

ÉTUDES ET ESSAIS

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The African Colonial Society in French Colonial Novels

*Ils s'en iront dans l'Afrique infernale
Porter la Science au pays des Bantou...*
Colonial Cadets' Marching Song.

At the 1964 UCLA symposium on plural societies, I read a paper on the former French colonies in tropical Africa. Following a method discussed by Margaret Mead in The Study of Culture at a Distance, and, later on, experimented by her (with Rhoda Métraux) in Themes in French Culture (1954), I used a random sample of 52 colonial novels as source material for this rather general sociological study. The present paper is a catalogue of the main themes in these novels from which should emerge a general outline of the French colonial society as the French colonials saw it. It is only fair to mention at this point that I am myself a colonial, which gives me both some inside knowledge of this society and a certain bias about its mores. It may also be stated that reading those 52 novels in one session was something of an ordeal.¹

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1. Colonial literature—I mean fiction about life in France's former colonies—is rather marginal in relation to the mass of French literature. It is, by the way, called 'exotic' rather than 'colonial',² even when the locale is a colony. Its classical exponents in the past have been Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1737-1814) and Pierre Loti (1850-1923), the only ones ever admitted to schoolbook consecration. Some modern professional writers such as Simenon, Pierre Benoit, the brothers Tharaud and a few others have occasionally set the

1. There is no French equivalent of a Joyce Cary. On the other hand there is no equivalent either of the bewhiskered pukka sahib type.

2. 'Colonial' has had rather bad connotations in France since the 18th century. Today it's a *hlonipha* word in French.

action of a novel in Africa, but I rejected their work to retain only books written by people with experience of life and work (other than writing . . .) in Africa. There are a few professional writers among them (Pierre Mille, André Demaison, Jean d'Esme, René Maran, etc.: see Table) but even those who made a living out of writing about Africa were never really admitted among the recognized French intelligentsia.¹ In fact, the only three novels about Africa that ever brought real money to their authors were the three which received a Goncourt Prize: *Batouala* (1921, 2), *L'état sauvage* (1964, 51) and *Les racines du ciel* (1956).² This last one has not been included in the sample because, as far as I know, Romain Gary never lived in Africa except as a visitor.

The sample has been assembled at random over the last ten years: after settling down in Paris in 1955, I got into the habit of buying all the second-hand books on Africa whose price I could afford, and those 52 books just happened to come within this price range. I think this sample is significant as, for instance, out of 10 books of this type, reviewed, since 1955, in *Le Monde*, *Réforme* and *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 5 are included in my list. This incidentally shows that of the 20 books in that list published after 1955, 15 must have gone straight from the critic's desk to the second-hand bookshop, most of them uncut, despite the fact that a good 10 of them compare very favourably with the ordinary run of French fiction. Professional and semi-professional writers tend to be somewhat under-represented, especially as regards the oldest works which have become unavailable even in second-hand bookshops. This is not very important, as professional writers show a tendency to accommodate their style and stories to the taste of the French general reading-public, while the amateurs are often guilty of talking shop in a more or less technical jargon, which may be one of the main reasons for their commercial failure. In fact, semi-professionals like Randau³ (15, strongly under-represented) or Delavi-

1. Field anthropologists were still called *explorateurs* in academic circles as late as 1940.

2. The welcome given to *Batouala* and *L'état sauvage* by French leftist critics was built on a huge misunderstanding. Both books were acclaimed as antiracist and anticolonialist and both were suppressed by the Central African Republic government as colonialist, racist and unfairly disparaging the Ubangian people. *L'état sauvage* really is a manifesto of hatred against both the expatriates and the native politicians of the Central African Republic—it seems they did not show the proper wonder and reverence for the author's talents when he was working as a technical assistant in Bangui. René Maran's case is quite different; he was a West Indian full-blooded Negro, a good, generous man, and very unlucky and unhappy. *Les racines du ciel* seems to have been intended from the start as a Hollywood film-story. It stinks.

3. In fact Arnaud, a good example of this contradictory type of colonial, the *pied-noir* (Algerian born Frenchman), liberal in Negro Africa, reactionary in his native country.

gnette (10, 14) did consciously and purposely write for a specialized audience, *viz.* other colonials.

