest sustained contact she had with any *indigène*, save her translator and *boy*. In her host's home, Cousturier joined in with a few of the family chores. She cleaned rice with Fatou, for example, but did not eat the rice when it was cooked, and she watched and interacted with her African hosts, as best as she could not knowing local languages. Fatou knew no French so Cousturier communicated with her either through her *boy* or with her African currency, her smile: "*quand je souris à Fatou elle sourit, elle a des dents blanches et de jolis traits réguliers, enfantins, à travers quoi, sortie de ses yeux, court toute son âme.*"[14] The metropolitan's smile was symbolic of kindness. The smile of the *indigène*, by contrast, opened a lens to a childlike soul. Cousturier was not, however, condescending. She was maternal and acted from a position of power but was still willing to play with her friends. One day, for example, Fatou dressed Cousturier in a *pagne*, *boubou*, and headscarf, *indigène* attire. Fatou was justly proud of her work, as was Cousturier. Although Cousturier good naturedly played the *indigène* for a moment, she did not "go native." Metropolitans, like Gide and the Croisière noire team, typically assumed new colonial roles, identities, in Africa. Cousturier, by contrast, chose only to be herself within the colonial matrix, greeting not the Other but

unknowns, friends, learning about their life in French West Africa then quickly moving on without forming lasting relationships. Cousturier's fraternity was one-sided, perhaps, though not unambiguously, exploitative. Clearly, given the existing range of relationships between metropolitans and *indigènes*, it was unique.

In the metropole Cousturier had befriended African males who were often uniformed, never nude. In French West Africa, she was confronted with a great deal of both male and female nudity. Unlike most male accounts of the *indigène*, Cousturier demonstrated no interest in ethno-erotic fantasies. She neither eroticized nor even valorized the Black body. She was, however, preoccupied with the African breast. Cousturier mentioned African nudity matter of factly, almost ethnographically. In the forest of the Haut-Niger, for example, Cousturier was more attentive to women's breasts than the women themselves:

> *Toutes les femmes de la campagne sont demi-nues. Je note des seins ronds dressés, des seins vides, plats et triangulaires abaissant leur pointe à la taille. Quant aux seins des mères, en forme de gourde, on ne les voit pas, leur relief servant de porte-manteau pour suspendre l'écharpe qui contient d'autre part, sur leurs reins, l'enfant.*[15]

Cousturier's factual ethnographic descriptions of breasts dissembled neither her metropolitan aesthetic nor the values wedded to this aesthetic. When Cousturier met the four wives of her Malinké interpreter, she exchanged pleasantries with them and then took the liberty to critique their breasts.

> *Je leur ai fait observer que chez mes compatriotes la mode veut qu'on porte les seins beaucoup moins longs. Elles ont bien ri....Je lui ai répondu que je n'avais pas d'opinion personnelle puisque, pour la poitrine de leur mère, ce sont les enfants qui décident de la mode. Les enfants noirs trouvent jolis les seins qui sont longs comme des bouteilles; mais les petits blancs qui boivent le lait aux bouteilles de verre n'ont pas besoin de seins longs.*[16]

In the metropolitan's gaze, dangling breasts and *seins flétris* reflected the totality of a woman's charm and character. At Macenta, for example, Cousturier commented on the declining beauty of a former *petite épouse*: "*elle a dû être très belle, quand ses seins étaient encore dressés.*"[17] On the other hand, too firm breasts were not criticized; they were a source of amusement. "*Une jeune fille qui nous croise, tête chargée de manioc, projette devant elle des seins si puissants et raidis qu'on dirait de deux bouteilles fixées là par ventouse. Cela n'est pas naturel, à force de l'être... j'ai ri.*"[18] Although this young woman could have been described as a sexualized fertility fetish, a statue incarnate, Cousturier did not eroticize her. Cousturier was not in search of a Vénus noire. She may not have even accepted the concept of a highly sexualized Other, a thought truly foreign to male adventurers in Africa, like the Croisière noire team or, for that matter, the homosexual Gide.

But like male writers, Cousturier accepted, albeit with some ambivalence, that aesthetics reflected character attributes. For Cousturier, herself a minor but known artist, both Winckelmann's thesis (see Chapter 9) and late nineteenth century French anthropology were reflected in her attention to breasts.[19] She valorized the firm, round classical white breast typically depicted in French art which symbolized the virtues of western civilization. African breasts, shaped from nursing and the absence of wearing braziers, only recently introduced in France, symbolized a lack of civilization. Indeed, only when women embraced *puériculture* and bottle feeding, scientific child-rearing, would the African woman become more civilized, and this would be reflected in her beauty.[20] In short, Cousturier suggested that the *indigène* would be beautiful when she was no longer subject to the ravages of gravity and children: nature.

Prior to World War I, very few metropolitan Frenchmen had set foot in the interior of French West Africa. Paradoxically, it was a land thought to be known. The French constructed their imagination from the representations of Africa seen in expositions, films, photographs, and literary exoticism. There was, however, a profound disjuncture between what was imagined in the hexagon and the reality of Africa, its landscape and its people. Cousturier learned to accept Africa for what it was, despite the land not measuring up to her idealized representation. Moreover, she learned to embrace the otherness of the land and its oceanic potential rather than trying to conquer it or be repulsed by it, both typically male responses to Africa.

A fresh category is needed to characterize Cousturier's embrace of Africa: the oceanic. Freud defined the oceanic negatively. It was, he claimed, that primitive, boundless feelings of a baby at the breast. The oceanic arose from the infantile dissolution of the boundaries between subjects and objects, and in civilized society, it was replaced, conquered or repressed by the reality principle. Romain Rolland, the author and Nobel laureate, agreed with Freud's basic definition but not Freud's negative characterization of the oceanic. Mariana Torgovnick, drawing off of the work of Romain Rolland, recently reintroduced the concept of the "oceanic" as that positive, albeit transitory, spiritual state when one merges one's self with the universe. When one embraces the oceanic, subject-object divisions dissolve as would the boundaries between the Occident and the primitive, one ultimate goal of exoticism.[21]

Africa, Cousturier discovered, had many different and unexpected landscapes. Some were quiet, even serene. Traveling outside of Conakry, Cousturier was struck by "*le silence. Silence pour l'oreille et pour l'œil; plus rien ne bouge ou brille dans l'espace, dans la grande plaine endormie sous le*

ciel, entre les hautes montagnes bleues. La lumière est vive, sans doute, mais elle est trop également répandue pour qu'on l'apprécie."[22] These reflections were written just a month into her trip. At this juncture, Cousturier could do little more than poetically describe a foreign landscape. In fact, her inability to grasp the grandeur and alterity of the land led to a fleeting bout of ennui. When she traveled on the Niger river towards Bamako, the monotony of the landscape disoriented her. The landscape did not conform to her previously constructed image of Africa:

> *Pas d'hippopotames, pas de crocodiles, pas de grands arbres, pas de lourdes formes nulle part, pas de formes! Nous avons l'air d'un monstre tombé d'une planète. Devant nous, c'est la monotonie dans toute son horreur ou sa beauté. L'eau, le sable, le ciel, la terre, la végétation ne cherchent pas à distinguer les uns des autres par des contours ou des couleurs: nos sens les confondent.*[23]

In the French imagination, especially the one that literary exoticism shaped, Africa was both strangely beautiful and savage. It was represented as the source of life and simultaneously the site of death. Metropolitans understood Africa in terms of its mystery, not of its undifferentiated monotony. With travel, reality clashed with fantasy.

Rather than allowing the landscape to be repulsive to her or to let its uniformity efface the singularity of the each tree, hill, and color, Cousturier grew to accept and even relish the radical otherness of Africa and the disorientation it generated. She challenged her metropolitan imaginings and came to embrace the exotic unmediated beauty of the landscape. Late in her trip, she saw Bofosso, for example, with her artist's eye, lyrically describing it as the unique site that it was.

> *Bofosso n'est pas un paysage humain, la terre y est rose, envolée, fumeuse, comme un ciel d'aurore; les arbres bleu et or y sont changeants et flous comme des queues de paon. Entre la terre aérienne et le ciel pâle, la montagne boisée est comme un vol d'oiseaux.*

> *Le vol d'oiseaux est comme une île bleue endormie entre l'aube et le soleil couchant.*[24]

Cousturier did more than discern the beauty of Africa. She learned to dissolve the boundaries separating herself as a subject from Africa, an object. She merged with the landscape just outside of Beyla.

> *A l'atmosphère sèche, je ne m'étais jamais abandonnée complètement, la vie m'y semblait un peu artificielle, je m'y sentais une coloniale novice; maintenant l'air le goût de l'air m'est familier, la lumière aussi, et la température. Hier en plein jour j'ai escaladé la colline abrupte en face de ma case. J'ai erré seule sur un plateau pierreux... Je me suis couchée pour mieux voir les nuages noirs et cuivrés tournoyer au-dessus de ma tête comme des aigles. De toute la longueur de mes bras nus j'ai goûté la fraîcheur de petites herbes rares récemment arrosées. J'avais envie de me rouler... Je pouvais le faire, j'étais seule. D'ailleurs des noirs m'eussent-ils vue qu'ils auraient pensé sans trouble: les femmes blanches, quand elles se promènnent seules, se roulent dans l'herbe.*[25]

Adventurers who sought the primitive desired the secrets of the oceanic, the dissolution of all boundaries. Cousturier did not travel to Africa to have a spiritual experience of merging, but she had one. Though she acknowledged the constraints of proper bourgeois behavior, she was not afraid to take the liberty, while alone, of experiencing oneness with her surroundings, something male adventurers, conquerors, evidently never accomplished.

Although she learned to love the landscape, and even provided a model for describing and merging with it, Cousturier's greater contribution to French culture involved reflections on both her position in the matrix binding race to power and the boundaries between whites and Blacks, boundaries, she discovered, that were indissoluble. At the start of her journey Cousturier realized that the metropolitan had the liberty and power to create a fiction for himself. After a few weeks among the *indigène*, Cousturier felt at home in Black Africa but not in White Africa. In fact, she consciously chose not to wear the colonial uniform, one symbol of white metropolitan power. When she

needed to go to a French store in Conakry, for example, Cousturier felt that she had to make the expected, appropriate sartorial statement:

> *Il va falloir que je m'habille moi-même en blanc, en coloniale. Depuis huit jours, j'en ai perdu l'habitude. Je me vêts ordinairement d'une robe-sac en batik bleu et bistre et d'un casque gris. J'ai fait du mimétisme, instinctivement. En changeant de robe aujourd'hui, je crains un peu de paraître déguisée.*[26]

Cousturier did not "go native," but she understood that the metropolitan, by virtue of his skin color and symbol system, played a role in relation to the *indigène* and colonialism. With this role came the privileges of racial power. Cousturier wrestled with these privileges personally, not politically. She was so ambivalent about her role in colonial attire that when she went into the French store she felt less white than the patron and addressed herself, instead, to his *indigène* employee. The store patron, not the *indigène*, rushed to address her with all the dignity befitting a white in French Africa. Cousturier was alone in questioning her socio-racial position within the colonial matrix.

Her reflections on racial power were new, hitherto not conceivable to her or perhaps anyone else in the hexagon, despite the recent history of colonial conquest and Blacks in France. Cousturier observed that the white in Africa had real, visible, and almost unfettered power. This power was entirely different than the social power one had in the metropole: "*la puissance est, en Europe, relative à la fortune et en dépit des décors, tout individu s'y sait, relativement à quelque autre, un prolétaire. Ma puissance jusqu'à présent n'avait été que très relative... très brusquement, elle se faisait absolue.*"[27] In France, Cousturier understood power to be based on one's class position. In French West Africa, power had little to do with wealth: it was racially based, and whites had a monopoly on it. Furthermore, power was qualitatively different than in the hexagon, and it forced Cousturier to connect for the first time race and power. She accepted the reality of her position:

> *Comme j'ai pris conscience de la beauté du rôle que m'assigne ici ma couleur de peau, je reste paisiblement immobile, offerte à la dévotion générale. Je n'ai pas à parler, je n'ai pas à sourire, je n'ai pas à penser, je n'ai qu'à être blanche, comme le soleil à briller. Un vainqueur paraît toujours magnanime...*[28]

Although she was comfortable being white and accepting of its privileges, at least in theory, Cousturier demonstrated great ambivalence in the actual exercise of any power.

From this ambivalence, one rooted in the contradictions inherent in the relationship between humanistic ideals and colonialism, came uneasy reflections about real social relations with *indigènes.* Cousturier, for example, used the *pousse-pousse*, a rickshaw, and the *tipoye*, albeit with significant misgivings. The *tipoye* was the chair, or hammock, used by metropolitans for travel that was attached to poles carried by two to four *indigènes*, *hamacaires.* Cousturier's *hamacaires* were poor. They dressed in rags which barely covered their nudity. She stated they were a visible testament to a society that betrayed them. Still, she traveled in the *tipoye*, though it was not pleasant, physically or psychologically. In fact, Cousturier felt that the *tipoye* held her captive. When a mountain path became too difficult for her *hamacaires*, she felt liberated: "*Tout de suite le sentier est devenu impraticable à mes hamacaires et je ne le regrette pas. Je suis ravie d'escalader moi-même...*"[29] Cousturier's porters, quite obviously, had little choice but to carry her. Her own captivity, however, was truly only psychological. She could leave the *tipoye* whenever she wished or, for that matter, not even use it. Cousturier discovered that any colonial practice, especially one that used humans as draught animals, impacted on all whites, especially their cherished ideals and identity. "*Ce n'est certes pas que mon humanitarisme se révolte de la condition servile dévolue à l'homme noir, ni que ma pitié saigne de ses maux possibles; c'est pour*

l'homme blanc et pour moi, sa compatriote, que soudain je suis inquiète."[30] Cousturier was not suggesting that whites were as victimized as *indigènes* under colonialism, but she was moving to a position that suggested whites acted in bad faith in their relationships with *indigènes*, letting colonial norms determine behavior rather than individualistic humanistic ideals.

The tension between her own desire for some *fraternité*, as she defined it, and colonialism was acute for Cousturier not just because she reflected on her relationships with *indigènes* and colonialism, but because of the situations into which she was thrown. Information of her arrival at Diangana, for example, was somehow misunderstood, and Cousturier arrived without proper greetings or even a hut readied for her. The village chief was embarrassed, frightened, and scrambled to fix a hut for her. Many *indigènes* were put to work for her:

> *Elles ne me doivent rien et c'est pour moi qu'elles travaillent sans rémunération avec zèle et crainte; ce sont mes esclaves. Mais je ne le sens pas. Je les regarde sans remords, comme chez moi à Paris, je regarde par ma fenêtre des cantonniers et des cantonnières nettoyant mon boulevard... ici le réflexe indigène de la peur de l'administration coloniale fait coïncider forcément ma venue et la réfection de mon gîte. Je n'ai pas créé le mécanisme parisien de la voirie, ni la machine colonial. Que leurs victimes s'émeuvent à mon bénéfice ou à celui d'autres individus, peu importe.*[31]

Cousturier accepted colonialism, feeling herself an object to it, a minor cog in the system. She felt no responsibility for inequities. Inequities, especially class inequities, were familiar and not problematic to her. Nonetheless, when she was the subject in a colonial drama, her exercise of power, white power, troubled her. She was pained when she made a speech stating that she bore the chief no ill will for not having properly greeted her: she knew she was not acting out of fraternity. The very action of speaking was an expression of white power, and she was the subject of this power. More disturbing to her was when the chief apologized to her: "*J'en étais honteuse. De cet homme qui avait*

tremblé devant moi j'avais tiré de la gloire et de la magnanimité personnelles; car puisque j'acceptais ses excuses, je faisais entendre par là que j'aurais pu les refuser."[32] Cousturier likened herself to a theater actor playing the role of the all-powerful white colonial. Since she was acting on her own, but consonant with colonial norms and from a privileged position, she felt ashamed of herself. She was not taking the liberty to be who she felt she was; rather, she acted with the same bad faith of other colonials. Colonials, she ultimately concluded, were more victims of colonialism than evil towards Africans. They were in a bad structure, and race relations in the colonies were like a hunter with a gun: "*Les armes provoquent des fuites; les fuites provoquent le tir, même chez les chasseurs bénévoles. Et le plus grave est que le gibier est excellent à manger; soit à exploite, l'indigène. C'est comme une fatalité*!"[33] On her own, Cousturier opted out of the colonial matrix--or so she thought. Her maternalistic friendship was not exploitive, and Cousturier imagined a new way to be with the *indigène*, but she did not nor could not dissolve the greatest boundary--the racial one.

Cousturier's Reception

Cousturier's writings on *indigènes* generated passionate responses--both negative and positive. René Maran, in the African American journal Opportunity in 1925, reported that colonial apologists actively attacked Cousturier, mounting a campaign against her nomination for the Prix Goncourt in 1920 and slandering her ever since as a Bolshevist.[34] By contrast, Maran claimed her books brought tears to his eyes and should be seen as "breviaries, or as little books of faith and prayer to keep at one's bedside at night," and he eulogized her as "The Harriet Beecher Stowe of France."[35] John Charpentier, though a colonial apologist for the Mercure de France, was struck by

Cousturier's "*sensibilité généreuse*," artistry, and acute observations put in the service of truth.[36] Two years after Cousturier's death, La Race Nègre, an anti-colonial French paper, stated Blacks should read and re-read Cousturier to try "*comprendre bien ses idées, s'assimiler ses conceptions courageuses sur les questions nègre et coloniale, et surtout en voulant les appliquer aux réalités présentes.*"[37]

Léon Werth, writer, humanist, and critic of the French treatment of *indigènes*, was one of Cousturier's greatest public champions. Werth went beyond praise. He claimed Cousturier did what no other writer had previously done: "*Elle a découvert, elle a pénétré, elle a révélé tout un continent: l'Afrique.... L'Afrique, avant Lucie Cousturier, était inconnue...*"[38] Before her, writers were immature in their understanding of Africa. They considered difference to be savagery rather than just difference, and they viewed others as if in a spectacle rather than living an authentic life. Cousturier, Werth claimed, was different because of her "*esprit*," her attention to detail, her absence of generalities, and her heart. Finally, Werth made his boldest assertion:

> *l'œuvre de Lucie Cousturier détruit en quelque sort pour l'avenir toute possibilité d'exotisme. L'exotisme n'est qu'un artifice d'éloignement, une variation par impuissance ou volonté, de la mise au point. Au contraire Lucie Cousturier --à qui nulle diversité n'échappe--retrouve l'unité humaine...*[39]

Conclusion

Werth's hyperbole should not detract from his perceptive appreciation of Cousturier. Cousturier broke with the prevailing genre of literary exoticism. She brought to Africa few *a priori* beliefs and was conscious of the singularity of each person and the landscape in Africa, embracing its oceanic potential. To the maternally inclined Cousturier, the *indigène* was neither a savage nor a child; he was someone with whom she could befriend. More importantly, she

may have been the first public French person to dissolve some of the boundaries that separated France from Africa, boundaries reified in literature, iconography, and expositions. She fell short, however, of discovering or rediscovering, as Werth believed, the unity of mankind, save in its 1920s variant. Indeed, fraternity alone, isolated from equality and liberty, was not sufficient for Cousturier even to conceive of merging with the *indigène*, as she did with the landscape. Quite possibly, however, because of this fraternity shorn of equality, Cousturier's work appealed to metropolitan liberal assimilationists. Her understanding of the matrix of colonial relationships and how colonialism degraded whites and Blacks challenged the bases of French empire in Africa and could have profoundly impacted French imperial and racial thinking. But in the mid 1920s, her work did not appeal to the popular French imagination. It did not serve the cultural needs of the French in the wake of the Great War.

Endnotes

[1]See William B. Cohen, The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880 (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980) and William H. Schneider, An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa 1870-1900 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).

[2]In France, scholars working with the Association Connaissance de l'Histoire de l'Afrique Contemporaine under Pascal Blanchard have begun to mine travel literature, exotic novels, and colonial iconography on Africa. Anglo-American scholars have not yet addressed this work, save for Gide's *carnets*. It should be noted as well that Ada Martinkus-Zemp, Le Blanc et le Noir, Essai d'une description de la vision du Noir par le Blanc dans la littérature française de l'entre-deux-guerres (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1975), treated Gide's Voyage au Congo as if it was a piece of literary exoticism in her synthetic look at representation of Blacks in literature between the wars.

[3]Lucie Cousturier, Mes inconnus chez eux: Mon amie Fatou citadine (Paris: F. Rieder et Cie, Editeurs, 1925), 92.

[4]The official documents specifying the terms of Cousturier's *mission* probably resides at the Archives nationale section Outre-mer; I hope to get this data, but at present, I cannot access it.

[5]Lucie Cousturier, "Rapport," Les Continents, 15 juillet 1924, p. 3.

[6]For a discussion on *puériculture*, see Willliam H. Schneider, Quality and Quantity, The Quest for Biological Regeneration in Twentieth Century France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[7]Lucie Cousturier, "Rapport," Les Continents, 15 septembre 1924, p.3.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Cousturier, Fatou, 148.

[10]Ibid., 21.

[11]Ibid., 23.

[12]Ibid., 40.

[13]For a discussion of communitas, see Victor Turner, Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974) and Victor Turner and Edith Turner, Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

[14]Cousturier, Fatou, 27.

[15]Lucie Cousturier, Mes Inconnus chez eux: Mon ami Soumaré laptot (Paris: F. Rieder et Cie, Editeurs, 1925), 97.

[16]Ibid., 226.

[17]Ibid., 181-82.

[18]Ibid., 97.

[19]For a good brief overview of the connection between aesthetics, morals, and anthropology, see George L. Mosse, Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

[20]See Schneider, Quality and Quantity.

[21]See Marianna Torgovnick, Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997). See especially pages 3-42.

[22]Cousturier, Fatou, 113.

[23]Cousturier, Soumaré, 9.

[24]Ibid., 207-08.

[25]Ibid., 108-09.

[26]Cousturier, Fatou, 85-86.

[27]Ibid., 54.

[28]Cousturier, Soumaré, 136-37.

[29]Ibid., 126.

[30]Cousturier, Fatou, 62.

[31]Ibid., 205-06.

[32]Ibid., p. 210.

[33]Ibid., 211.

[34]René Maran, "The Harriet Beecher Stowe of France," Opportunity, August 1925, 229-231. I have not yet found evidence that demonstrates that Cousturier was the subject of political attacks for her sympathy to Black Africans, as Maran claimed she was. More research clearly needs to be done on the important issue of the reception of Cousturier's work. She was, however, a known figure in the Parisian art world, and her writings were known by Black intellectuals, *négrophiles*, and colonial apologists. Beyond these circles, I am unsure who knew of her work, though John Charpentier claimed that Cousturier had attracted only the attention of elites, Mercure de France, 1 septembre 1925, 479. Perhaps, but her books, Fatou and Soumaré, did go through at least five printings in their first year of publication.

[35]Maran, "The Harriet Beecher Stowe of France," 229.

[36]Charpentier, Mercure de France, 479.

[37]La Race nègre, juin 1927.

[38]Léon Werth, "Chroniques," Europe, 15 août 1925, 483.

[39]Ibid., 484.

CHAPTER 8

ANDRE GIDE IN AFRICA: DISILLUSION AND COMMITMENT

Moins le blanc est intelligent, plus le noir lui paraît bête.[1]

Just when Cousturier's works were being published, André Gide (1869-1951) was walking off the steamship *Asie* in Dakar, French West Africa, 26 July 1925. Although this would only be a port call, it was Gide's first taste of Black Africa, and he relished its ethno-erotic potential: "*Joie de se trouver parmi des nègres*," he gushed.[2] Gide, a lover of travel, was ready for escape and adventure. He had been working feverishly, as he was wont to do. He had recently published Corydon, his defense of pederasty, and he had just sent Les Faux- Monnayeurs to the publishers. Although Gide's popularity was high, his critics were numerous and vocal. Indeed, he was personally blamed for corrupting the morals of the post-war generation of Frenchmen. The time was clearly ripe for the fifty-five year old Gide to take an extended trip. He had his appendix removed, sold some four hundred personally inscribed items from his library, namely by those who had attacked Corydon, and then took off to Africa with his young friend, Marc Allégret. Gide spent ten months among the *nègres* of l'Afrique Equatoriale Française. With Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1902) as his muse, which he read four times on his trip, Gide went on expedition in the Oubangui-Shari, trekked up to Lake Tchad, and came out through Cameroun, finally leaving Africa 14 May 1926. On expedition, Gide kept a journal that was published in two volumes, Voyage au Congo (1927) and Le Retour du Tchad (1928). His writings were not only reflections of himself as a traveler, but also full of rich and precise descriptions of the land and people of equatorial Africa. These works were noteworthy when published. In fact, they were a *cause*

célèbre and are even in print today. Because of his political engagement on behalf of *indigènes* against colonial concessionary companies, Gide has been rightfully lionized. Less well examined, however, was how Gide lent first-hand credibility to many dominant representations of the African landscape and the *nègre*. While he opened a space for a new representation of the African male, he also reconciled colonialism with humanitarian republicanism, bolstering French ambivalence to the *nègre* if not to France's mission in Africa.

From a young age, Gide had imagined Africa, or more precisely, North Africa, to be an exotic, Oriental world; later, as a young man, he eroticized it in thought and experience. Gide's Oriental fantasies began when he was just a boy. Like many bourgeois Frenchmen, he was exposed to exoticism in literature. He remembered fondly his father reading to him such adventures as the Odyssey and the Mille et une nuits, but his puritanical mother put an end to such frivolousness after his father died, when Gide was just eleven.[3] A little over a decade later, Paul Laurens, son of the painter and a painter himself, won a travel scholarship and invited Gide to accompany him to Algeria. Gide agreed to the journey without hesitation. He had recently published Les Cahiers d'André Walter (1891), an expression of pure spiritual love, and the real-life object of his ethereal love, Madeleine Rondeaux, had just rejected his first marriage proposal. Furthermore, Paris literary society was stifling him. He was ready to revitalize his life and, not insignificantly, experience for the first time physical love: both Gide and Laurens resolved to lose their virginity in North Africa.

Neither of the young men would be disappointed. Leaving his Bible behind, Gide headed off for a truly emancipatory trip. It did not take long for Laurens to find the lovely Mériem, a sixteen year old Ouled Naïl girl ostensibly

earning money for her dowry through prostitution. Sharing her charms, both Gide and Laurens lost their virginity to her at the Hôtel de l'Oasis in Biskra, the former home of the Pères Blanches. Gide enjoyed further good fortune, though perhaps of a less expected nature. He had his first homosexual encounter with a young Arab boy in the dunes. Not long after all this, Gide caught a respiratory ailment, and his mother fetched him before he could have any further sexual experiences. Although his first trip was cut short, Africa would continue to assume a large role in Gide's real life as well as his fantasy life. In 1895, when Gide was still just twenty-five, he returned to Algeria for escape, renewal, and more erotic adventure. Again, he was not disappointed. Shortly after arriving, he met by chance his friend Oscar Wilde. Wilde cruised the cafés with Gide, and each found a lovely boy for the evening. On this trip, Gide realized that he was truly a homosexual. Abandoning himself to his growing physical passions, Gide let Africa be the site to realize his fantasies. Over the years, Gide returned again and again to North Africa not just for his sensual needs, which he soon met in the hexagon as well, but for an escape from civilization. The people, oases, and desert never failed to renew Gide, as contact with the exotic was supposed to do. It was this construction of Africa as an Oriental fantasy world, a common metropolitan fiction, that Gide brought with him to the equatorial forests in 1925.

At this time, Black Africa was unknown to him. There is no reason to think, however, that Gide considered it much differently than North Africa: an eroticized Eden where there was natural liberty and freedom from sin. His desire to visit the land was long-standing. Élie Allégret, Marc Allégret's father and Gide's own spiritual mentor when he was young, went to Africa as a missionary when Gide was about twenty years old, the very age Gide claimed he first desired to make a voyage. Closer to his own time of departure, Gide

left for Black Africa when *négrophilisme* was popular in Paris. Marc Allégret's journal indicated that Gide visited Paul Guillaume's art nègre exhibit in May 1919.[4] A few years later, Gide became friendly with René Maran. Even more directly, Marcel de Coppet, Roger Martin du Gard's future son-in-law, was a colonial official stationed in equatorial Africa in 1924. He wanted writers to visit him and piqued Gide's interest in a trip. Once Gide finished Les Faux-Monnayeurs and Marc Allégret sat for his exams at Sciences-Po, the two were free to travel.

They sought ethno-erotic and artistic fulfillment, although they also had, paradoxically, official government pretensions on their journey. Gide traveled for renewal and to experience the unlimited potential of primitive nature--flora, fauna, and man. Allégret traveled as Gide's secretary, organizing the logistics of the trip, but he was also in quest of exoticism and eroticism and took the opportunity in Africa to realize himself as a visual artist. Allégret took many photographs of Africa which were collected in a book, and he made a documentary film of their trip, released in 1927 as Voyage au Congo. In addition, Allégret kept a journal, like Gide, which was only recently published, and notes from his travelogue formed the basis of an ethnographic study of the Massa people he published in Le Monde colonial illustré in 1927.[5] In fact, Gide was also supposed to write a few ethnographic reports for the Minister of Colonies. In June 1925, the Minister granted Gide, on Gide's request, an official *mission*. The *mission* did not make available to Gide any financial assistance, but it provided him with administrative support procuring porters, food, and lodging in Africa.[6] Finally, the *mission* provided Gide with some official power to supplement what he innately had as a white metropolitan--power he would exercise in the colonies, albeit as much against the white man as the Black man.

The Africa Gide knew, one of deserts and oases, was structured to reflect his imagination. Equatorial Africa, conversely, would be problematic for Gide: he searched for an ideal he could not appropriate. From the start of his trip, Gide was smitten by Africa, but his initial emotions were hard to sustain. At Brazzaville, he stated,

> *tout m'y charmait d'abord: la nouveauté du climat, de la lumière, des feuillages, des parfums, du chant des oiseaux, et de moi-même aussi parmi cela, de sorte que par excès d'étonnement, je ne trouvais plus rien à dire... Puis, passé la première surprise, je ne trouve plus aucun plaisir à parler de ce que déjà je voudrais quitter.*[7]

Tainted by civilization, Brazzaville disappointed Gide. Although beautiful butterflies, curious termitaries, and lovely flowers continuously surprised and delighted Gide, the landscape as a whole failed to meet his desires. Near Bolombo, early in the trip, Gide took a stroll in a forest that disappointed him: "*Si intéressante que soit cette circulation parmi les végétaux inconnus, il faut bien avouer que cette forêt me déçoit. J'espère trouver mieux ailleurs.*"[8] Gide was searching for mystery and alterity. He exalted his first contact with the landscape but could not easily appropriate what was real from what he desired to see. In the forest near Bangui he realized that his imagination was as powerful as what he was experiencing:

> *Ma représentation imaginaire de ce pays était si vive (je veux dire que je me l'imaginais si fortement) que je doute si, plus tard, cette fausse image ne luttera pas contre le souvenir et si je reverrai Bangui, par exemple, comme il est vraiment, ou comme je me figurais d'abord qu'il était.*[9]

The imaginary was central to how the metropolitan in the 1920s experienced the truly exotic: *l'Afrique* or *le vrai nègre.*

The disjuncture between the imaginary and real was experienced, in part, in terms of monotony. Simply put, Africa was often boring. Gide could not differentiate its singularity from its uniformity and that led to ennui in the forest:

"*L'interminable forêt met à l'épreuve notre inépuisable patience.... Forêt des plus monotones, et très peu exotique d'aspect.*"[10] Gide could be surprised by natural beauty, but more often he found nothing particularly intriguing about equatorial Africa. And yet he realized his lack of appreciation of the landscape reflected his own inability to perceive distinctions in the forests.

> *L'absence d'individualité, d'individualisation, l'impossibilité d'arriver à une différenciation, qui m'assombrissaient tant au début de mon voyage.... La contrée est mouvementée, larges plis de terrain, etc., -- mais pourquoi chercherais-je à atteindre ce point plutôt que tout autre? Tout est uniforme...*[11]

He did not find just the landscape uniform; the people and architecture were as well. Although Gide claimed that he developed the ability to differentiate in Africa, he rarely used this new capacity. In fact, he resisted differentiation and the oceanic potential in Africa. Rather Gide rapidly moved from one sensation to the next, as Mariana Torgovnick recently argued, never stopping to let himself merge with manifestations of the oceanic that he was able to identify.[12] His inability to embrace the landscape, as Cousturier learned to do, was rooted, in part, in his metropolitan concept of natural beauty, defined in terms of the standard, France. Near Kuigoré, for example, Gide discovered lovely granite rock outcroppings. Rather than appreciating them as they were, he related them to French landscapes: "*Chaque fois que le paysage se forme, se limite et tente de s'organiser un peu, il évoque en mon esprit quelque coin de France; mais le paysage de France est toujours mieux construit, mieux dessiné et d'une plus particulière élégance.*"[13] It could not have been otherwise. Civilization defined beauty: moral, intellectual, and natural. Africa, like the African, was an object to define and appreciate the self: France and the French.

It was common for travelers through Africa to cast an erotic gaze on the Other. Gide was one of the first to express an openly homo-erotic gaze, and

with it, the *indigène* woman was represented less sexually than disparagingly. Gide considered a few women beautiful. The Moundang women, he discovered, were ordinarily naked, and "*quelques-unes sont très belles.*"[14] Stated so matter of factly, Gide, like Cousturier, did not sexualize the Black woman. Nevertheless, he still defined women by their sexual organs, appearance, and lack of shame in their nudity. When traveling past Bambari by automobile, *indigènes*, especially women, greeted Gide. They ran up to his car, "*le sexe ras, parfois caché par un bouquet de feuilles, dont la tige, ramenée en arrière et pincée entre les fesses est rattachée à la ceinture, puis retombe ou se dresse en formant une sorte de queue ridicule.*"[15] Shorn of her erotic potential, Gide's African woman was ridiculed as animal-like in attire, if not look. Indeed, even when he conceived of one being attractive with a classical aesthetic, he subverted his praise, denigrating the Black breast. Dressed in leaves, a woman was described as "*très Eve, 'éternel féminin;' elle est belle, si l'on accepte les seins tombants.*"[16] Gide was not interested in women sexually, but he was an aesthete who valorized only those breasts (and women) that conformed to his imagination of Eve's. Finally, women were represented as pathetic creatures, especially when they were old and/or were dancing. Resting at a small fishing village a few kilometers before Nola, Gide watched some women dance, not out of interest but "*par politesse, car elles sont vieilles et hideuses.*"[17] Older women, he noted, were the most frenzied in their dancing: "*Les plus vieilles sont les plus forcenées; et ce gigotement saugrenu des dames mûres est assez pénible.*"[18] Colonial literature represented *indigène* women typically as sexualized beings or animalized beasts of burden.[19] Gide rejected both categorizations, and though he equivocated, his dominant representation for *indigène* women was pathetic, even ridiculous.

Gide described the African male altogether differently from the female. He eroticized and aestheticized, but did not animalize, the male *indigène*. Gide took first notice of the *indigène* working. He was described as athletic and admirable, even superb. Gide's homo-eroticism found full expression when he voyeuristically watched his sculptured boatmen work:

> *Lyrisme des pagayeurs, au dangereux franchissement de la barre... À chaque enfoncement dans le flot, la tige de la pagaie prend appui sur la cuisse nue. Beauté sauvage de ce chant semi-triste; allégresse musculaire; enthousiasme farouche. À trois reprises la chaloupe se cabre, à demi dressée hors du flot; et lorsqu'elle retombe un énorme paquet d'eau vous inonde...*[20]

The sensual enthusiasm was all Gide's: he eroticized not just the male but the male working--a positive colonial image. More often Gide's sexualized male was soft, sensual, and approached a classical aesthetic, a break with the dominant representation in literature which, as Ada Martinkus-Zemp has demonstrated, represented the male as sexualized and animalized, not humanized, especially after adolescence.[21] When Adoum, Gide's *boy*, fell ill with boils on his thighs, for example, Gide was distraught with how illness disfigured him: "*Douloureux spectacle de ce beau corps, aux lignes si pures, si jeune encore, tout abîmé flétri déshonoré par ces hideuses plaies.*"[22] Gide's loving gaze tended towards youthful males, and he found plenty of them in Africa. When Gide entered a village, it was common for him to be met by a chief's entourage, which often included the chief's sons, and Gide singled them out:

> *Comme de coutume je choisis, dans le cortège formé pour fêter notre entrée dans le village, un préféré sur lequel je m'appuie, ou qui marche à mon côté en me donnant la main. Il se trouve souvent que c'est le fils du chef, ce qui est d'un excellent effet. Celui-ci est particulièrement beau, svelte, élégant et fait penser à la Sisina de Baudelaire.*[23]

Gide was a pederast who exploited some *indigènes* sexually in the name of experiencing pure physical love.[24] More important culturally was that Gide's

sexual preferences and aesthetic humanism allowed him to conceive of his favorite *nègres* in universal terms. His homo-erotic gaze and practices, though clearly not appealing to all in the metropole in the 1920s, opened up a new space for representing the Black male, one most ennobling for its classic sensuality rather than sexuality. As the existence of the Vénus noire granted to the Black woman the privilege of beauty (as seen in the following chapter), so Gide's representation of the Black male granted to the African the dignity of beauty.

Gide was more traditional in how he perceived the *indigène* intellectually and culturally: he accepted the construction of the *grand enfant*. Gide was a profoundly humane individual. He believed that the *indigène* deserved to be treated well and, in response, would be noble. Uncivilized African behavior was a result of how the metropolitan treated the *indigène*. "*L'on peint le peuple noir comme indolent, paresseux, sans besoins, sans désirs. Mais je crois volontiers que l'état d'asservissement et la profonde misère dans laquelle ces gens restent plongés, expliquent trop souvent leur apathie.*"[25] Gide did not dispute that *indigènes* appeared lazy, but he claimed this was a result of the colonial situation. *Indigènes* had no reason to be industrious: what they earned was taken away in taxes, and only inferior consumer goods were available to them. The disagreeable qualities of the *indigène* were, then, not innate. As proof, Gide treated his porters well, and they responded by acting in a civilized manner:

> *Nos boys sont d'une obligeance, d'une prévenance, d'un zèle au-dessus de tout éloge... Je continue de croire, et crois de plus en plus, que la plupart des défauts que l'on entend reprocher continuellement aux domestiques de ce pays, vient surtout de la manière dont on les traite, dont on leur parle. Nous n'avons qu'à nous féliciter des nôtres--à qui nous n'avons jamais parlé qu'avec douceur...*[26]

Although Gide represented the *indigène* with much dignity, he was really developing a position of humane paternalism. Indeed, he congratulated himself for his efficacious behavior towards the *indigène*, and he believed that his paternalism created a loving reciprocal relationship: "*Il s'établit, entre nos gens et nous, une confiance et une cordialité réciproques, et tous, sans exception aucune, se montrent jusqu'à présent aussi attentionnés pour nous, que nous affectons d'être envers eux.*"[27] Gide's humanism rejected the myth of the innately depraved *nègre* only to replace it with the one of the *grand enfant*, the dominant representation in France after the Great War.

Gide's *grand enfant* was malleable but not infinitely perfectible, especially since the metropolitan continuously degraded him. The *indigène*, Gide suggested, had an attenuated free will and limited capacities. Metropolitans, he argued, got the *nègres* they deserved: "*Prodigieusement malléables, les nègres deviennent le plus souvent ce que l'on croit qu'ils sont--ou ce que l'on souhaite, ou que l'on craint qu'ils soient.*"[28] Rather, it was the representation of the *nègre*, not the real Black African that expressed the prejudices, desires, and fears in the French social imagination. Gide's own contradictory prejudices and desires were expressed and resolved in representations that maligned the *nègre*. Gide wanted to improve his *nègres*, but he suggested that they simply did not have the cognitive capacity to be perfected, like the civilized French. Gide gave Adoum, his *boy*, reading lessons. Adoum made consistent progress under Gide's tutelage, despite his inherently thick head:

> *De quelle sottise, le plus souvent, le blanc fait preuve, quand il s'indigne de la stupidité des noirs! Je ne les crois pourtant capables, que d'un très petit développement, le cerveau gourd et stagnant le plus souvent dans une nuit épaisse--mais combien de fois le blanc semble prendre à tâche de les y enfoncer!*[29]

Whites, Gide criticized, were unable to raise up the *indigènes* intellectually. On his own, however, the *indigène* did not fare well: he did not have the capacity for anything but the slightest development. And Gide knew: Gide improved his *boy* but could not perfect him--in just his few months of trying.

Gide, like Lucie Cousturier, was deeply troubled by the use of *tipoyes* and porters. In fact, the *tipoye* posed a uniquely Gidean, perhaps even Protestant, problem. Early in his trip, Gide claimed that he scarcely used the *tipoye*, out of love of walking and to spare his *tipoyeurs*. Even when he used the device, Gide was not comfortable--physically or morally. On a difficult stage, he stated, "*je prends de plus en plus en horreur le tipoye, où l'on est inconfortablement secoué et où je ne puis perdre un instant le sentiment de l'effort des porteurs.*"[30] Nevertheless, it was very hot in Equatorial Africa, and Gide was fifty-five years old, traveling numerous kilometers each day, and did not like to sweat.[31] Consequently, he used his *tipoye* but complained that it was fatiguing--for him. "*Rien de plus lassant que ce mode de locomotion, lorsque les tipoyeurs ne sont pas supérieurement dressés. C'est un menu trot qui secoue comme celui d'un mauvais cheval. Impossible de lire.*"[32] Therein lay the functional problem of the *tipoye*: it was difficult to read or write in it, as was the proper way to travel by *tipoye*, especially when one found the landscape monotonous.[33] The *tipoye* for Gide was a necessary evil which often interfered with his incessant literary work, which he took with him and persued, even in the exotic equatorial forest.

More significantly, human portage lent itself to examining one's relationship to power in the colonial matrix. Gide, unlike Cousturier, never questioned his power. He asserted it as a humane French Republican, paternalistically to *indigènes* and righteously to metropolitans. Although

portage was a troublesome institution that continuously weighed on him, he did not hesitate to use it. In fact, he trekked with as many as eighty porters despite having an acute socio-political understanding of the institution: "*Vous allez faire une trentaine de kilomètres par jour, avec 20 ou 25 kilos sur la tête... et ceci à raison de 1,25 F par jour, nourriture à vos frais--rein pour le retour! Esclavage provisoire, je le veux bien; mais esclavage tout de même.*"[34] Gide was a good, paternal, boss--or should one say master, *provisoire tout de même.* Indeed, this was not lost on Gide himself. After a long, hot stage, when Gide had accessed his *tipoye* and sipped ice tea, his porters thanked their good boss: "*'Merci, Gouverneur.'--Pas une récrimination, pas une plainte. Un bon sourire, en réponse à nos quelques paroles affables lorsque nous passons près d'eux. Ces gens sont admirables.*"[35] Gide inspired love, he suggested, not just because he treated his porters humanely, but because he ensured that they were fed and paid appropriately, and he was willing to use his power as a white for their well-being. At Niko, Gide needed to purchase manioc to feed his porters. When the local chief would not sell any to him, Gide took decisive action:

> *Force a été de perquisitionner dans les cases. Nous avons néanmoins payé cet homme stupide et buté, lui laissant entendre que nous lui eussions donné le double, s'il avait apporté de lui-même et de bonne grâce cette nourriture dont nos porteurs avaient besoin... C'est la première fois qu'il nous arrive de devoir faire acte d'autorité.*[36]

Gide accepted the colonial matrix and the authority it gave to him as a metropolitan. What made Gide's stance unique was that within the colonial structure he defined a moral economy, imposed it on *indigènes*, and thrust it upon whites, ultimately changing French colonial policies but not necessarily how the French viewed the African.[37]

The moral economy that Gide defined was predicated upon his belief that he as a white Frenchman had both the right and the power to define one.

Gide did not realize these sentiments in advance of his journey. On the steamship to Africa, he stated that he did not know the purpose of his trip. Once in French Equatorial Africa, the suffering and injustice he witnessed would, he claimed, "*devenir le principal intérêt de mon voyage, et que je trouverais dans leur étude ma raison d'être dans ce pays. Ce qu'en face d'elles je sentais alors, c'est surtout mon incompétence. Mais j'allais m'instruisant.*"[38] Gide was a fast learner, learning more about his own position in the colonial matrix than the *indigène*'s. Gide readily assumed the role of the white metropolitan. He wore his colonial outfit and casque colonial and frequently used the *tipoye*, signifiers of power. He used his newly realized power as a roving official, investigating and even, on occasion, adjudicating colonial abuses. Significantly, as he asserted power, Gide grew to understand the racial and cultural basis of his identity. Toward the end of his trip, Gide met the Sultan Reï Bouba with ceremonial flourish: "*Nous descendons de cheval et, très soucieux de représenter de notre mieux la France, la civilisation, la race blanche, nous avançons lentement, dignement, majestueusement, vers la main tendue du sultan...*"[39] Opposite the *nègre*, Gide, the metropolitan, was not simply an individual; he was also a symbol and representative of white men and civilization, both of which were linked, making the privilege of civilization exclusive. Furthermore, the civilized French demanded the dignity befitting of their status. Gide had cordial relations with the Reï Bouba, but when Gide left one of their meetings and the *indigène* sultan did not stand, Gide took note of this slight.

> *Ce à quoi je n'attacherais pas d'importance, si je n'étais averti du danger qu'il y a de le laisser trop se gonfler.... mais me retrouvant avec l'interprète (Hamandjoda) je laisse entendre à ce dernier que je n'ignore pas ce qui s'est passé ce jour-là, et Marc, un peu plus tard, le persuade qu'il est décent que le sultan vienne me rendre ma visite.*[40]

Once the *indigène* was slightly humbled, all was set well again--civilization was acknowledged as supreme. But the nature of that civilization, the question of who the French were or at least who they were in relation to the *indigène*, needed to be redefined, and this was expressed in Gide's courageous and dogged campaign against the colonial concessionary companies, not colonialism itself.

The Reception to Voyage au Congo

The publication of Gide's Voyage au Congo in June 1927 was an immediate *cause célèbre*. But unlike his other works that were attacked for their moral ambiguity, Gide's *carnets* of his trip were the subject of a political debate. In fact, it was from his voyage and the political debate it precipitated that many date Gide's commitment to politically engaged literature.[41]

At the center of the reception of the Voyage au Congo was Gide's representation of the horrific experience of *indigènes* under the rule of the colonial concessionary companies, especially the Compagnie Forestière Sangha-Oubangui (C.F.S.O.). The rubber harvest under the C.F.S.O. was particularly brutal. Villages were immiserated and *indigènes* were frequently punished for failing either to harvest the requisitioned rubber or to obey the company's dictates. This became an especially emotive issue for Gide when he learned of the recent crimes that a Mr. Pacha, the administrator of Boda, committed against *indigènes*. Just a week before Gide reached Boda, Pacha retaliated against *indigènes* who, in the neighboring village of Bodembéré, refused to move their village away from their crops and on to the road. Pacha's sergeant, Yemba, randomly requisitioned a number of men from the surrounding villages and publicly shot them at Bodembéré. Women were then slashed with machetes, and five children were burned alive. Just prior to this

massacre, Pacha punished *indigènes* at Bambio for failing to bring in rubber the month before. He forced ten to twenty rubber gatherers to walk around and around the C.F.S.O. factory carrying a heavy beam in the hot sun. This "*bal*" lasted all day, and Pacha and a C.F.S.O. agent presided over the punishment, including the flogging of the condemned and the death of one of them. All of this took place before the eyes of the village. These events transformed Gide:

> *Le 'bal' de Bambio hante ma nuit. Il ne me suffit pas de me dire, comme l'on fait souvent, que les indigènes étaient plus malheureux encore avant l'occupation des Français. Nous avons assumé des responsabilités envers eux auxquelles nous n'avons pas le droit de nous soustraire. Désormais, une immense plainte m'habite; je sais des choses dont je ne puis pas prendre mon parti. Quel démon m'a poussé en Afrique? Qu'allais-je donc chercher dans ce pays? J'étais tranquille. À présent je sais; je dois parler.*[42]

Speak, he did, and his voice was heard, as was that of his supporters and detractors.

To publicize his political campaign against the concessionary companies, Gide had his thoughts published in three main venues. First, in November 1926, even before his book came out, Gide exposed colonial abuses in the Nouvelle Revue Française. He followed this with four months of excerpts from his *carnets*. Léon Blum, editor of Le Populaire, a socialist paper, brought Gide's accusations to a wider audience with two articles synthesizing Gide's position on the concessionary companies on 5 and 7 July 1927. Finally, on 15 October 1927 Gide wrote a long article for the Revue de Paris describing colonial abuses and accusing the companies of harming, not civilizing, the *indigène*. In this article, Gide made a forceful and public cry to end the reign of the concessionary companies.

With the publication of the Revue de Paris article, political polemics dominated the reception of Gide's work, and no one examined his representations of Africa and the *nègre*, with one notable exception. Paul

Souday, the influential literary critic of the pro-colonialist Le Temps, published an ambivalent review of Voyage au Congo before the work truly became a political *cause célèbre*. In fact, Souday wondered why the book was even written, implying that it was, or rather should be, inconsequential. Nevertheless, Gide's travelogue read agreeably, albeit the descriptions of Africa were dry. Gide was no romantic, Souday claimed, and thus one would be better served reading Pierre Loti, the great writer of exotic novels. Most significantly, Souday opted out of discussing the book politically: "*M. Gide s'y déclare négrophile jusqu'à un certain point. Il dénonce des exactions et des atrocités coloniales. Là-dessus, je manque de compétence. En principe, M. Gide a certes bien raison de vouloir qu'on traite les nègres avec humanité.*"[43] In principle, all peoples deserved to be treated with humanity. In practice, however, Souday implied a more equivocal position: the *nègre* had limited intellectual capabilities and the aptitude not to use liberty wisely. In short, Souday felt this was a work of little merit, save for Gide's musings about literature while on expedition.

In response to Le Retour de Tchad, Souday highlighted Gide's negative representations of Africa and the *nègre*. Souday claimed he too loved to travel but not to Africa: "*j'aime les pays historiques, et où il y a quelque chose à voir. Il n'y a rien à voir en Afrique centrale. On s'en doutait, et cela résulte nettement des carnets de route d'André Gide...*"[44] The Africa Souday discovered in Gide was not worthy of metropolitan attention. The landscape was monotonous and the climate was horrid and unhealthy. What's more, one did not even see animals different than what could be seen at the Jardin des Plantes. Tam-tams were hideous as was the *indigène* himself. After finding in Gide only negative representations of the *nègre*, Souday expressed disbelief in Gide's *négrophilisme*:

> *Cependant Gide s'extasie sur les bons nègres. Que de qualités chez ses porteurs! Doux, dévoués, fidèles, en tous points délicieux pourvu qu'on les traite gentiment. C'est bien possible. Il note pourtant quelques défauts: l'imprévoyance, la manie du jeu, la bêtise, mais, corrige-t-il naturelle. Allons! La civilisation a ses inconvénients, mais vaut mieux que cet état de nature.*[45]

Although Souday was a hostile partisan critic of Gide, his reading of the *carnets* was not inaccurate: Souday read in Gide only the negative representations of the *nègre* and Africa that were current in literary exoticism--and in Gide. Since virtually all other reviews of Gide's voyage addressed his political battle, not his exoticism, issues concerning republican ideals were effectively shorn from cultural representations of the *nègre*.

The Chamber of Deputies even furthered the political reception to Gide's work. On 7 July 1927, Georges Nouelle, a socialist, cited Gide's Nouvelle Revue Française articles to demand that the Minister of Colonies respond to the abuses that were detailed. Nouelle claimed that if there was no forthcoming action, he would "*faire appel à l'opinion publique, à l'opinion de tous les peuples civilisés.*"[46] A few critics echoed Nouelle's sentiments, but not before Henry Fontanier, socialist from Cantal, continued the assault on the Minister of Colonies, four months later. On 23 November 1927, Fontanier read passages from Voyage au Congo, attacked both the system of portage and the concessionary companies, and demanded that conditions for *indigène* workers be ameliorated. Nouelle joined the debate and again framed the issue in terms of French civilization. "*Il faut*," he stated, "*que l'on puisse savoir si, dans nos possessions d'outre-mer, la France de la Révolution et des Droits de l'homme accomplit auprès des populations indigènes la mission éducatrice et civilisatrice qui doit être la sienne.*"[47] French national ideals would, however, take second place to politics when applied to the *indigène*. The Minister of Colonies ostensibly responded favorably to the socialists. He stated that the companies

would not be allowed to renew their concessions which were due to expire in 1929. It was, however, a hollow victory: for the C.F.S.O., because of a recent reorganization, had already had its concession extended to 1935.

Journals also focused on the political ramifications of Gide's work.[48] Foreshadowing the parliamentary debate by a few weeks, the pro-colonial Mercure de France expressed concern but not outright hostility to Gide's campaign. Raising issues, the journal suggested, would lead to progress: "*le Voyage au Congo est, et sera de plus en plus, le centre d'âpres discussions et, comme tel, marque dans le mouvement des idées sur le terrain colonial.*"[49] Georges Altman, the critic for the Communist paper, L'Humanité, praised Gide for his sincerity and message, though he claimed L'Humanité had been saying for some time what Gide only recently discovered. Furthermore, Altman took the opportunity in his review to attack the colonial regime and whites:

> *Mais, de ces pages, il s'élève comme une sorte de désespérance et de lourde fatigue: au Congo et au Tchad, les saisons, les éléments, la nature entière est dure à ceux qui vivent, aux indigènes. Mais plus dure peut-être que la rage du soleil et des pluies, l'oppression des blancs, porteurs de corruption et de mort.*[50]

Pierre Humbourg, critic for Les Nouvelles littéraires, also claimed Gide's message was an old one, but he praised Gide's work and the effect it had especially in relation to René Maran's 1921 Batouala, which he said was an act of vengeance and therefore was ineffective. Perhaps, though, Humbourg was just expressing a racial bias, preferring white rather than Black exoticism.[51] Pierre Mille made more explicit than Humbourg the relationship between political-cultural debates and artistry. He claimed that Gide repeated old saws about the colonial regime but did so better than others: "*Il la dit seulement avec plus de talent; et c'est sans doute le retentissement de ce talent qu'on a craint.*"[52]

Talent or not, the critics of Europe did not just want colonial issues aired or to hear a debate about artistry, they demanded action. Philippe Soupault, himself a *négrophile*, advocated on behalf of Gide. Soupault argued that committed literature demanded a public response: "*nous ne devons pas laisser passer le livre de M. Gide sans nous associer à ces protestations.*"[53] Soupault stated that Gide's work must not be met with indifference. What was at stake was not just the treatment of *indigènes* but an ideal: liberty. "*Il faut donc que ce livre soit lu et médité par ceux qui estiment que la liberté n'est pas un mot et qui, en leur âme et conscience, refusent de se désintéresser de ce qui est humain.*"[54] Positions were clearly demarcated in this political battle, and it was easy to choose sides. No one in the 1920s, however, appeared to examine what *liberté*, *égalité*, or *fraternité* would mean for *indigènes* in the cultural arena, and Gide's own views, ambiguous as they were, were not easily assimilable by minds already set.

What was lost in the political response to Gide's campaign against the colonial concessionary companies and the abuses they committed was the larger cultural impact that Gide had on the representation, reception and understanding of the *nègre* in the 1920s, including Marc Allégret's photographic documentation of their trip. Central to the organization and success of the trip was Marc Allégret, Gide's friend. Allégret was technically Gide's secretary, but he had his own interests in Africa: he made both a photographic record of the trip and an ethnographic film. Allégret's cultural productions were largely overlooked in the heat of Gide's political battles, but they open a lens on the two travelers' understanding of the *indigène*.

Allégret's photographs, Daniel Durosay has recently argued, corresponded to his and Gide's fantasy of Africa.[55] Allégret took some 700

photographs, but only 64 of them were published in Gide's 1929 edition of Voyage au Congo. The photographs that were selected and published were not traditional ethnographic shots: they did not show *indigènes* at work or women with plates or illness or a sense of the misery in Africa one gets in Gide's writings. Rather, they were of young nude women with firm breasts representing natural eroticism and pure sentiments of love. Allégret's Africa was edenic, aestheticized and sensual.[56] His portraits of women, Durosay persuasively concluded, represented the *indigène* with a grace and elegance of form that asked the European not to view the *indigène* as grotesque or as a pornographic subject. Beauty was given to the Black body. This was also true of the film Allégret turned: Voyage au Congo: Scènes de la vie indigène, en Afrique équatoriale, rapportées par André Gide et Marc Allégret. This was not a typical French ethnographic and adventure film, like La Croisière noire, that pandered to the metropolitan's sense of the curious, or even of the grotesque. Allégret's film was of a more aestheticized exoticism, focusing on the body, "*la beauté des attitudes, les corps magnifiques des noirs*"[57] Although Gide may have broken few paradigms in his writings, his sense of the body and Allégret's visual representations of it contributed to a humanizing of the *nègre* while still eroticizing him and her. Allégret's vision was representative of a new *mentalité* in France and reached a diverse albeit probably limited audience in the 1920s. His photographs adorned Gide's Voyage au Congo only after 1929, and after its opening at the Vieux-Colombier on 8 July 1927, his film ran for two months in Paris, 15 July until 15 September, at Le Pavillon but with little comment from reviewers.[58]

Conclusion

The Great War and the 1920s in many ways brought the first encounter in popular culture between the metropolitan French and the Black African. In these encounters reality and fantasy melded together, one inseparable from the other, generating paradoxical responses and representations of the Black Other. Voyages to Africa, where reality and fantasy could have been resolved but were not, profoundly impacted the metropolitan, often in unexpected ways. Africa was available to Gide, as it was to all metropolitans, but unlike Cousturier, Gide never merged with the land or people. The boundaries of his cultural and spiritual self were inviolable. But Africa was still transformative to him: in the Congo, Gide discovered racial power and his political self. Unfortunately, in the 1920s the tension between republican ideals, including colonial ones, and cultural beliefs constrained both the representation of the Black African and, no less important, the universal ideals that the metropolitan in principle would extend to the *indigène*. Gide, like Cousturier, extended his fraternity, but whether in the political arena or cultural arenas, neither Gide nor Cousturier ever coupled their fraternity with the *indigène* with liberty and equality. The Black African, therefore, could never be anything but the Other, and thus the *nègre* would remain vulnerable to further exotification, as evident by the reception of the Croisière noire.

Endnotes

[1]André Gide, Voyage au Congo suivi de Le Retour du Tchad, carnets de route (Paris: Editions Galimard, 1927 et 1928), 27. All citations to the Voyage au Congo and Le Retour du Tchad will be in the double volume Galimard edition that has continuous pagination.

[2]Gide, Voyage, 15.

[3]For biographical information on Gide, see Justin O'Brien, Portrait of André Gide: A Critical Biography (New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1953), George D. Painter, André Gide: A Critical Biography (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968)

[4]An excellent discussion of Gide's desire to go to the Congo and the planning that it involved can be found in Daniel Durosay, Introduction to Carnets du Congo, Voyage avec André Gide, by Marc Allégret (Paris: C.N.R.S. Editions, 1993).

[5]See Marc Allégret, "Sous le soleil des Tropiques," Le Monde colonial Illustré, no. 45, mai 1927, 107.

[6]See Durosay, Introduction to Carnets, 25. The full text of Gide's mission should be at the Archives nationale section Outre-mer. I have not had the opportunity to access it.

[7]Gide, Voyage, 30.

[8]Ibid., 46.

[9]Ibid., 95.

[10]Ibid., 114.

[11]Ibid., 195.

[12]For a fine, brief, albeit slightly sarcastic treatment of Gide's voyage, see Marianna Torgovnick, Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 23-42.

[13]Gide, Voyage, 193.

[14]Ibid., 420.

[15]Ibid., 73.

[16]Ibid., 134.

[17]Ibid., 126.

[18]Ibid., 119.

[19]For a discussion of how the African woman is portrayed in exotic literature, see Ada Martinkus-Zemp, Le Blanc et le Noir Essai d'une description de la vision du Noir par le Blanc dans la littérature française de l'entre-deux-guerres (Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1975), 181-211.

[20]Gide, Voyage, 22.

[21]See Martinkus-Zemp, Blanc et le noir, 43-74.

[22]Gide, Voyage, 178.

[23]Ibid., 191.

[24]For a recent discussion of Gide's homosexuality and how it affected his work and politics, see Michael Lucey, Gide's Bent: Sexuality, Politics, Writing (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[25]Gide, Voyage, 78.

[26]Ibid., 142.

[27]Ibid., 143.

[28]Ibid., 143.

[29]Ibid., 144.

[30]Ibid., 140-41.

[31]Torgovnick, Primitive Passions, 23-42 addresses Gide's attention to his body on the trip to the Congo and his dislike of sweating in the jungles.

[32]Gide, Voyage, 153-54.

[33]See Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (London and New York: 1992), 154.

[34]Gide, Voyage, 416.

[35]Ibid., 452.

[36]Ibid., 167-68.

[37]For the classic statement on a moral economy, see E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," chap. in Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Cuture (New York: The New Press, 1993), 185-258.

[38]Gide, Voyage, 31.

[39]Ibid., 438-39.

[40]Ibid., 443.

[41]Gide scholars have been interested in Gide's political engagement because after the Congo trip he publicly announced his support for communism and then after a trip to the Soviet Union he very publicly denounced Soviet communism. See O'Brien, Portrait of André Gide; Painter, André Gide; Lucey, Gide's Bent; Daniel Moutote, André Gide: L'Engagement (1926-1939) (Paris: C.D.U. et SEDES, 1991); and Jacqueline M. Chadourne, André Gide et l'Afrique: Le rôle de l'Afrique dans la vie et l'œuvre de l'écrivain (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1968).

[42]Gide, Voyage, 113.

[43]Paul Souday, "Les Livres," Le Temps, 7 juillet 1927.

[44]Paul Souday, "Les Livres," Le Temps, 19 avril 1928.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Journal Officiel. Débats Parlementaires. Chambre des Députés, 7 juillet 1927, 2395.

[47]Journal Officiel, 23 novembre 1927, 3182.

[48]The Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide (BAAG) collected a number of reviews of the 1928 edition of Le Retour du Tchad and Voyage au Congo in its three part series, "Le Dossier de press, de Voyage au Congo," BAAG XI (avril 1983): 239-249; BAAG XI, (juillet 1983): 425-429; BAAG XI (octobre 1983): 529-533. Unfortunately, there is no collection of reviews from 1927 when the Voyage au Congo was first published and sparked a political debate.

[49]Maurice Besson, "Questions coloniales," Mercure de France, 1 novembre 1927, 679.

[50]Georges Altman, "Les Livres," L'Humanité, 30 avril 1928, reprinted in BAAG XI (avril 1983): 246.

[51]Pierre Humbourg, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 28 avril 1928, reprinted in BAAG XI (avril 1983): 246-249.

[52]Pierre MIlle, L'Œuvre, 3 août 1928, reprinted in BAAG XI (octobre 1983): 531.

[53]Philippe Soupault, "Comptes Rendus," Europe 18 (15 octobre 1928): 266.

[54]Ibid., 267.

[55]Daniel Durosay argued that Allégret's artistry reflected both his and Gide's vision of the Black African. See Daniel Durosay, "Les Images du Voyage au Congo: L'Oeil d'Allégret," Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide XV (janvier 1987): 57-80. In addition, see Daniel Durosay, "Images et imaginaire dans le Voyage au Congo: Un filme et deux <<auteurs>>," Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide XVI (octobre 1988): 9-30.

[56]See Durosay, "Introduction."

[57]Pierre Leprohon, L'Exotisme et le cinéma (Paris: Les Editions J. Susse, 1945), 216. See also Marcel Oms, "L'Imaginaire colonial au cinéma," in Images et colonies, eds. Pascal Blanchard et Armelle Chatelier (Paris: ACHAC et SYROS, 1993), 103-107 and Durosay, Introduction to Carnets.

[58]See Durosay, "Images et imaginaire."

CHAPTER 9

LA CROISIERE NOIRE: HEROISM--IN A CITROEN!

On 2 March 1926 a detachment of *gardes municipaux*, at attention and in sartorial splendor, lined the monumental stairs of the Opera in Paris. It was to be a gala evening. Gaston Doumergue, President of the Republic, arrived with his *cortège*. Doumergue entered a full house of elegantly dressed patrons, many of whom were French officials and notables. Marshal Pétain, the hero of Verdun, was in the audience. Baron de Rothschild, the Director of the Beaux-Arts, the Director of the Museum of Natural History, ambassadors, counts, barons, and many other luminaries were also noticeable. Doumergue took his presidential box with his invited guests: Marshal Foch, André Citroën, and adventurer Georges-Marie Haardt. The orchestra, under the direction of Szyser, began to play, though not for a classical *spectacle*. Rather, all of Paris turned out for the premier showing of the exotic documentary film La Croisière noire, a lavish benefit for war widows.

La Croisière Noire, l'Expédition Citroën Centre-Afrique, was a daring automobile *raid* from Colomb-Béchar, Algeria, through central Africa, to Madagascar. Georges-Marie Haardt and Louis Audouin-Dubreuil led a team of eight *autochenilles* and 15 men 20,000 kilometers over eight months, 24 October 1924 to 26 June 1925. The expedition was sponsored by André Citroën and was a *mission* for the Minister of Colonies, the Geographic Society, the Museum of Natural History, and even the under secretary of aviation. More significantly for the general public, it was, perhaps, the first multimedia extravaganza in France. It generated numerous short ethnographic movies and became the subject of one feature-length film. Original music was even

composed for the film that included African songs scored for a western orchestra. In addition, it was the subject of numerous journal articles, one major book, and an art exhibition. Finally, artifacts from the *raid* were collected for ethnographic and zoological museums and exhibitions. The Croisière noire was not the only *raid* in the 1920s: there were many, but it was easily the most famous automobile expedition of its time. Its lasting importance had little to do with the almost meaninglessness of driving from Algeria to Madagascar. Rather, the *croisière* was a cultural expression of post-war French imaginings and pacific conquest, and it was especially significant for how it represented French identity, Africa and *indigènes* to the popular French public. The Croisière noire on film and in print effectively joined exoticism, heroism, and nationalistic pride to represent the *indigène* once again as the Other, primitive and sexualized.

The background to the expedition, as to so much in the 1920s, was the Great War. The war had been horrific, bloody, demoralizing, and tragic. For many young men, however, it was also a heroic experience, one where the boredom of effete bourgeois life could be extirpated on the battlefield. In the wake of mass death, mourning, an uneasy peace, and the return to bourgeois life, individual heroism needed to be redefined and relocated. Machines, which had been the agents of death and destruction, were now harnessed for pacific purposes. Lindbergh's 1927 solo Atlantic crossing was only the most famous of these interwar conquests of geography.[1] But there were also many French adventurers in the 1920s, especially in France's Empire, recently pacified by arms and ripe for peaceful conquest.

Adventurers in automobiles and airplanes gravitated to Africa not long after the war ended: the Sahara beckoned them. In fact, the first attempt to

cross part of the desert in an automobile dated to 1916. A year later, a Lieutenant Bellot had gone only 300 kilometers south of In Salah in the desert. Airplanes had even worse luck: the first attempted crossing ended in the death of the pilot, General Laperrine. Shortly after this tragedy, in February 1920, Commandant Vuillemin overcame the great expanse and crossed the desert in his airplane.[2] The automobile was technologically not yet ready for such a victory. Citroën then modified a truck with military technology, installing tank tractors, to realize his African fantasy. On 17 December 1922 the first Haardt-Audouin-Dubreuil expedition left Touggourt for Tombouctou in a dual rear axle *autochenille*. On 7 January 1923 they reached Tombouctou, the first automobile crossing of the Sahara. News of the exploit brought joy in France, and years later, L'Illustration was still effusive: Robert de Beauplan called it "*un grand événement de l'histoire africaine*."[3] Citroën thought so as well. The raid was recounted in the press and in a book and shown to the public in the aptly titled 1923 film, La Traversée du Sahara en auto-chenilles. This type of promotion and exoticism established a model for subsequent expeditions.

In 1924 and 1925 the French carried out seven automobile and three airplane *raids* across Africa to further national prestige, to sublimate ennui with individual acts of heroism, and to pursue the exotic. Henri de Kérillis, former combatant, aviator, and adventurer, asked, after one adventurer's death, if the *raids* were necessary. Indeed, he answered, they were. They were a new form of competition between countries. "*Dans ces conditions*," de Kérillis warned and queried, "*comment la France aurait-elle pu demeurer inactive, les ailes ployées, sans souffrir d'humiliation d'abord, sans perdre bien vite confiance en elle-même*?"[4] The French felt no loss of confidence: adventurers crossed the length and width of Africa, dutifully recording their exploits for a hungry public and carrying the French flag to the *indigène*. The Mission Tranin-Duverne in

1924-1925, for example, crossed Africa laterally, connecting the Atlantic to the Red Sea. The Mission Capitaine et Mme Delingette traveled from Algeria to Le Cap with only a single mechanic: "*sans doute le mieux mis en valeur l'énergie individuelle... une randonnée d'une audace inouïe,*" waxed L'Illustration. "*Ils avaient couvert 23,000 kilomèters et vaincu des difficultés qui semblaient devoir surpasser les forces humaines.*"[5] Madame Delingette, it should be noted, was the first metropolitan woman to cross the Sahara in an automobile. These two *raids*, like many others, were undertaken with considerable self-promotion: they were filmed and chronicled for the home audience. This exotic cinema typically showed chase scenes, *indigène* rites and tam-tams, and the heroism of the adventurers and their automobiles crossing a savage land lacking many roads or bridges. The individual and modern technological France were celebrated in these *raids*. The connection between individual bravado and national mission was also not lost to the editors of L'Illustration: "*Ce sont là d'admirables exemples d'énergie et de splendides performances sportives.... Les intrépides voyageurs de l'air, des dunes ou de la brousse ont accru parmi les indigènes le prestige de leur pays ...*"[6] Adventurers were exemplars of manly energy. They asserted an aggressive, modern but pacific identity, one in stark contrast to the *indigènes* they encountered. This contrast was central to the emotive potential of the *raids*. If the *indigène* was not half naked, dionysiac in their rites, and shrouded in the mystery of fetishism, in short, uncivilized, there would only be touring, not *raids*, which would not salve the wounds from the war.

La Croisière noire--the Book

Raids highlighted contrasts, both constructed and real, and Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil in their written travelogue, La Croisière noire, drew the divide

between the self and the Other at the Sahara. They left Paris for a land they constructed to be timeless, mysterious, and, metaphorically, biblical. This fantasy began where the railroad ended, at Colomb Béchar: "*Le rail s'arrête ici. Avec lui cesse la vie intense de la civilisation occidentale. Au delà de Colomb-Béchar commence le désert.*"[7] The desert was as much a conceptual divide as a geographic divide. It forced self reflection and awe:

> *Sur les silhouettes parisiennes dont note vue garde encore la mémoire... sur la vie fébrile des usines, le paisible retour des pasteurs au costume biblique.... Une image bientôt apparaît, se précise, agrandit, absorbant les autres qui viennent se 'fondre' en elle, une image sans limites, faite de tout le ciel, de toute la terre et de tout l'horizon: le Sahara.*[8]

Although the Croisière noire team dwelled on the timeless singularity of the desert and what it symbolized, they did not condemn modern industrial life. It was compartmentalized in memory as a defining standard for civilization and the boundary defining the self. Civilization, however, embodied little mystery and provided no access to the numinous of the primal. For adventurers, not travelers, the desert became a necessary gateway to the numinous which in Africa was paradoxically connected to conquest. "*Le désert s'est refermé sur ceux qui voulaient conquérir son mystère. Ils ne sont plus et lui est là, toujours, adversaire immense, fascinateur insaisissable que l'on ne peut s'empêcher de poursuivre et dont on est le captif méme quand on l'a vaincu!*"[9] In the 1920s, adventurers began most of their *raids* from Algeria to cross the great divide, like a rite of passage. It evoked in the social imagination of the French a martial metaphor, one that reinforced the subordination of Black Africa to the Occident in cultural thought. Travelers, like Lucie Cousturier and André Gide, not insignificantly, began their journeys from sub-Saharan west Africa and thus created a space for new representations of the French and the *indigène*. Adventurers, on the other hand, did not desire Africa to be anything than what it was in their imagination.

And their route through the Sahara fed their fantasies: on the other side of the desert, the other side of civilization, was a space imagined to be edenic--Black Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, the Croisière noire team instantly felt that they were in a fantasy world though not Eden. Women offered them food and men greeted them on horseback, but the Niger River towns of Bourem and Niamey, the first sub-Saharan towns they passed through, were too Islamic and too civilized for their vision of paradise. Still, though, Islamic Black Africa offered up seductive imaginings, like those from the days of Saracen kings: "*Il semble que nous vivions un conte oriental, au temps lointain...*"[10] Islam was considered a strong bond uniting the various *indigènes* of French Africa, but for the metropolitan seeker of the primitive, it altered or rather corrupted the imagined *vrai nègre.*

It did not take long, however, for Haardt and his team to find what they were searching for. Women in the little villages on their route to Lake Tchad ran in front of their *autochenilles* and danced: "*la grâce de ces êtres humains qui bondissent en liberté nous donne la vision d'un Eden noir...*"[11] In Africa, Eden was colorifically qualified--at least if it involved *indigènes.* By contrast, nature needed no qualification. Touring Lake Tchad, the adventurers stopped at a little island inhabited by birds and scented by flowers: "*Sensation délicieuse de nature pacifique, écho intuitif, profond peut-être, d'un paradis originel.*"[12] Whereas a Lucie Cousturier learned to embrace the oceanic of Africa, the male adventurers noticed paradise--only as they searched for game to hunt. They also noticed the women they encountered: paradise was gendered. On one hunting expedition, the adventurers took note each morning of a young girl dressing: "*Chaque matin, nous l'avons vue composer une toilette neuve; toute nue auprès d'un bananier nain, elle en examine longuement les feuilles, les compare, puis en coupe une et l'assujettit à sa*

ceinture avec un geste pudique d'Eve après la faute."[13] Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil did not speculate whether it was colonization or something indigenous that caused this young Eve's fall. It was disappointing enough that in Africa one could not find a true pristine prelapsarian state.

More accessible to the French social imagination than an Eve was the idealized female nude, the Venus and in the 1920s, the Vénus noire. In classical art, the Venus dates to Praxiteles fourth century B.C.E. paradigmatically defining *Aphrodite* and more recently to Botticelli's late fifteenth century, *The Birth of Venus.*[14] In the mid nineteenth century, the classical nude, the very definition of beauty, acquired a new shade: Baudelaire's emotive writing about his obsession with a mulatto, Jeanne Duval, spelled out feelings and thoughts evoked by the image of the Vénus noire. In the 1920s, the Vénus noire was searched for, discovered, and commodified. At Niamey, for instance, the Croisière noire was treated to a dance representing a human sacrifice. Kadi, a priestess, was to sacrifice Sondo, a beautiful woman. Sondo was described in sexually charged language: "*Vénus noire aux formes parfaites, Vénus au sourire épanoui, offrant son sexe au couteau de Kadi et sa croupe magnifique à la caresse flatteuse des coryphées qui la poursuivent frénétiquement...*"[15] But this dance was only a performance. Once it was over, the white man's gaze saw Sondo differently: she was now only a *négresse.*

The Vénus noire, possessor of classical beauty could not be an uncivilized *négresse* in the French imagination. Indeed, since Winckelmann, classical beauty was understood to correspond to a perfect soul, a civilized one. Modern art may have exploded this myth, but it had not yet affected the construction and reception of the Black woman. Indeed, when in 1925 a Vénus noire was discovered in Africa among the Mangbetou people at Niangara, the French took pains to link her to a great civilization. The Mangbetou people in

the northeastern corner of the Belgian Congo confounded the French, no less so since a German ethnographer in the nineteenth century accused the Mangbetou of cannibalism.[16] But to the French, their demeanor appeared less primitive than noble: "*Car il s'agit bien ici de noblesse. Nous sommes loin de la grossièreté des races primitives. Le Mangbetou est fier de ses traditions.*"[17] The French were struck by the haughty beauty, copper, not black, skin, chaste appearance, and the elaborate headdress of the Mangbetou women, the *auréole coiffure*. Their elaborate hair style, their natural, somewhat elongated head, and disdainful look obviously connected them to ancient Egypt.

> *Assises dans une pose hiératique sur de petits tabourets d'ébène, les femmes Mangbetou sont rangées en file comme les figures d'une fresque égyptienne. Évocation d'une précision documentaire qui, subitement dans la pensée, relie par-dessus les siècles les temps présents et la civilisation des Pharaons.*[18]

No one exemplified Mangbetou beauty better than Nobosodrou, a young woman who wore the *auréole coiffure* with an aristocratic air and had breasts that defied gravity [Figure 18]. She was a living fertility goddess. With her fantastic genealogy and graceful aesthetic, Nobosodrou became a Vénus noire in the French imagination, and her beauty, symbolic and real, was readily appropriated. Her image adorned posters and was used to advertise cigarettes in 1931 [Figure 19]. In addition, her hair style was copied by a few metropolitan women, not unlike the only other Vénus noire in the 1920s, Josephine Baker. Baker was accepted not just because of her talent, sexualized energy, and looks, but because she too was civilized and thus more susceptible to being commodified and consumed. Although the Vénus noire was a powerful and emotive image in French culture, it was also a paradoxical one: the Vénus noire was desired for her proximity to the primal, but without civilization, the metropolitan could not accept her as a Vénus, a contradiction that bred tensions in encounters with the *indigène*.

Figure 18. Nobosodrou, Venus noire, 1925.

Figure 19. Nobosodrou advertising image, 1931.

The metropolitan did not just search for the sexualized primal; he also came in search of the origins of civilization. Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil suggested that Islamic Africa had lost contact with the primal, despite Islamic *indigènes* still being considered primitive. The equatorial forests, however, were protected. The *tsé-tsé* fly kept civilization at bay and allowed the forest dwellers to live in primal freedom: "*A partir d'ici le Continent noir mérite d'être appelé le continent mystérieux, car c'est au pays fétichiste, rebelle à l'Islam, que se réfugia le mystère des origines de l'homme et qu'il est permis de pénétrer au plus profond des arcanes de la nature humaine.*"[19] *Fétiches*, it was believed, held the key to human nature. The very existence of the Sara-Djingé, the *femmes à plateaux*, or the various *rites de passage* of *indigènes* suggested as much: "*retrouve-t-on pas dans l'initiation... le fil ininterrompu qui va de la conscience moderne aux limbes des antériorités mystérieuses de l'homme*?"[20] The French, informed by vulgar ethnographic literature, felt that they understood *fétiches* and the universal basis of them. Moral society, Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil claimed naively, was founded on both learning of good and evil and the ability of man's will to struggle against ancestral beasts for unknowable ideals. Adventurers were not *philosophes* nor were they truly interested in what the *indigène* could teach them.

Indeed, the French did not want Africa to transform them. Rather, what was desired was a site that nourished fantasies impossible to realize in modern France. Men desired a romanticized primitivism, and they imagined it on the safari, a major preoccupation of most expeditions. The hunt was manly, challenging, and connected one to one's own primitive self: "*Le charme de la marche en saffari est grand. Il évoque en nous des souvenirs ancestraux.*"[21] On the chase that generated such profound reflections, the Croisière noire

team employed a troupe of one hundred porters and were carried into the bush in *tipoyes*. And yet on the hunt, the French adventurers sincerely experienced a feeling of escape, a form of bourgeois primitivism. After shooting some hippopotami in a marsh, not a difficult hunt, Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil reflected eloquently on themselves:

> *Quelques bottes d'herbe sèche comme lit, un bon feu, la bouillotte qui chante, le plaisir de se baigner dans l'eau claire du bahr Ouandja, la satisfaction de manger sa chasse et de fumer sa pipe, le bonheur de s'endormir après les fatigues d'une journée de soleil... heures saines où l'homme se retrempre aux sources du bonheur originel et oublie, un instant, les soucis que le 'progrès' lui a donnés.*[22]

Progress had recently brought hecatombs to Europe, unsettling social change, and the burden of the "civilizing mission;" reality was disturbing. By contrast, Africa, as a construct, provided an appealing fantasy world where the metropolitan had the near total freedom to imagine any role, identity, or experience he wished for himself.

Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil relished their momentary respites from progress in Africa; however, they never wavered from their identity as pacific bourgeois conquerors, the heroic avant-garde of progress. In fact, progress, in both of its meanings, was the *raison d'être* of their *raid*. After accomplishing some of their official duties, the adventurers subordinated everything to their goal of conquering Africa in an automobile:

> *Le moment est venu de réaliser le programme... jonction automobile de la ligne des grands lacs que nous venons d'atteindre et de la côte est de l'Afrique, vers Madagascar. 'Rush' final, pourrait-on dire. Cette expression sportive est d'ailleurs exacte. Il s'agit d'atteindre le but coûte que coûte. Tout sera désormais subordonné a cette nécessité.*[23]

Progress, often slow, was heroic: the adventurers blazed new paths through Africa, crossing marshes, chopping down brush to clear a road, and floating their trucks over rivers, sometimes making less than fifteen kilometers in a day. Once they reached the Indian Ocean, and ferried their *autochenilles* over to

Madagascar, the adventurers let out a melancholic sigh of relief: they had reached their goal. Their melancholy was not just about ending their adventure. It was about the ambivalence of the social progress they brought.

> *Heures splendides et passées que nous n'oublierons pas mais ne revivrons plus, non seulement parce que le temps ne revient jamais en arrière, mais encore parce que le Continent noir, pénétré de toute part, est pris d'assaut par le progrès. Le mystère africain va finir. Nos blanches voitures n'ont été qu'une avant-garde... annonciatrices d'une ère nouvelle. Le vieux mònde étouffe: pour conquérir l'espace, il supprime la distance--et le charme de l'inconnu.*[24]

Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil's ambivalence to their accomplishment was rooted in the contradiction of post-war exoticism: the search for Eden and the desire to put a road through it. The colonial encounter was bittersweet. Reality could not match the fantasy world so many desired, but it did not have to. The metropolitan gaze was still so disproportionately powerful in the 1920s that the Croisière noire, by emphasizing Western heroism and alterity and making the unknown available, only reinforced the exoticism of Africa for the popular French audience.

The Reception of the Croisière noire

The Croisière noire was well known in the 1920s. Even before the book about the expedition was published or the movie released, the *raid* received much praise. The expedition's route was chronicled in the French press and ethnographic curiosities, like the *femmes à plateaux* and Mangbetou women, were noted. Le Monde colonial illustré emphasized the scientific aspect of the *raid*, denying it was about pure sport. And yet the journal could not help but heap praise on the heroic actions of the expedition: "*En le suivant jusqu'au bout avec plein succès, Georges-Marie Haardt a prouvé que le courage, la décision et l'énergie peuvent réaliser des miracles.*"[25] In its four-part, well illustrated series on the Croisière noire, L'Illustration also demonstrated a

tension between the adventure of the *raid* and its scientific aspects. The magazine discussed the challenges the expedition faced but gave greater emphasis to its ethnographic, artistic, and zoological studies. Léon Poirier's ethnographic films, Robert de Beauplan stated for L'Illustration, showed a great adventure through a picturesque Africa. Discovering "*toutes les charactéristiques des races indigènes*," de Beauplan claimed, was also an emotve experience.[26]

Moreover, *indigènes*, de Beauplan stated, found their artist in Alexandre Iacovleff, the ethnographer and artist on the expedition's team. His work was more than precise. It challenged the French conception of beauty: "*Il a, en même temps, élargi notre conception classique de la beauté. Sans établir de parallèle entre la Vénus de Milo et la Vénus noire... on ne peut rester insensible à l'esthétique particulière de ces visages, de ces corps de bronze ou d'ébène.*"[27] Three weeks before this article and Iacovleff's work was published, Josephine Baker took Paris by storm. The timing may have been coincidental, but the effect was profound: beauty became a universal concept, not exclusive to the white body. This was an unintended consequence of the Croisière noire. De Beauplan was unequivocal in the intended consequence of the *croisière*: "*Elle a servi avec autant d'éclat que de désintéressement la propagande française.*"[28]

La Croisière noire--the Film

The most popular vehicle for this colonial publicity was Léon Poirier's successful 1926 film, La Croisière noire. Léon Poirier, the cinematographer, and his camera man, Georges Specht, shot almost 30,000 meters of film on the expedition. From this raw footage, Poirier wove together a feature length film of two hours which was a landmark in *le cinéma exotique*. The film generated

glowing reviews for its picturesque quality, its ethnographic footage, and its story of adventure and escapism-- in sum, its exoticism.

Le cinéma exotique, which included films on Africa, was already well established before Poirier's work. Prior to the Great War, French cinematographers traveled to different lands and took films of the people and natural habits they discovered. Alfred Machin, for example, was sent to Africa by Pathé in 1908 to make chase films, which he did for two decades. Exoticism first entered the cinema in the form of short *reportages*, often poorly made but attractive to the growing audience for films.[29] After the war, Jacques Feyder's adaptation of Pierre Benoit's L'Atlantide and Robert Flaherty's Nanouk l'Esquimau established two different patterns for *le cinéma exotique*. L'Atlantide was the first feature film of fiction shot on location in Africa. It was well received and was popular for its dazzling scenes of the Sahara and the heroism of the Foreign Legion. Orientalism in film became popular. In response to L'Atlantide, Maréchal Lyautey, proconsul of Morocco, developed a film program that for a decade made films in the protectorate that were not just authentic in their settings, but also rather respectful of North African culture. By the 1930s, however, fictional narratives set in Africa moved to Algeria and became more sympathetic to the white population and hostile to Africans.[30] Nanouk l'Esquimau, on the other hand, established a new model for exotic documentary or reportage films. Pierre Leprohon, the first chronicler of exoticism in French cinema, claimed Flaherty "*ouvrit au documentaire tout entier la voie de la poésie; il lui découvrait le charme nostalgique des existences primitives...*"[31] Léon Poirier learned from Nanouk that exoticism was about more than picturesque landscapes and foreign peoples, *l'atmosphère*. It was the product of a unique principle. It must grow out of the

experience of being in an exotic site: "*Un film exotique*," he wrote just before releasing Le Croisière noire,

> *ce n'est pas un scénario qu'on emporte dans ses bagages, c'est une œuvre que l'on construit en route avec les paysages que l'on rencontre, les caractères qu'on analyse, les incidents que l'on note. Le cinégraphiste doit, par la vertu de sa sensibilité, extraire directement de la vie qu'il découvre, la poésie, la joie, la douleur, puis, par le moyen de son art, bâtir une œuvre capable de faire éprouver aux autres ce que lui-même a ressenti.*[32]

Poirier was able to convey his sentiments and even passion for Africa and the *indigène* to his metropolitan audience, crafting the most celebrated documentary on Africa in the interwar period.

French reviewers and audiences were thrilled by this new cinema. The reviews for La Croisière noire were almost all glowing. First, the film beautifully captured the natural landscape of Africa. There was ample footage of the *autochenilles* crossing the desert, the savanna, and the forests. Even Jean Prévost, one of the few ambivalent critics of the film had to concede that the scenery was powerful: "*Mais l'admirable voyage! Désert, rochers, oasis, fleures, lacs et forêts, chasses et bêtes en font la plus belle parade géographique et pittoresque que le cinéma ait jusqu'à présent fournie.*"[33] Shots of the landscape and visions of animal life were captivating, but the most emotive images appeared to be where man battled nature in the chase scenes. The lion, elephant, and hippopotami hunts were exciting. More captivating, however, was the gory burning of fields to drive game to the hunters, which first came to French attention in René Maran's Batouala. The public, Poirier wrote, loved the hunt as much as it loved romances. "*Pour quelle raison? Probablement parce que son intérêt pour la chasse est aussi instinctif que son élan vers l'amour.*"[34] The destructive principle, so present in the mentality of the Europeans shaped by the Great War, was sublimated in a manly, ostensibly noble endeavor that did not entail the loss of human life--the chase in Africa.

The film was not, however, about the landscape of Africa or its fauna. It was about humans--less the "primitive" than the "civilized," though *indigènes* were most prominently featured in La Croisière noire, especially their dancing. Poirier introduced to a wide audience some of the diverse peoples of Africa, and some of these peoples came to play a significant role in how the French appropriated the Other. Islamic Orientalist fantasies, prominent in the films of North Africa, did not appear to interest Poirier's audience: critics did not discuss the harem of the man with one hundred wives. Rather, audiences were struck by the extreme otherness of the people of equatorial Africa. The "Pygmies" of the forest were noted for their lack of evolution, called by one reviewer, "*hommes-singes des forêts vierges.*"[35] The forest held other mysteries. The dance of the Ga'nza of the Banda people, Pierre MacOrlan stated, perfectly represented what Maran described in Batouala: dancers "*possédés par le vertige, tournent éperdument jusqu'à l'extrême limite de leurs forces.*"[36] Furthermore, MacOrlan, like most reviewers, was struck by the beauty of the Mangbetou women. Nobosodrou, though less accessible than Josephine Baker, was readily identified as a Vénus noire: "*Je ne connais rien de plus gracieux que cette petite fille d'ébène au crâne apprêté selon les traditions égyptiennes.*"[37] Not all who enjoyed and praised the film, however, had a sympathetic response to *indigène*. Edouard Helsay felt "*une fâcheuse impression de dégoût devant certains traits de mœurs*" and laughed at the "*vieilles négresses*" on the screen.[38] Although the French relished the alterity of the *indigène*, they had to learn how to integrate what they saw with their contradictory cultural beliefs about the *nègre*.

Conclusion

La Croisière noire, whether as a book or a film, was really more about the virile, heroic French than the *indigène* himself or Africa itself. Freed from the *boue* of the Western front, the French sought adventure and the testing or rather proving of their spirit in Africa. The film allowed all Frenchmen to live the "*grande aventure*" vicariously. "*Nous avons ... traversé des contrées nouvelles*," wrote one reviewer in the third person plural and "*nous avons assisté également à des chasses aux antilopes, au lion...*"[39] The French felt that they too had the vigor to overcome the innumerable obstacles that La Croisière noire expedition faced in achieving its goal. Although the expedition conveyed much about the Other, more was confirmed about French identity. The expedition, Henri Simon stated, "*s'affirma si magnifiquement l'énergie de notre race.*"[40] The French perceived themselves to be peaceful conquerors. They believed they were using modern technology for science and to bring civilization, not destroy one: "*la Croisière Noire contient en soi tout une année de labeur d'endurance, de sang-froid et de patriotisme pacifique...*" wrote MacOrlan. "*C'est la grande aventure qui ne pénètre pas chez inconnu en le soumettant à la menace des mitrailleuses.*"[41] After the recent Pyrrhic victory, French guns were silent, and France proudly redefined herself as civilized and pacific, overlooking, of course, the battle in the Rif.

Civilization, however, had proven fragile and peace unheroic. Africa became the antidote to this disillusion:

> *Nous avons, pendant quelques heures trop brèves, échappé aux monotonies de notre existence trop civilisée. Nous avons saisi à sa source certaines forces encore obscures et médité sur des aspects embryonnaires de notre pauvre race humaine, toujours plus près qu'elle ne s'imagine ses origines animales.*[42]

As Poirier desired, those who felt European civilization to be suffocating found in imaginative exoticism and the Black Other not the fledgling humanism of a

Cousturier or Gide but a space to rejuvenate both their sense of self and their fantasies.

Endnotes

[1]For an interesting discussion of how heroism was relocated after the Great War, see Michael B. Miller, Shanghai on the Metro: Spies, Intrigue, and the French Between the Wars (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1994). For a fine short discussion of Lindbergh which connects heroism and technology, see Modris Eksteins, Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

[2]See "A la conquête de l'Afrique par l'automobile et l'avion," Le Monde colonial Illustré, mars 1925.

[3]Robert de Beauplan, "De L'Algerie à Madagascar en autochenilles," L'Illustration, 26 septembre 1925, 305.

[4]Henri de Kérillis, "Faut-il faire des raids," L'Illustration, 21 fevrier 1925, 164.

[5]"La Pénétration Africaine," L'Illustration, 9 janvier 1926, p. 31.
[6]Ibid., 29.

[7]Georges-Marie Haardt et Louis Audouin-Dubreuil, La Croisière noire, expédition Citroën Centre-Afrique (Paris: Libraire Plon, 1927), 3.

[8]Ibid., 3.

[9]Ibid., 4.

[10]Ibid., 25.

[11]Ibid., 38.

[12]Ibid., 60.

[13]Ibid., 198.

[14]See Nanette Solomon, "The Venus Pudica: uncovering art history's 'hidden agendas' and pernicious pedigrees," in Generation and Geographies in the Visual Arts ed. Griselda Pollack (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 69-87.

[15]Haardt et Audouin-Dubreuil, Croisière noire, 28.

[16]G. Schweinfurt, a German ethnographer who lived among the Mangbetou in the nineteenth century claimed they were cannibals. See Nigel Davies, Human Sacrifice in History and Today (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981).

[17]Haardt et Audouin-Dubreuil, Croisière noire, 180.

[18]Ibid., 179.

[19]Ibid., 70.

[20]Ibid., 75.

[21]Ibid., 111.

[22]Ibid., 121-22.

[23]Ibid., 214.

[24]Ibid., 250.

[25]Paul Bruzon, "De Colomb-Béchar à Tananarive à travers le continent noir," Le Monde colonial illustré, novembre 1928, 266.

[26]Robert de Beauplan, "De l'Algérie à Madagascar en autochenilles," L'Illustration, 17 octobre 1925, 414.

[27]Robert de Beauplan, "De l'Algérie à Madagascar en autochenilles," L'Illustration, 24 octobre 1925, 433-34.

[28]Robert de Beauplan, "De l'Algérie à Madagascar en autochenilles," L'Illustration, 7 novembre 1925, 492.

[29]For a treatment of the first exotic films in France, see, Pierre Leprohon, L'Exotisme et le cinéma (Paris: Les Editions J. Susse, 1945).

[30]For a brief discussion of Lyautey's role in film, see David H. Slavin, "French Colonial Film before and after *Itto*: From Berber Myth to Race War," French Historical Studies 21 (Winter 1988): 125-55.

[31]Leprohon, L'Exotisme, 134.

[32]Léon Poirier, "Le cinéma exotique," Le Monde colonial illustré, janvier 1926, 8.

[33]Jean Prevost, Fonds Rondel 8°RK3277.

[34]Léon Poirier, "Le cinéma exotique," Le Monde colonial illustré, octobre 1926, 231.

[35]A. M., Fonds Rondel 8°RK3277.

[36]Pierre MacOrlan, L'Intransigeant 4 mars 1926, Fonds Rondel, 8°RK3277.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Edouard Helsay, Fonds Rondel, 8°RK3277.

[39]F.R., Fonds Rondel, 8°RK3277.

[40]Henri Simon, Fonds Rondel, 8°RK3277.

[41]MacOrlan, Fonds Rondel, 8°RK3277.

[42]Edouard Helsay, Fonds Rondel, 8°RK3277.

CHAPTER 10

ETHNO-EROTICISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS: FROM THE BAL NEGRE TO PAUL MORAND'S MAGIE NOIRE (1928)

As the 1920s came to a close--but well before the Great Depression impacted France, exoticism had lost none of its appeal, and the *nègre* seemed to offer to increasing numbers of Frenchmen a source for renewal and a means for celebrating life and sexuality. The invasion of jazz musicians and proliferation of jazz clubs for dancing attracted many. For some, and especially the bourgeoisie, attending the Revue Nègre satisfied all of their exotic and ethno-erotic fantasy quests, for a brief time at least. But others desired a more authentic, participatory experience, including playing at being Black, dancing with Blacks, and even taking Black lovers--all of which could occur at the Bal nègre in Paris. Although exoticism took many forms in the 1920s, the French could not leave the exotic Other as it was: more often than not, the exotic was colonized and even transmogrified. In the hexagon, the French chose to experience less an everyday otherness than the carnivalesque artifice of alterity at fetes and *bals* that only ostensibly celebrated the *nègre*. Despite the playfulness in the metropolitan's encounter with the Other, some only saw the Black Other, especially his imagined sexual appetite, as a peril to French civilization. Paul Morand, for one, gave voice to those attracted to but horrified at the unprecedented amount of crossings of the color line. For Morand, the popularity of the exotified and eroticized racially ambiguous mulatto not only symbolized the decadence of the age, but also was a means to express a revulsion of the *nègre*, fear of the *nègre*'s hold on civilization, and the danger sexual mixing posed to French society.

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Dancing Dangerously: Colonizing the Exotic at the Bal nègre

Early in the morning of 16 December 1928, in a fashionable building on the rue Chalgrin in the 16th arrondissement, three shots were fired. Jane Weiler, daughter of a wealthy manufacturer, quickly but calmly telephoned the police: "'*Ici, Madame Weiler, 20 rue Chalgrin; je viens de blesser mon mari à coups de revolver; voulez-vous m'envoyer un médicin...*'"[1] A doctor was dispatched to the household, as was a magistrate. When they arrived, Robert Weiler, 38, well decorated *ancien combattant*, lay dead on the floor, not far from the cradle of the Weiler's baby. The popular and sensational press lost no time dramatizing this affair. It was not simply that the crime involved the bourgeoisie; rather, the crime capped a night of partying at fashionable night spots, the most significant of which was the Bal nègre, where Blacks and whites danced together. The connection was transparent. Le Détective screamed it from its headline: "*Du bal nègre aux Assises* [Figure 20]."[2]

Discovering the Bal nègre

Around 1920, Alexandre Jouve, an Auvergnat, opened a little bar and *tabac* at 33 rue Blomet in the 15th arrondissement, just off rue de Vaugirard. The bar was small and unexceptional, save for a large back room that Jouve occasionally rented for neighborhood *bals.* In 1924, Jean Rézard des Vouves, a Martiniquais and candidate for the Chamber of Deputies, rented the back room for meetings to win the political support of the Antillais community residing in Paris. Spontaneously, his electoral meetings turned into to informal *fêtes*, complete with music and dancing. Rézard des Vouves, a shrewd businessman and musician, realized that he had more potential as a band leader than a parliamentarian. He proposed to Jouve to host a regular *bal* for the Antillais

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DÉTECTIVE

Le grand hebdomadaire des faits-divers

Du bal nègre aux Assises

La fête rue Blomet, le drame rue Chalgrin... Entre ces deux pôles gît le secret de Jane Weiler, qui tua son mari et que les jurés de la Seine vont avoir à juger.

(Lire pages 4 et 5, les révélations de Paul Brinquier et de Jean Herlèrec.)

Figure 20. Jane Weiler, Le Détective cover photograph, 1929.

community in Paris. Jouve accepted the offer, and on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, the bar on rue Blomet became the "Bal colonial."[3]

The Bal colonial was successful, featuring authentic Antillais music and appealing to the local Antillais community. In the 1920s, this community was relatively large, perhaps 10,000 strong, and many *indigènes* lived in the 14th and 15th arrondissements.[4] In fact, some of the first patrons of the Bal colonial were *indigène* workers who lived in the Hôtel Jeanne d'Arc on rue Blomet. In addition, colonial soldiers at the nearby École militaire sought the warmth and sounds of their native islands at the popular *bal*.

Little is known of the *bal* during its first two years of existence. It appeared, however, that few metropolitans patronized it. Soon though, word of the Bal colonial spread beyond the French Antillais community--to the arts community. In April 1926, Robert Desnos, the writer, critic, and surrealist, moved into a studio at 45 rue Blomet, the former address of the artists Joan Miró and André Masson. Desnos wandered into the Bal colonial, just up the street from his studio, and he immediately made it one of his favorite haunts. In 1926, he was attracted to the *bal*'s lack of *snobisme* and the exhilarating exotic dancing of *indigènes*.[5] Desnos then wrote an article about the *bal*, perhaps for Comoedia, and by 1928 the avant-garde and adventurous chic French were ending their evenings at what was now called the Bal nègre.[6]

In its heyday, from about 1928 to 1932, or even a little later, the Bal nègre attracted a large number of *indigènes* from the Antilles as well as a lesser number from Africa. In addition, a few African-Americans, like writer Countee Cullen, were known to frequent the club. Cullen, in Paris on a Guggenheim fellowship, for example, said of a night at the Parisian Opera, "'I don't like it... I'd rather be at the Bal [nègre]'"[7] Although *indigènes* gave the *bal* its color, numerically, the metropolitan and tourist population may have dominated. In

the late 1920s, the Montparnasse artist milieu frequented the club: Desnos, Kiki, Kisling, Pascin and the like were often seen there.[8] Hemingway knew the bar, as he did many in Paris. Paul Morand, author of Magie noire, was not unknown in the club, and André Gide was spotted seeking the exotic at the *bal* on rue Blomet. The elite and celebrities also frequented the club: Ernest Léardée, a band leader at the *bal,* recalled that on the narrow and popular rue Blomet "*était encombrée chaque soir de voitures en stationnement parmi lesquelles se remarquaient les Rolls Royce, Hispano Suiza, Bugatti...*"[9] Most patrons, though, were probably like the Weiler's--comfortably bourgeois. Although the metropolitan population colonized the dance hall and helped turn it into a tourist attraction, the Bal nègre, even transmogrified, remained a unique social space where boundaries were crossed.

The Scene at the Bal nègre: The Biguine and *les couples panachés*

The Bal nègre, like many dance spots in the 1920s, had an all Black house band, but unlike virtually all the other clubs, the Bal nègre's band played biguine music, not African-American jazz. Biguine music, native to Martinique, was an Afro-Caribbean creolized quadrille that developed in the nineteenth century and, claimed Ernest Léardée, "*était par essence la manifestation spontanée la plus authentique et la plus pure de la musique populaire de la Martinique... La biguine représentait ainsi le champ d'expression privilégié de l'esprit créole, dans sa pluralité et son extême subtilité.*"[10] Central to the biguine sound was the clarinet. At the Bal nègre, Rézard des Vouves led a house band until 1930 consisting of a clarinet, piano, banjo and drum. Léardée's Creol's Band played at the Bal nègre from 1930-1932, and his five piece band, clarinet, violin, piano, banjo and drum, got smart Parisians dancing the biguine, as well as the quadrille, mazurka, and créole waltz, all Antillais

style. But to express his music authentically, Léardée asked the beautiful and dangerous Fernande, "La Martiniquaise," and her "ballet martiniquais" to provide brief floor shows at the *bal*. The crowd did not come just to watch these traditionally clad exotic dancers. They came to view and to participate in a sexual and racial drama of their own making.

When metropolitans entered the Bal nègre, they were struck by the number of *indigènes* in the club. "*C'est une prodigieuse surprise que ce spectacle gratuit*," reported poet Georgette Camille in 1928, "*où deux cents nègres, pressés comme pour une mise en scène, dansent avec des cris.*"[11] Most of the other Parisian clubs only had Black entertainers. It was rare for metropolitans to discover large numbers of *indigènes* dancing for their own enjoyment and not for pay, as in a *revue*. The Bal nègre thus supplied material for fantasies, but the French imagination, though salaciously vivid in the 1920s, was also limited. The French understood and imagined the *nègre* largely in terms of spectacle: "*Ondulations et frémissements lascifs de corps souples*," Abel-Petit wrote of the *bal* in 1928, "*pas saccadés, engagements conjugués au rythme des accords amoureux, gestes hiératiques des bras aux courbes d'amphores, qui se rejoignent, paumes en dehors, au-dessus des crinières laineuses...Toutes attitudes que nous avons admirées aux Folies, au Moulin, au Casino de Paris...*"[12] The *indigènes* dancing at the Bal nègre were living proof to Abel-Petit, at least, that the artifice on the stage of Josephine Baker's Revue Nègre, for example, was authentic. On the dance floor of the *bal*, the *nègres* danced, if not with the grace of an entertainer, at least, so the French imagined, with the same primitive energy that Josephine Baker had brought to the French spotlight.

Furthermore, *indigènes* danced sensually, even erotically. "*Et les nègres dansaient. Collés ventre à ventre, les visages à quelques centimètres*," Paul Bringuier wrote for Le Détective,

> *ils mimaient une sorte de danse sacrée ou de danse érotique.... Les hommes tenaient leur cavalière des deux mains, un peu au-dessous de la taille. Elles s'accrochaient des deux bras au cou de leurs cavaliers, et un mouvement lent et souple des jambes fébriles des hanches, entraînait le couple.*[13]

Bringuier could just as easily have been describing sexual intercourse as dancing. In the French imagination, the *nègre*'s sexuality was transcendent. It was numinous: it was the expression of a primitive or natural love. In the material and virulently secular Third Republic, however, the sacred was limited and inhibited. Yet, it was still necessary to give life meaning. One way that the French expressed this human need was by honoring the war dead. Another was available, vicariously, through the *nègre*. As on ethno-erotic postcards and in the exotic fantasies of La Croisière noire team, at the Bal nègre the Black Other was not just imagined to express natural sexual energy, but also considered a conduit to the source of primal sexuality, something the French believed numinous. On the dance floor of the Bal nègre, the numinous could be imagined to be discovered and exotic sexual fantasy quests of the French could be fed, especially for those who dared to cross the color line and all that it connoted.

Voyeuristically to look at Blacks dance was titillating, but it could not compare to the real attraction of the Bal nègre: dancing not just among *indigènes* but with *indigènes*. At the Bal nègre it was not taboo for Blacks and whites to dance together. "*On y trouve toutes les races, noir, jaune, blanche, mais c'est la noire qui domine*." Léardée recalled.

> *Tout le monde danse avec tout le monde. Les frontières et les distinctions de classe sont abolies, et l'on se croirait à une cérémonie*

> *rituelle où tous les peuples communient dans une même passion du rythme et de la danse. Les conventions et les hypocrisies de la société sont laissées pour compte, et chacun extériorise, dans une liberté sans constrainte, le feu intérieur qu'il porte en lui, sans se soucier du regard des spectateurs...*[14]

Léardée knew that the *bal*'s true appeal was not just its exoticism, but that race and class were transcended, if only for a moment on the dance floor. All danced with equal passion and without the fears and inhibitions of modern morality and propriety. Moreover, dancing *panaché* allowed the French to act out a libertine fantasy in the safety of a public space in Paris. In physical and sensual contact with Blacks, the French evidently imagined themselves liberated from what inhibited them. On the dance floor and in their imagination, the French regained a piece of Eden, a lost paradise. Though their fantasies differed, all participated in the fantasy world at the Bal nègre, but it was merely fantasy, a nightly carnival of artifice. Relations between the races and classes did not change. Outside of the *bal*'s walls, the *indigène* was still only an object for French needs and desires: renewal, escape, and the discovery of one's vital force, including sexual force, which increasingly defined exoticism in the 1920s.

Representing the Bal nègre

The Bal nègre became a well known night spot that generated multivalent representations of the exotic. The Weiler affair, both in 1928 and when it went to trial in 1929, was fodder for the sensational press that connected the exotic to danger. On the night of 15 December 1928, Robert and Jane Weiler and a friend had gone to the Bal nègre. There they listened to music, the men drank, and then, as the press reported, Robert danced with a *négresse*. The *négresse* was "la Martiniquaise," not just a fixture at the *bal*, but a main attraction at the night spot. She danced wildly and seductively, "*se*

tortillait en dansant, avec une frénésie de diablesse..."[15] Robert Weiler, enthralled with her, bet his friend that he could pick her up, and he did. "*Weiler le gagne... Il danse avec la Martiniquaise, la remène et l'enlève du bal...*"[16] The group left with la Martiniquaise, stopped at the Jungle, another Montparnasse bar, and then dropped off the male friend they had started the evening with. "*Que fait-on de la négresse? Au petit jour, on la reconduit chez elle... Les époux rentrent rue Chalgrin, un peu las, énervés par cette soirée, cette nuit trépidante...*"[17] The end of the drama then unfolded in the Weiler's smart apartment.

La Martiniquaise was a "*troublante et séduisante danseuse,*" beautiful and of some lesbian inclinations, recalled Ernest Léardée.[18] Her night with the Weiler's was probably more innocent than was suggested by the ellipses Le Détective employed in its article. The innuendo, however, allowed for suggestion, imagination. The *Antillaise*, understood as a *mulâtresse* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (as seen in Chapter 6), was a beauty who also could be a *femme fatale*. She was amorous, irresistible to white men, but also popularly considered monstrous, being ambiguous, neither white nor Black.[19] Le Détective, drawing off of prevailing myths, spurred the French imagination, connecting exoticism with sex and violence. The *nègre* or in this case, the *négresse*, was seen as seductive and dangerous. Miscegenation, Le Détective suggested, was the ultimate forbidden fruit, on penalty of death. In this genre of representation, a moral lesson was embedded in a sensational story: when the races mingled, bourgeois morality crumbled. Indeed, Jane Weiler's trial revealed that Robert and she led a morally corrupt life that included frequent late nights at bars and even visits to brothels, where Jane Weiler may have offered herself, for a price.[20] In the end, Jane Weiler was convicted of murder, but she was only sentenced to five years--because of

extenuating circumstances, which included her husband's violent behavior and their degenerate nocturnal lifestyle, which included frequenting the Bal nègre.[21]

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In 1929, Sem, the *nom de plume* of author and caricaturist of Parisian life, Georges Marie Coursat (1863-1934), made a tour of popular bars and restaurants for L'Illustration. He was clear: the Bal nègre was the place to go to finish the evening. Just after Jane Weiler was sentenced to five years for murder, the staid *haute bourgeoisie* was invited to taste the exotic at the Bal nègre differently from what Le Détective constructed. The *bal*, Sem wrote, was a late night spot where the bourgeoisie could experience the exotic in a range of manifestations:

> *On finira la nuit au bal de la rue Blomet où, au milieu d'une âcre fumée secouée par les pulsations de la grosse caisse et la grêle du tambour, dans une atmosphère chargée de senteur sauvage, s'ébat en liberté une gaieté tout animale, innocence de paradis terrestre nègre que gâtent nos costumes de civilisés et l'intrusion d'Eves trop blanches et de pécheresses trop averties.*[22]

The *bal* was an equivocal space for Sem and his readers. The primitive was unleashed on the dance floor. His and her presence, a fantasy in itself, allowed for the transcendence of the bourgeois world to an imagined Edenic paradise of primal enjoyments and sexual delights. But the primitive also corrupted: he and she ruined the bourgeoisie, even those that had already tasted sin.

Renewal and decadence were linked to the *nègre*, Sem made clear, especially when a visitor ceased to be a voyeur and crossed the color line *sur la piste*: "*Je crois devoir laisser en blanc le boniment destiné à commenter ce tableau noir. Ces couples panachés, par leur danse expressive, parlent assez clairement, quoique en petit nègre, pour qu'il soit superflu et dangereux d'insister--passons...*"[23] Many stories were told of the Bal nègre. Sem enticed his readers with a taste of the exotic, but he warned of its danger to French
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civilization, in both his text and his sketch. Mixed race dancing was frightening to participants and voyeurs alike. Those who did it, degenerated: they spoke, metaphorically, in "*petit nègre.*" *Petit nègre,* as previously described, was the language of the Senegalese tirailleurs, not the Antillais, and it implied that one lacked civilization, was suspended in a protracted juvenile state, and was incapable of abstraction. Not only did Sem warn against dancing *panaché*, he conflated the citizens of the Antilles, French speakers, with primitive subjects from A.O.F. Moreover, even before miscegenation occurred, the white dancing with the *nègre* lost his mark of civilization, the French language, and thus became decivilized. When boundaries were at risk of dissolving, all who were dark, whether a *mulâtre* or not, were the *nègre*, and all that he and she represented.

Sem's watercolor for L'Illustration was a complex caricature of the Bal nègre that reflected his equivocal text [Figure 21]. Five well dressed Black men were depicted dancing with white partners in the foreground of the sketch. In addition, there was one smart Black couple in the group. The woman were fashionable, sporting sleeveless dresses and short hair. They were the *garçonne* in look and adventurous spirit. The men they danced with were tall and a bit grotesque: they had large protruding lips, white teeth, and billiard ball eyes, standard representations of Blacks in popular culture in the 1920s. The men danced close to their partners, pelvis to pelvis, with one hand on the woman's buttocks. This sketch however, was, less sexually charged than it could have been: Sem's caricature of the Bal nègre and its denizens playfully subverted metropolitans' Prospero Complex.

In 1950, drawing off of Shakespeare's The Tempest, O. Mannoni coined the term "Prospero Complex" to analyze the illusions and misunderstandings in the confrontation of the civilized and the primitive in colonial situations.

Figure 21. Bal nègre sketch, by Sem, 1929.

Mannoni re-interpreted Shakespeare's protagonists as colonial types: Prospero was a metropolitan colonial father figure, and Miranda was his obedient and virtuous daughter. Caliban (an obvious play on the word cannibal) was an unruly child but also a useful slave: he was, metaphorically, the semi-civilized, if not uncivilized, *indigène*. Prospero, though powerful, constantly feared that the Other, Caliban, would violate his daughter. This fear constitutes the Prospero Complex. Mannoni, a Freudian, stated that the Prospero Complex was really a "justification of hatred on grounds of sexual guilt."[24] Prospero, or the metropolitan, Mannoni suggested, projected his own evil, including his own desire to violate his daughter, on the Other. Although Mannoni's Freudian analysis is too deterministic and simplistic to explain the range of colonial relations, the Prospero Complex is useful for conceptualizing some of the tensions in the color line in the hexagon in the 1920s.

At the Bal nègre and in popular culture in general, the danger of the *nègre* defiling white women was provocative, but unlike in the United States at this time, in France this sexual danger was either subverted through humor or rendered carnivalesque. In Sem's sketch, for example, the *indigène*'s were so caricatured that they could be imagined to have little power or sexual prowess. Two of the Black men even stood awkwardly and appeared to be marionettes. Sem's representation of the *bal* salaciously acknowledged that Caliban existed in the metropole, but then through caricature, Sem eased the anxieties metropolitans had not just by neutering the imagined virile Black body, but also by representing the Bal nègre as spectacle. Off to the right of the sketch a properly portly bourgeois gentleman and his date, his wife or perhaps his mistress, observed the scene at the *bal* as if they were at the Revue Nègre. Conflating the Revue Nègre and the Bal nègre may have alleviated the spectre

of the Prospero Complex by confining the Other to the fantasy world of spectacle.

Authenticity and the *Bal*

The Bal nègre was a complex space, exotic, even authentic, originally being a space for the Black community in Paris. Yet it became a tourist site for bourgeois adventurers and was transformed into, some imagined, an inauthentic site. Some metropolitans even noticed that on any given night the *bal* had lost its soul or at least its distinctiveness: "*Où donc sont les pittoresques biguines de Fort-de-France et La Pointe-à-Pitre*?" André Reuze asked. "*On danse comme à Montmartre, à la Bastille et ailleurs... Pourquoi faut-il que les nègres expatriés dédaignent les danses de leur pays*?"[25] Reuze desired the exotic. *Indigènes*, on the other hand, longed for the authentic, and they got it, albeit only briefly, at the Bal de la Glacière.

In May 1929, a different kind of *bal* opened in Paris, one operated by Blacks and for Blacks, not metropolitans. Stellio, the greatest biguine musician of his day, and Ernest Léardée, his sideman and subsequent musical rival, had just arrived in Paris from Martinique a few days before the Stellio orchestra opened the Bal de la Glacière in the 13th arrondissement on boulevard Auguste Blanqui on 11 May 1929. Paulette Nardal, the well educated Antillaise writer, reported in La Dépêche Africaine that the new Bal de la Glacière was unique in Paris: "*Dans ce cadre, les noirs se sentent bien chez eux. Aucune opposition choquante, comme dans d'autres dancings, entre leurs types et un cadre violemment européen.*"[26] Although a pre-negritude assimilationist, Nardal suggested that *indigènes* profoundly experienced their minority status in Paris. Blacks and whites were different, and Blacks, Nardal stated, longed for their

own cultural expression, something that was no longer entirely possible at colonized clubs, like the Bal nègre.

At the Bal de la Glacière, there was little to fear from the metropolitan population, at least within the club: "*Rien dans cette salle qui rappelle la France...*"[27] Like the metropolitan, the *indigène*, Nardal suggested, sought escape from the constraints of modern bourgeois culture--or at least the *nègre*'s servile status in the metropole. In the *indigène*'s fantasy, this *bal* was authentic. The musicians played a harmonious, spirited "*biguine à réveiller les morts... On se croirait subitement transporté dans quelque bal doudou antillais...*"[28] The couples danced "*vrai*" quadrilles, biguines, and mazurkas as if in Fort-de-France. Except one was not in the islands. At the Bal de la Glacière those from the Antilles mixed with those from Africa "*mêlées dans le commun désir de retrouver un peu de l'atmosphère du pays.*"[29] The *indigène* was not readily assimilated in the 1920s nor, Nardal suggested, did he entirely want to be assimilated. For all of its charms, integrationist France could not satisfy all of the cultural needs of citizens and subjects.

But escapism was only an illusion for *indigènes*, not to mention metropolitans. Just off to the side of the stage in the club was a plaster statue titled, "Réconciliation." It was aptly named, depicting a woman holding two men. The statue, Nardal reported, had "*une pancarte attachée au socle prie le public de respecter ce groupe qui a déjà eu à souffrir de l'ardeur destructrice des camelots du roy.*"[30] Though the *indigène* community in France attempted to segregate themselves a little culturally, they were neither immune from right-wing attacks on the street nor colonization. Indeed, the autonomous and authentic expression of *indigène* culture in public spaces was ephemeral. The Bal de la Glacière was closed down after two months: residents living next to it disliked seeing Antillais coming and going from it at all hours of the night.

There was no metropolitan community to protect and preserve this *bal*, as there was at the Bal nègre. Perhaps only those that were colonized could survive.

Representing the Antillais

Before the Stellio band broke up, some six months after the Bal de la Glacière closed, it cut a few disks for the Odéon label. The records sold well, and to generate further interest in the music of the Antilles, Odéon published for the metropolitan population in 1930 a catalogue, "L'Ame Nègre en exil... Au Bal Antillais." Odéon understood the Antillais population, albeit French speaking citizens, to be *nègres*:

> '*Ces nègres puissants et doux que la guerre a laissés en France, ces négresses naïves à l'éclatant sourire qui sont venues 'servir' dans des familles de chez nous, ont gardé la nostalgie de leur merveilleux pays lointain: Et il nous l'ont communiquée*!'[31]

In one expression of the French imagination, the *nègres* from the old colonies, like those from A.O.F., were in the metropole only to serve French needs, either on the battle field or as domestiques. The *nègre* was servile, docile, and yet a willing servant to those who granted him civilization, even if the *nègre* was a *mulâtre* possessing French blood. In addition, Odéon's catalog reiterated a common notion that the Antillaise, unlike the African, made a good domestique. There was a shortage of domestic help in the interwar years, and some did turn to the Antillaise to solve the perennial bourgeois crisis of finding good help. In fact, under the headline, "Le Péril Noir," Le Temps ran a 1923 article on a proposal to bring one hundred Martiniquaises into the hexagon for domestic service.[32] Paradoxically, the danger Le Temps described was not to Blacks being subjected to a new form of slavery. But rather, it was to metropolitans at the mercy of *indigènes* in a seller's market. Conflating race and class was not unknown in the cultural politics of the Third Republic. Furthermore, the

Antillaise domestique, unlike the provincial *bonne*, was sexualized. Fantasio playfully addressed the domestique shortage in 1923 with its sketch, "Bamboulinette À La Rescousse."[33] The sketch showed a curvaceous Martiniquaise *bonne* wearing nothing but an apron and jewelry [Figure 22]. She arrived in France packed in a box--to serve the every need of the bourgeois home.

Even the Antillais culture, Odéon's catalog suggested, served the French. The *indigène* was a dreamer, a natural voyager, and one who escaped to the "'*bals popularies nègres de la rive gauche de la Seine*" where the music released him from the confines of Paris.[34] Odéon offered this release and more to those adventurous enough to spin its disks of exotic island sounds. The music was simple and yet complex,

> '*tantôt nonchalante, tantôt monotone, tantôt frénétique, et qui garde une saveur primitive, prenante infinitement. Et puérils comme des hommes et des femmes dans la nature luxuriante de chez eux, ils dansent la biguine: et cette danse, de la joie à la tristesse, d'abord seulement pittoresque, évocatrice, originale, prend un caractère quasi sacré: N'est-elle pas comme une espèce de religion sauvage qui mimerait les grands sentiments primitifs, et d'où naît l'amour?*'[35]

The Antillais, Odéon suggested, was the primitive. Through his music, he could express a full range of human emotions, some of which were lost to civilized man. The intoxicating music was regenerative, and through the music the *indigène* provided access to an almost sacred primitive religion, one shorn of sin or restraint. For the few francs of a disk and in the safety of one's home, the metropolitan imagined the exotic and experienced the source of noble sacred love. Here the drabness of modern life melted away for the highest social ideal--primitive love, something only the adventurous few imagined they tasted.

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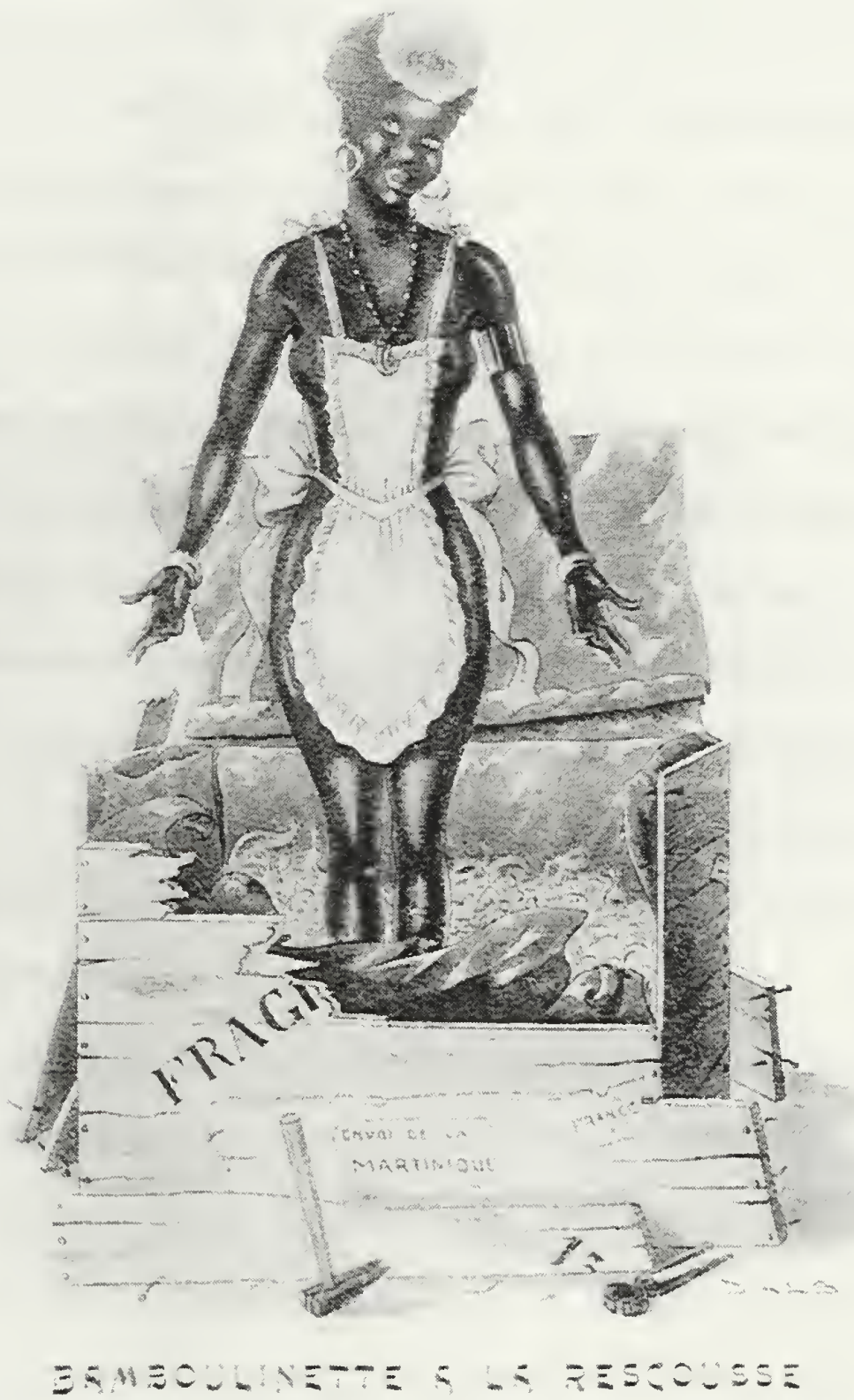

Figure 22. Bamboulinette à la Rescousse, 1923.

For the many, the Bal nègre satisfied their exotic quests, but for some the *indigène* had to be possessed and possessed sexually. Ernest Léardée stepped off the band stand at the Bal nègre often enough, he stated in his autobiographical oral history, to enter into a number of sexual relations. One of his affairs was with the Comtesse de Suvarennes. Although Léardée claimed she taught him, a sexualized Black man, a thing or two about sex, he was, in the eyes of the Countess's circle, her sexual object. One evening, the Countess took Léardée to a fashionable address for a party. In the foyer, he was asked for his clothes--all of his clothes--and told to take a shower. He then entered a large room where all the guests at the party were naked. The guests talked, drank, and smoked naked "*de la manière la plus naturelle...*"[36] When Léardée entered the room, all eyes fell on him, the sole Black in the room. Léardée remembered his feelings vividly: "*j'avais l'impression de marcher dans du coton.*"[37] At this moment, the gaze of the powerful metropolitan on the *indigène* did not dissemble any of the historical relations of power between the two. Though no longer chattel, the *indigène* was still an object--now an exotic, erotic ornamental one.

The Countess, *au naturel*, gleefully introduced Léardée to her friends. Léardée, shaken, went off to the bar, had a drink to calm himself, and scrutinized the room. To his consternation, he delighted in the naked women he saw and, without clothes, could not hide his erection. The Countess returned to Léardée, accompanied by more of her friends "*pour me présenter à eux.*"[38] With nowhere to hide, Léardée shook hands with, in his eyes, a number of "*ravissantes créatures, exhibant sans aucune pudeur leurs charmes provocants...*"[39] It was too much for the young Léardée:

> *Malgré mes efforts pour fixer mon esprit vers autre chose, je sentais mon sang affluer par cognements sourds vers des lieux que la décence m'oblige à ne pas nommer, me mettant dans une situation horriblement insupportable. Tout cela semblait amuser follement les invités.*[40]

The guests examined Léardée, then responded to the Countess:

> '*Mes félicitations, Madame la Comtesse, vous avez bon goût! disait l'un en ajustant son monocle et en dirigeant ostensiblement son regard vers ce qu'il était impossible de ne pas remarquer. --Oh! Mais c'est magnifique! s'exclamait l'une, les yeux écarquillés, avec émerveillement et stupefaction. --Quel homme! soupirait une autre d'un air songeur.*'[41]

To the *haute bourgeoisie*, Parisian snobs, the *nègre* was a sexualized object. Thus the Countess was complimented for her possession, conquest, and, of course, Léardée's anatomy. The Countess had a possession few had but which provided the material of many fantasies. Indeed, the French preferred the fantasy of the exotic Other to actually tasting the imagined forbidden fruit. Or perhaps, fantasies and fears of the exotic Other were gendered. Men expressed their fantasies in exotic literature and in adventures like the Croisière noire. Men also seemed to succumb, at some level, to the Prospero Complex. Women's fantasies, by contrast were less well expressed in the 1920s than men's; however, where evidence exists, women appeared less fearful of the Black Other than men and more willing to cross the color line, as did the Comtesse de Suvarennes. In addition, Sem's sketch of the Bal nègre suggested that it was metropolitan women who readily danced *panaché* for their own renewal and liberation after the Great War.

The Carnivalesque Colonization of the Bal nègre

Many Frenchmen sought the exotic and deliberately challenged the boundaries of bourgeois respectability in the 1920s. Although the numinous was desired in the exotic, the exotic was not imagined as anything sacred that needed preservation; rather, it was something that was fluid, malleable, and

able to transfer its charisma to the mundane or even exceptional. The exotic was made to be available to French needs, and thus, it was easily destroyed or just as easily transmogrified, as was the Bal nègre on one night at the end of the *années folles*.

In the spring of 1929, Madeleine Anspach, André Derain's mistress, hosted one of the last great avant-garde fetes of the 1920s: the fête Ubu. Alfred Jarry's turn of the century Ubu plays inspired the fete, a costume ball held at the Bal nègre. It was a wild night. The celebrated Montparnasse crowd was there. Madeleine Anspach and her husband dressed up as *mère* and *père* Ubu. André Warnod, the chronicler of *bals* and boulevards, came as *capitaine* Bordure. Foujita, the artist, dressed as a prostitute. There were cases of champagne, a huge buffet of charcuteries, chicken, salmon, fruit and patisseries.

The party lasted all night, but it was a party that distilled from the Bal nègre only its imagined libertine essence. The band played more "*tonitruant*" than usual. Kiki danced a cancan with her shirt slipping off her shoulders, exposing her already well known breasts. Jacqueline Goddard, a model for a few Montparnasse artists, wearing a tricolor scarf around her breasts, was lifted up by the crowd and had her skirt pulled off. Naked, she lashed out at the crowed, for a moment, then laughed. After retrieving her skirt, she proceeded to dance barefoot, like a primitive, on a box of champagne. Later, Jacqueline was seen feeding cheese to a Black banjo player. All the women danced wildly, Odette Pannetier, chronicler of Parisian pleasures for Candide, reported: "*Les femmes dansent au hasard avec n'importe quel homme. Des mains palpent des décolletés, des hanches, des bras, mais au hasard et sans arrière-pensée.*"[42] As the party wound down, one historian has claimed, the guests' last images were of "*une femme à demi nue se contorsionnant devant*

l'orchestre noir comme en proie aux convulsions de l'orgasme dans le but évident de rendre fous les musiciens. Elle faillit se faier violer sur la piste et on l'emporta hurlante."[43] As at carnival time, the world was turned upside down at the fête Ubu. Dancing half-naked, metropolitans played at losing their civilization and being primitive. Some danced erotically, even longingly, in front of the Black *indigène*. Taking the freedom of the carnival atmosphere, and given the *garconne*'s own liberation earlier in the 1920s, metropolitan women acted out a fantasy of their own making at the fête Ubu at the Bal nègre. And yet, their fantasy was pure colonial inspired artifice. It was held at the Bal nègre, but the *bal* had no natural relationship to Jarry or the Ubu plays. The Montparnasse crowd took over the Bal, colonized it, and transformed it into nothing more than a rented hall--something the bal Blomet had once been, though originally for Blacks. The Bal nègre, at least on this night, was used for its sexual license and not as a site for anything close to authentic *indigène* cultural expression--something the metropolitans had the power to alter or even obliterate.

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Magie Noire and the Hardening of Racial Beliefs

At the Bal nègre, perceptive metropolitans saw many different types of Blacks: some were from the Antilles, others from the United States, and still others from Africa. Some metropolitans asked if there was anything in common between these Blacks or if there was a unity to the Black world. Others were concerned with the hitherto unprecedented amount of crossings of the color line. The potential consequence of all this mixing was a population of mulattos, a breed considered both somewhat civilized, at least in appearance, and morally questionable. This whitish breed, could they be assimilated and were
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they a danger to society? In the summer of 1928, Paul Morand (1888-1976), who was not unknown at the Bal nègre and who was profoundly attracted to the *nègre* but who also feared the *nègre*'s impact on French civilization, addressed these questions in Magie Noire, a compilation of eight short stories representing the Black and mulatto world of the Antilles, the United States, and Africa. In his exotic fiction, Morand forcefully asserted that the *nègre*, as well as the mulatto, had a weak moral and physical claim to civilization and was incapable of withstanding the power of *féticheurs* and their black magic.

Morand was born into a bourgeois family with interminable weekly Sunday dinners. When he was old enough to escape his home, he did--and he never ceased traveling, making distance and speed his antidote to the oppression of dull bourgeois life. Professionally, Morand entered the government as a diplomat. He was stationed in England during the Great War and then spent some time in Rome and Spain. The new modern world that the war advanced was an order that Morand believed was morally decadent, and though he expressed a conservative pessimism culturally, he still embraced much of modernity. He began to develop these themes in Ouvert la nuit (1922) and Fermé la nuit (1923), two works that gave him instant and lasting fame for capturing the spirit of the age. Morand's travels increased in the mid 1920s, going around the world to visit Asia and then traveling through the United States, the Caribbean and later Africa in 1927 and 1928, which informed the stories of Magie noire. When the World War II came, Morand found himself in England. Rather than joining De Gaulle, Morand returned to France and won a post in the Vichy regime from his old friends Pierre Laval and Marshall Pétain. During the war, Morand, an anti-Semite, served as the head of Vichy film censorship and then returned to diplomacy as an ambassador to Romania and,

later, Switzerland. After the war, Morand was exiled, but towards the end of his life, he was rehabilitated and even was honored with a place in the Académie Française.

Morand's claim to literary fame was his imaginative, insightful, and allegedly objective representations of peoples and places. His chronicles of the twentieth century were not, however, just about surface realities; he was understood as revealing deep truths about the modern age. Morand's depiction of the post-war period was considered by contemporaries as truthful, and, claimed literary critic Georges Lemaitre, "apart from a few... exaggerated statements, which, it must be said, are by no means numerous in his books, Morand is as a rule reliable."[44] Lemaitre concluded that Morand's characters were objectively drawn and less a personal expression of Morand's than a reflection of some aspect of the modern world. This, as will be demonstrated, says little for French *fraternité* with the Other in the 1920s.

Magie Noire, Morand's third volume in his series, "Chronique du XXe Siècle," was a work of exotic fiction with a deliberately constructed air of authenticity. Like many other authors of exotic works in the 1920s, Morand attempted to validate his sketches of the *nègre*. To do so, Morand briefly outlined his own first introduction to the *nègre* in his preface. In 1895, when he was just a child, representations of French soldiers pacifying the Malgache in the illustrated press profoundly affected him. When he was a young adolescent just after the turn of the century, Morand saw some African-Americans perform the "Cake-walk" at a music hall. This spectacle, he recalled, prophetically announced the modern epoch: the *nègres*, he claimed, "*font irruption dans le XXe siècle*."[45] Then as an adult, Morand began to travel--to the Antilles, Africa, and the United States. He concluded his preface pithily: "50,000 *kilomètres*. 28

pays nègres."[46] So, in just a few pages, Morand announced his exoticism as experiential, based on real interactions with the *nègre in situ*. Morand was trying to authenticate his fiction and, more importantly, his phantasmagorical portrait of the *nègre*, especially the civilized *nègre*, a figure he denigrated, if not denied--which his experience justified, at least to him and many Frenchmen.

Morand imagined that despite the African Diaspora, Black African blood, even a single drop of it, forged a psycho-social unity among *nègres*. Mulattos, with their veneer of civilization, tested this unity, but with their Black blood, they could not repress their latent primitive immorality. In "Le Tzar Noir," Morand's representation of the Antilles, Occide, a mulatto lawyer in Haiti whose very name was a play on the word Occident, was infected with hatred of both the white and the American occupation of Haiti. After destroying a club that was white's only, Occide fled to the mountains. There, he found a relatively pure African culture, one civilization had scarcely tainted. He abandoned his shoes, took a wife by rape, and fell under the spell of voodoo, a "*frère de la kabbale*," claimed the anti-Semitic Morand.[47] Voodoo, Morand reported, drove Blacks into frenzied states where blood lust was satiated and, for the initiates, like Occide, out-of-body travel was experienced.

When Haiti was freed of the American occupation, Occide, still with a hatred of whites and now under the spell of voodoo, was elected president. Occide believed it was the hour of the *nègre*; the Occident was dying. But intoxicated with power, Occide adopted Bolshevism--the antithesis of the west. He grabbed revolutionary power, became a dictator, suppressed marriage and the family, and authorized the free practice of voodoo, transforming the church into a temple where youth worshipped a wooden phallus: "*tout ce que la religion perdait, la magie s'en empara*."[48] Occide led Haiti to communism, imitating all that he knew of Lenin. But what he really wanted was a "*vieux*

communisme africain, celui du corps nu; communisme de la pipe, de la femme, de la marmite..."[49] Before this could be realized, the Americans returned and Occide fled Haiti for exile in France.

This short story was an attack on the *nègre*'s ability to govern himself. Morand suggested that in primitive society, the *nègre* could live out an edenic, communal existence. But once civilized, once given competing complex ideas, he could not extricate the noble from the base. The *évolué*, especially the mulatto *évoulé*, was thus a dangerous figure, capable of leading but not capable of moral thought in the face of his master, voodoo. Thus, the *nègre* needed colonial stewardship--and would always need it, lest the world turn to Bolshevism.

The mulatto's tenuous hold on civilization was further evident to French observers in the imagined physical mutability of the mulatto. In "Excelsior," one of Morand's representations of Blacks in the United States, the Blooms were described as prosperous southern mulattos, so light that they could easily pass for white. After experiencing increased racial animosity, the pride of the family, Octavius Bloom, was sent to Delaware to live as a white. He quickly prospered in real estate. Socially, he became the darling of the ocean set, moving in elite circles, and he anticipated engaging a society women--Morand's veiled evocation of the Prospero Complex. Octavius then brought north his sisters, Poolie and Alma. They too passed for white and were assimilated into society. But just when Poolie was engaged to be married, she began to darken. Her features even changed: "*les traits eux-mêmes semblaient s'altérer. Le nez perdait de sa solidité aiguë, la bouche prenait du relief; un air indéfinissable d'exotisme, qui ajoutait d'ailleurs à son éclat, transformait Poolie.*"[50]

Because of Poolie, the Blooms were discovered. Octavius's aunt attributed the transformation to retribution for pride. But Morand put greater emphasis on a metaphysical cause:

> *Quel étrange caprice avait eu son corps en régressant ainsi?... Mystérieuse alchimie du sang. Fallait-il la tenir pour responsable de l'enchevêtrement des races, et, derrière la race, des passions qui avaient causé cet alliage, cet obscur travail des cryptes de la peau?*[51]

Morand suggested that there was something mysterious in Black blood; it transmuted men not to the sublime but to the base. Moreover, Morand wrote to caution metropolitans who found it sport to cross the color line. The mulatto was biologically a *nègre*, physically as well as socially unstable. Mixed race unions, Morand fantasized, would not yield a stable breed of semi-civilized beings, only more *nègres* lowering the quality of the race.

Morand's *nègre*, no matter how civilized and even integrated into metropolitan society, was always subject to the power of the *fétiche*. "Congo," another short story in Magie noire that represented Blacks in the United States, was the tragic tale of an attractive *mulâtresse* who was a dance hall star in Paris, a thinly veiled metaphor for Josephine Baker. Congo, the dancer's name, was starring in the revue "Paris-Cochon" when she gave a grand party. All of Paris came, and the dancing and gaiety began when Congo entered the room. She was everywhere at once, livening up the room, unlike any metropolitan. "*C'est un monstre naturel. Mais le premier de ses dons, ce n'est ni la danse... c'est un élan vital immédiatement transmissible, une décharge plus violente que celle de la chaise électrique. Dès qu'elle apparaît, tout se met en mouvement, les gens, les lumières, les meubles.*"[52] She was exciting, even rejuvenating, but also, Morand insinuated, dangerous to metropolitan society.

She was a living *fétiche* with powers analogous to the hazardous *fétiches* in Black Africa:

> *elle pile les classes, moud les races, presse les sexes, foule les âges; il faut que l'univers s'agite... Ce que Congo fait, chacun aussitôt l'imite... de son côté, cette jeune sorcière pulvérise les mélodies musicales, politiques ou sentimentales des Blancs, les oblige à revenir aux commencements du monde, à la simplicité des grandes fougères.*[53]

Congo's very energy obliterated cultural categories and made the modern world both modern and disorienting.

For metropolitan society, Congo was symbolically a living *fétiche* and a medium for imagining the primitive and all that civilized society suppressed. The *fétiche* for the *nègre*, not necessarily the metropolitan, was as ominous as efficacious, capable of determining individual behavior and actual events. At the party, for example, Congo caught a glimpse of a black satin hand under her pillow. She immediately fled the party and met a voodoo doctor who told her the hand foretold her death. She was then led to a voodoo ceremony in Montmartre, and after stripping naked and dancing frenziedly to drums, Congo found herself on the banks of the Mississippi. She was there to attend her grandmother's funeral and to unravel the meaning of the *fétiche*. Far away from the adulation of metropolitan society and her own pretensions, Congo discovered the meaning of the black hand: she was, like all Blacks, "*n'être plus qu'une fille de Cham... qui ne peut espérer de bonheur que de l'autre côté de la vie.*"[54] Death, and perhaps happiness, soon came to her. *Fétiches*, Morand suggested, had a powerful hold on all *nègres*, including the most ostensibly civilized. Moreover, he suggested that black magic had been brought from Africa into the hexagon to rule the *nègre*. If metropolitan society fell under the power of the fetishized *négresse*, Morand warned, it may not be long before it succumbed to a more covert force of decadence.

Morand's representations of Africa reflected even more stereotypes of the era: the black magic of the tam-tam stripped off the veneer of civilization some wore and revealed the natural primitive in the *nègre*. In "Adieu, New-York!" Pamela Freedman was described as a very rich light-skinned *mulâtresse* more at home in the racially tolerant France than in her native United States. When she booked an expensive suite on a steamship cruise around Africa, Freedman intended to pass as à white. But on the ship a Mr. Jonas, a Jew, became suspicious of her, claiming he could identify any *métis* from their unique "*souplesse du corps*."[55] Jonas, a Judas figure, denounced Pamela Freedman as a *négresse* and then railed against the epoch: "'*notre âge est un âge nègre. Voyez, cette paresse générale, ce dégoût des jeunes pour le travail, les nudités... l'égalité, la fraternité, les maisons en torchis qui durent trois ans, l'amour en public, les divorces...*'"[56]

Despite this hostility, Morand also articulated the ambivalence many in France expressed towards the Black Other. His own life and literature demonstrated a fascination for the *nègre*, jazz, and even Africa. His attraction to things *nègre*, however, paled before his fears of the Black. Morand was deeply disturbed and even repulsed by the ramifications of Black culture in contemporary society, especially when it seemingly transformed established cultural categories. The exotic was clearly desirable--but only when it was confined within the walls of a dance hall and had no impact on the hegemonic civilized culture.

Ostracized on the steamship, Pamela Freedman found solace in the ship's first port of call in Africa. From the very oarsmen who took her ashore, Freedman found everything about Africa evocative of the primal. Her oarsmen were naked and "*tout dents, tout sexe; démesurés pour ce qui était de manger et de se reproduire*."[57] Africa and the African appeared beautiful, and

Freedman even dared to remember that she had Black blood in her. She went into the forest, and though it disoriented her, not unlike Cousturier, she began to experience the oceanic: "*une furieuse envie de jouer, l'enfantin désir de courir, la reprit.*"[58] Freedman's joy evaporated when she discovered that the steamship left without her; she had been tricked into believing it would leave later than it would. In America, Pamela had been at one with progress and the modern age. In Africa she was alone, apparently just a white woman, with her skin her only claim to power. Pamela frantically ran through the forest until she came to a village with a colonial administrator. There she found a French Corsican official who took her in--as his mistress. As "Madame Commandant," a white, Freedman found peace and happiness in Africa and chose not to return to the civilized world.

When the drums beat, however, Africa was transformative. Freedman became strongly attracted to the Black male. She admired the African body, which was described as stronger and less flabby than the American Black's, and she found beauty in the savage, especially one in particular, a prisoner and her porter, Mamadou. One night when she was hunting with Mamadou, they came close to his native village. Hearing village drums, Mamadou grabbed Freedman and carried her to his village--Caliban could have done no better in the French imagination. With the arrival of Mamadou, an esteemed *féticheur*, the rejoicing began. The tam-tams beat loudly. Mamadou danced wildly, and Pamela Freedman felt herself drowning in the Black world. Naked women pressed on her, not as a white, but as a woman, and Pamela felt herself a fake white among the *nègres*, fraudulently borrowing the progress of whites for her own vanity. Driven by the drums, Pamela sought her own progress, which in Morand's construction of the *nègre* meant decivilization and a return to one's

ancestors. Pamela thus threw off her clothes, jewels, and money and danced in the circle with Mamadou, welcoming her initiation as a *négresse*:

> *Mamadou la serrait nue contre son torse nu, la frottait contre sa peau douce... Non, la vue d'une Blanche ne le rendait pas fou... il prenait Paméla comme une autre, il avait pour les femmes, cet énorme et indifférent appétit du mâle noir, à qui la quantité seule importe. Humée par le cercle magique, elle se donnait à lui, à cette foule sombre... Adieu New-York!*[59]

She was no longer worth millions, just three cows, like all *négresses*.

Morand's racial disdain for the Black African and misogyny were boldly announced. In a few brief pages, he recycled, made vivid, and helped fix contested stereotypes of the *nègre*. Morand depicted the *nègre* as under the sexualized influence of the tam-tam, over-sexualized, and incapable of western love, just animalistic sex. Moreover, he represented the African women as a willing passive receptacle for the male, possessing little agency and equated to quadrupeds. Finally, this was a warning that the *nègre*, even when ostensibly civilized, would never be at home in the modern Occident. If the drum sounded, whether in Paris or Africa, the *nègre* would be driven to return to his natural primitive self. It was a self, Morand developed in Magie noire, that was weak before the powerful *féticheurs* who were bent on destruction, cannibalism, and sexual conquest.

Morand's Exoticism

Although Magie noire did not have the grand success of Morand's earlier books, it was well received and, like his other works, was considered to capture an essence of the 1920s. Most significantly, critics feted Morand's exoticism. Paul Souday, the literary critic for Le Temps, applauded Morand for writing short stories that reflected the *pays nègres* rather than technical scientific accounts of the Black Other. Souday claimed that Morand expressed an

"*exotisme très parisien, voire assez montmartrois. D'ailleurs Montmartre est un peu aussi un pays nègre.*"[60] The hyperbole notwithstanding, Souday suggested Morand's fantasies were authentic, accurate, and even apparent in the Blacks residing in Paris. Robert de Saint Jean, critic for La Revue Hebdomadaire, argued that Morand's exoticism was modern, reflecting both a break from pre-war literary exoticism and, implicitly, an extension of Souday's Parisian exoticism. Pre-war exoticism was based on scant empirical knowledge. It was about metropolitans and their concerns in an exotic, albeit generic, picturesque landscape. Morand's exoticism, Saint Jean stated, was about the actual habits, landscapes, and mysteries of distant lands and peoples. In a more plausible vein, Saint Jean suggested that the boredom of bourgeois life and inauthenticity of the exotic in the metropole drove this new experiential exoticism. Jazz, he asserted, was not even pure: "*nous croyons entendre une musique nègre, mais ses vrais créateurs la renient depuis que les Juifs l'ont transformée.*"[61] Moreover, the *nègres* in Paris were almost as inauthentic as zoo animals. If Morand wished to see *nègres*, Saint Jean claimed, "*il pouvait se borner à payer une visite au bal nègre, mais il est de ceux qui veulent voir les lions dans la brousse et non derrière des barreaux, et il a dépassé la petite cage bruyante de la rue Blomet.*"[62] The "zooification" of the *nègre* was pervasive in the 1920s. It informed Saint Jean's metaphors and his dissatisfaction with the *nègre* in the metropole. In France, the *nègre* was tamed and no more exotic or authentic than a wild animal at the zoo. The truly exotic Black Other could still be experienced, it was imagined, in his natural, savage landscape, as one does animals on safari.

Morand's exoticism was thoroughly modern, both reflecting the sensibilities of the denizens of the Bal nègre on rue Blomet and rejecting the dance hall in search of the paradoxically phantasmagorical authentic. André

Chaumeix, the critic for the Revue des deux mondes, stated that what set Morand apart from Kipling or Conrad was precisely this balanced exoticism. Moreover, Morand's exoticism was easily appropriated: "*il en communique ce que ses compatriotes lui semblent capables d'en comprendre... il va aussi loin qu'il peut en gardant la chance d'être suivi.*"[63] His exoticism was considered an account of the bizarre, and though it expressed a pessimism towards the *nègre*, it was also, given 1920s sensibilities, considered less tragic than comic. Chaumeix accepted Morand's derision of the *nègre* without question; it was too useful. Exoticism, whether tragic or comic was escapist: "*il répond à un besoin d'échapper à ce que l'on connaît et de trouver des images neuves, des secousses inconnues, des spectacles insoupçonnés.*"[64] Exoticism, however, was more than just a flight from the ordinary and an exploration of the curious. It was, claimed Henry Bidou in La Revue de Paris, an expression of what metropolitans needed in order to realize their potential as humans. The *sensibilité nègre*, Bidou posited, was necessary for the white to "*accomplir l'Histoire. De sorte que les plus raffinés d'entre nous ne se réalisent eux-mêmes que par l'office des sorciers anthropophages, à qui le jazz et le cubisme servent d'intermédiaires.*"[65] The Black Other, Morand's *nègre*, was thus a metaphor and means for metropolitan regeneration.

The accolades for Morand's veracity and exoticism, concepts that easily could have been contradictory but were not in the 1920s, was virtually universal. The anti-colonial Black press, however, claimed Morand may have traveled to Africa but he did not have the sympathy to observe anything. Garan Kouyaté, critic for the short-lived La Race Nègre, argued that Morand's descriptions of the African landscape were generic and his descriptions of African peoples inaccurate: "*Ce sont là fantaisies d'un voyageur qu'accablait la torridité de la chaleur tropicale*," concluded Kouyaté.[66] Moreover, Kouyaté

suggested that Morand did not even invent his own fantasies: they were borrowed from the anthropologist James Frazer, the colonial writer Robert Randau, and even Herodotus. Finally, Kouyaté argued that Morand objectively knew, but disregarded, the condition of the *nègre*: in "L'Aristocratie blanche contre les peuples de couleur," republished in La Dépêche Africaine, Morand stated that the assertion of white privileges contributed to the immizeration of the Black.[67] Morand was not, however, sympathetic to the Black's condition--no matter the cause. Rather, he sensationally cautioned metropolitans that they were in danger of cultivating Black Bolshevism, a curse only worse than black magic. Morand raised this specter, Kouyaté could only conclude, to denigrate the *nègre*: "*le parti-pris dans la Magie noire est, tout bien considéré, évident. M. Morand a horreur du nègre.*"[68] But it was an appealing horror to the French, cloaked in fascination and exoticism.

Conclusion

Cultural epochs defy precise periodization; however, at least two historians have dated the end of the *années folles* to the fête Ubu.[69] Not long after this party at the Bal nègre, the American stock market crashed, and shortly thereafter, the "hollow years" of the 1930s dampened many spirits.[70] Exoticism, which may have held out the possibility of fraternity with the Other, waned in the 1930s, ultimately succumbing to the racism of the Vichy years. This later racism need not be seen as contradictory to or discontinuous with the festive flourishing of exoticism in the 1920s. Indeed, as the *années folles* sputtered to a close, Paul Morand's decidedly pessimistic vision of modern life shaped an exoticism that was a negative response to the *nègre*. And we also know from his later writings that he was extremely hostile to several kinds of the Other: Jews and foreigners, as well as Blacks. Morand's importance to the

reception and representation of the Black Other was, however, considerable. Writing popular fiction under his veneer of empiricism, a significant authority claim in France, could only have further fixed the most derogatory representations of the *nègre* in the French imagination while still keeping the fascination with exoticism alive. By the end of the decade, *négrophilisme* and *négrophobisme* were intimately and unfortunately intertwined.

Endnotes

[1]Jean Morières, "Du bal nègre à... La Cour D'Assises," Le Détective, 17 October 1929, p. 5.

[2]See cover page, Le Détective, 17 October 1929.

[3]See Dimitri Vicheney, "Le Bal nègre de la rue Blomet," Bulletin de la Société Historique et Archéologique de XVème Arrondissement de Paris, Automne, 1994. This is the only secondary source I found on the Bal nègre that attempted to discover its history from 1924 to World War II and even after. Unfortunately, this article was poorly referenced. Information on the Bal nègre for this paper was culled from these additional primary sources: Georgette Camille, "Le bal nègre à Paris," Variétés, Revue mensuelle illustrée de l'esprit contemporaine, 15 June 1928, 78-80; Fonds Rondel, Ro 13013: Abel-Petit, "Le 'Bal Nègre' Rue Blomet...sous le ciel des tropiques" 12 March 1928 and André Reuze, "La Bal Doudou de la Rue Blomet," no date; Sem, "Bars et Cabarets de Paris," L'Illustration, 7 December 1929, unpaginated; George F. Paul, "The Gayest Danse in Gay Pareel" Abbott's Monthly, August 1931, 4-6, 60; and Jean-Pierre Meunier et Brigitte Léardée, La Biguine de l'Oncle Ben's, Ernest Léardée raconte (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1989). See also Billy Klüver and Julie Martin, Kiki's Paris: Artists and Lovers, 1900-1930 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1989) and Jean-Paul Crespelle, La Vie quotidienne à Montparnasse à la grande époque, 1905-1930 (Paris: Libraire Hachette, 1976).

[4]See Philippe Dewitte, "Le Paris noir de l'entre-deux-guerres," in Le Paris des étrangers depuis un siècle, eds. André Kaspi et Antoine Marès (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1989), 157-169.

[5]See Rosa Buchole, L'Evolution Poétique de Robert Desnos (Bruxelles: Palais Des Académies, 1956), 96. Unfortunately, Buchole does not develop Desnos' interest in the Bal nègre.

[6]I have seen numerous references to Desnos' article on the Bal nègre but never an actual citation. Similarly, I have seen references to the Comoedia article but never an actual citation of it. Desnos and Comoedia are cited for popularizing the Bal nègre for the metropolitan population. I believe, but am unsure, that Desnos wrote the article for Comoedia. Regardless, I have found no sources yet on the Bal nègre before the metropolitan population discovered it.

[7]Countee Cullen quoted in Tyler Stovall, Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 99.

[8]For a list of some of the cultural luminaries who frequented the club, see Crespelle, La Vie Quotidienne, 131-134.

[9]Meunier et Léardée, La Biguine, 171.

[10]Ibid., 265.

[11]Camille, "Le Bal nègre a Paris," 78-79.

[12]Abel-Petit, "Le Bal nègre rue Blomet..." Fonds Rondel, Ro 13013.

[13]Paul Bringuier, "Du Bal Nègre à... la Cour D'Assises," Le Détective, 17 October 1929, p. 4.

[14]Meunier et Léardée, La Biguine, 174.

[15]Morières, Le Détective, p. 5.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Meunier et Léardée, La Biguine, 181.

[19]See Jean-Pierre Jardel, "Représentation de <<gens de couleur>> et du métissage aux Antilles dans la littérature para-anthropologique (XVIIe-XXe siècles) images textuelles et iconographie," in L'Autre et Nous, <<Scènes et Types>>, eds. Pascal Blanchard, Stéphane Blanchoin, Nicolas Bancel, Gilles Boëtsch, et Hubert Gerbeau (Paris: Syros et ACHAC, 1995), 115-120.

[20]See Le Petit Parisien, 31 October 1929 and Morières, Le Détective, 17 October 1929, p. 5.

[21]See Le Petit Parisien, 1 November 1929.

[22]Sem, "Bars et Cabarets de Paris."

[23]Ibid.

[24]O. Mannoni, Prospero and Caliban, The Psychology of Colonization, trans. Pamela Powesland (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1956), 106.

[25]Reuze, "La Bal Doubou," Fonds Rondel, Ro 13013.

[26]Paulette Nardal, "Le Nouveau Bal Nègre de la Glacière," La Dépêche Africaine, 30 May 1929, p. 3. The Bal de la Galcière appeared to be frequented only by Blacks; I do not know, however, if white Frenchmen were excluded from the dance hall or if it closed before metropolitans discovered it.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid.

[31]See excerpt of Odéon's catalogue, "L'Ame nègre en exil... Au Bal Antillais," 1930, in Meunier et Léardée, La Biguine, 157.

[32]V. "Le Péril Noir," Le Temps, 25 April 1923, p. 1.

[33]See Fantasio, 1923. This sketch is reprinted in Jan Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 160. In addition, this sketch may have first appeared, or a version of it, in in the journal "L'Escalier de service," which in 1923 warned of the danger of using domestiques from Martinique; for additional description of the sketch, see V. "Le Péril Noir," Le Temps, 25 April 1923.

[34]"L'Ame Nègre en exil..." in La Biguine, Meunier et Léardée, 157.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid., 176. Léardée's story has not been verified; however, as fantastic as it is, I have no reason to question the veracity of his relationship with the Comtesse. Even if largely false, Léardée still demonstrates the prevalence of stereotypes of Blacks.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid., 176-177.

[42]Odette Pannetier, Plaisirs Forcés À Perpétuité (Paris: Éditions Prométhée, 1929), 201.

[43]Crespelle, La Vie quotidienne, 134.

[44]Georges Lemaitre, Four French Novelists: Marcel Proust, André Gide, Jean Giraudoux, Paul Morand (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1938), 357. See also Ginette Guitard-Auviste, Paul Morand (Paris: Hachette, 1981).

[45]Paul Morand, Magie noire (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1928), 7.

[46]Ibid., 9.

[47]Ibid., 38.

[48]Ibid., 55.

[49]Ibid., 64-65.

[50]Ibid., 154-155.

[51]Ibid., 159.

[52]Ibid., 81.

[53]Ibid., 82-83.

[54]Ibid., 102.

[55]Ibid., 203.

[56]Ibid., 206.

[57]Ibid., 212.

[58]Ibid., 216.

[59]Ibid., 240.

[60]Paul Souday, Le Temps, 12 juillet 1928, p. 3.

[61]Robert de Saint Jean, "La vie littéraire," La Revue Hebdomadaire, 28 juillet 1928, 486.

[62]Ibid.

[63]André Chaumiex, "Revue Littéraire," Revue des deux mondes, 1 août 1928, 708.

[64]Ibid., 710.

[65]Henry Bidou, "Parmi les livres," La Revue de Paris, 1 août 1928, 707.

[66]Garan Kouyaté, "La Trahison du clerc Paul Morand," La Race Nègre, octobre 1928, p. 2.

[67]See Paul Morand, "L'Aristocratie blanche contre les peuples de couleur," reprinted in La Dépêche Africaine, juillet 1928, p. 2.

[68]Kouyaté, La Race Nègre, p. 3.

[69]See Crespelle, La Vie Quotidienne and Armand Lanoux, Paris in the Twenties, trans. E. S. Seldon (New York: Golden Griffin Books, 1960).

[70]See Eugen Weber, The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994).

CONCLUSION

In the spring of 1919, not long after the guns of the Great War fell silent, Paul Guillaume, the influential modern art dealer, held a magnificent costume party to celebrate the first art nègre exhibition in Paris. His fête nègre, which re-opened the celebrated Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, marked a cultural shift in French exoticism. Indeed, Paul Poiret, the greatest pre-war couturier and creator of oriental fantasies presided over the party--dressed as an African chief in black face.[1] A new sensibility had taken hold of the French. The cultural significance of this fete was not lost to writer Paul Reboux; he announced in Paris-Magazine, "Les Nègres sont à la mode."[2] The exotic Black Other remained fashionable for a dozen years, peaking with the widely attended 1931 Exposition Coloniale in Paris.[3] This fashion, however, evoked negative responses as well as positive ones. *Négrophobisme* was the cultural corollary to *négrophilisme*, and exoticism, both the affinity for and repulsion of the Black Other, would come to serve many cultural needs in France in the 1920s.

The Great War generated profound social anxieties among many. Some looked no further than the Western Front and wondered if the Occident was truly civilized. Others suggested the West was exhausted and needed regeneration. Still others felt that fixed cultural categories, like class, gender, and race, indeed French identity itself, had become unstable. The concerns that followed in the wake of the war, Charles Rearick has shown, were addressed in popular culture through images of the common folk in songs and films.[4] But they were also addressed through representations of the *nègre* in exotic literature, spectacles, and material culture.

This dissertation has suggested that just after the Great War, the *nègre* was a key figure in a French redefinition of social categories--French and Other.

Who defined the exotic *âme noire* would also, instrumentally, define the French self. Thus the representation of the Black became a contested site and would remain contested throughout the 1920s. In literature and iconography after the war, the dominant representation of the *nègre* became the smiling *grand enfant*. This image grew out of the exigencies of the Great War, and it opened up a cultural space for *négrophilisme*. African American jazz artists and dancers flourished, and smart Parisians danced *panaché* at the Bal nègre. Some metropolitans traveled in search of ethno-erotic adventure, and many discovered beauty in the Black body. From the root representation of the *grand enfant*, a happy, life affirming *nègre* was made available to the French. He became a means for accessing the numinous and regenerating all that bourgeois society had repressed.

But there was another more powerful and prevalent French narrative of the *nègre* in the 1920s. It was of the grotesque, primitive, even derisively savage, Black Other. These representations were most noticeable in advertisements and iconography but also were apparent in exotic literature. Finally, the primitive African was consistently represented in exhibitions at the Jardin d'Acclimatation and local fairs, not to mention grand expositions. In total, these contested images reinforced a moral geography between the civilized French self and the primitive and savage Black Other. They also created a mythology of the *nègre*, ripping him out of the stream of history and essentializing derogatory qualities attributed to him.

French representations of the exotic Black Other were overwhelmingly demeaning. The construction of these derisive stereotypes, however, may have been more the expression of a French male mentality than a female one. Indeed, most of the data researched in this study was attributed to males. The two female authors studied, Lucie Cousturier and Louise Faure-Favier, and the

female respondents to the Eve survey on mixed marriages provided a distinctly different representation of the *nègre* than their male counterparts. Although these women were not immune from harsh derogatory representations of the *nègre*, they shied away from exotifying the Other and were open both to growth in their racial thinking and to extending sympathy to the Black Other. The Eve respondents, at a rate of almost fifty percent, conceived of marrying a *nègre* and having mulatto children. Fàure-Favier was unequivocal in her belief that women must become the *civilisatrices* of French society, forging a non-racist society through mixed marriages. And finally, Cousturier demonstrated that she could grow in her own racial understanding and extend true fraternity not to the Other but to *inconnus*--individuals who were unknown but who were represented as autonomous, fully formed persons. It is not clear from available data that the most derogatory genre of French exoticism, racism, was solely the province of French men, but one can say with certainty that French men, more so than women, created the contemptuous representations of the *nègre* in the 1920s.

Finally, this dissertation raises two related questions. First, given the range of representations of the exotic *nègre*, why is there a myth of a racially tolerant, indeed non-prejudicial, France? The French, not to mention some African Americans, celebrate the racial climate and exoticism of the 1920s. It is true that France, unlike the United States, did not legislate racial relationships in the metropole. Black citizens, exiles, and tourists had theoretical equality under the law on metropolitan soil, were rarely subjected to any violence, and could make a living in the hexagon. But this myth of tolerance, so often celebrated, was just that, a myth. It was forged in response to the genuinely warm welcome a relatively small number of African Americans experienced. These African Americans never numbered more than a couple of hundred in Paris in

the 1920s, generally stayed for short periods of time, and, most significantly, were talented, artistic, and, in French eyes, civilized individuals. Rarely competing with Frenchmen for jobs, it was easy to embrace them, especially when commodified on a stage. Thus a myth was born, both from the writings of expatriates and from the French.

But drawing conclusions about general French racial beliefs from the reception of African Americans is facile, if not inaccurate. Moreover, it conflates American style racism with French exoticism. American racism, though it could be complex, usually started from a biological/phenotypic categorization of the Black. Conclusions, or rather judgments, were drawn from this starting point. By contrast, in the 1920s, French exoticism and racial beliefs were the product of a complex web of relationships between the biological/phenotype of the Black, his level of civilization--as defined by the French, and French universal ideals. The Other's perceived level of civilization could then mediate negative stereotypes of his racial phenotype. African Americans were welcomed, in part, because they were citizens and bearers of a great, albeit parvenu, civilization--not because the French were inherently non-racist. Indeed, in the French imagination, the Black African Other had little civilization, was capable of little, and was thus ridiculed. French ethnocentrism impeded the leveling of the playing field between Blacks and whites, fixing prejudicial views: "*c'est bien la race blanche qui a créé la civilisation, et les autres ne se cutivent qu'à son école*," declared Paul Souday, defender of French letters. "*Je croirai à égalité lorsqu'elles auront toutes produit un Platon et un Sophocie, un Descartes et un Voltaire.*"[5] Claiming all of Western civilization as "*la civilisation*," French civilization, the standard, the Black Other defined in terms of a relationship to Africa would never be equalized in the French cultural arena, and exoticism would be preserved and racism would take hold.

Finally, this dissertation raises a moral question: how do we judge the past? Although the French in the 1920s, unlike Americans, neither lynched Blacks nor legally institutionalized racism in the metropole, the French brutally subjugated its colonial population, economically discriminated against Blacks in the metropole, and commodified and denigrated Blacks in the cultural arena. What we can surely judge is the effort to extend French universal ideals to all peoples. Here, the data is unequivocal and moral judgment easy. France was never able to extend its noble universal ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity *en bloc* to the Black, rendering him at best and at worst exotic and always the Other.

Endnotes

[1]Jean-Paul Crespelle, La Vie quotidienne à Montparnasse à la grande époque 1905-30 (Paris: Libraire Hachette, 1976), 266.

[2]Paul Reboux, "Les Nègres sont à la mode," Paris-Magazine 10 juillet 1919, 105-106.

[3]See Charles-Robert Ageron, "L'Exposition coloniale de 1931: Mythe républicain ou mythe impérial," in Les Lieux de mémoire vol 1, La République, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1984) and for a recent statement on the 1931 exposition that addresses some of the same issues I address, see Dana Suzanne Hale, "Races on Display: French Representations of the Colonial Native, 1886-1931" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1998).

[4]See Charles Rearick, The French in Love and War (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997).

[5]Paul Souday, "Les Livres," Le Temps 12 juillet 1928, p. 3.

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