This term 'colonial' is taken *latissimo sensu* to mean non-Africans living in Africa even after independence. The terms 'White' or 'European' would be improper since what Delavignette (*Service africain*, 1946) has called the 'colony' in the etymological meaning, opposing it to the 'country', was far from being exclusively composed of metropolitan, white Frenchmen: some 15% of the colonial service, for instance, were born in the French West Indies, Réunion and India, and a strong proportion of them were presumably coloured (indications of race are forbidden by law in French censuses and official documents such as service lists).¹

In the following list of novels no effort has been made to give the authors' real names, even when I know them: a number of them (marked* in the Table) use a nom-de-plume for various reasons, including the fear of reprisals, since many characters are all too easy to identify (an action for libel was contemplated, for instance, against Miss Garnier after publication of 28). In some cases I am not sure of the author's identity and therefore of his professional status; this is indicated by a question mark in the proper column. 'LCS' stands for 'Lower Civil Servant' meaning either a member of the *services locaux* or a member of the executive (as opposed to the administrative) class of the colonial service. 'Employee' means 'employee in the non-official sector' (*secteur privé*); 'trading clerk' an employee in a big trading firm as opposed to a 'trader' with a business of his own; 'officer' an officer in the armed forces, in general the Marines (*infanterie de marine*); 'pr. w.' a professional writer or journalist. Period of action is given either in decades or in relation to World Wars I and II. The rating in the columns 'view of' is

0: irrelevant	2: rather low	4: rather high
1: abhorrent	3: balanced	5: enthusiastic

(A less rough scale with more nuances would, of course, have been preferable but was not feasible within a reasonably short space.)

Other mentions are self-explanatory.

2. Like Gaul, the 'colony' is divided in three parts or rather, to translate the French term, three sectors: the officials (in colonial slang *la strasse* from *l'administration*), the missionaries, and the people engaged in private enterprise (*les privés* from *secteur privé*). All the authors in the sample belong to the official and private sectors, and

1. In the older novels the case of non-white colonials is seldom played upon. There are some rather good natured jokes about the *ancêtres gaulois* of Senegalese *citoyens*, and their, historically correct, boast of "having been French" for a longer time than the Corsicans or *Savoyards*. The problem of the coloured non-African expatriate appears in post-World War II novels, simultaneously with negritude, that is at a time when the nature of race relations in France had been deeply affected by German nazi propaganda and American attitudes. When I arrived in Africa twenty years ago, my Guyanese superior officer was called by the Fang *ntangan evin' asu*, *i.e.*, "White with a black face."

TABLE I

N ^o	Title	Author	Job	Date of publication	Locale and period of action	View of				Main theme	Style	Observations
						Africa	Africans	Europeans	Race relations			
1	<i>Louise et Barnavaux</i>	MILLE Pierre	Secretariat, pr. w.	1912	W. & Eq. Afr. pre-WWI	3	2	5	2	4	Humorous	Author influenced by Kipling. In charge of colonial affairs in <i>Le Temps</i> .
2	<i>Batouala</i>	MARAN René (West Indian Negro)	LSC, pr. w.	1921	Oubangui '20	2	1	1	1	1	Realist	Goncourt Prize 1921. Insists on necessities of reforms. Achieved success by scandal.
3	<i>Diato</i>	DEMAISON André	LSC, trad. clerk pr. w.	1923	Senegal '20	3	2	4	2	3	Realist	Bad ethnography. African customs as viewed from outside without sympathy.
4	<i>L'illustre Partonneau</i>	MILLE Pierre	See 1	1924	W. Afr. pre-WWI	2	2	5	2	3	Humorous	Describes impossibility of readaptation to European life.
5	<i>Cieux africains</i>	MARQUIS-SEBIE Daniel	Adm.	n.d. [1926]	Soudan pre-WWI	3	4	3	4	5	Naive	Slightly disguised autobiography?
6	<i>Le singe et la petite fille</i>	MILLE Pierre	See 1	1927	Africa pre-WWI	3	2	4	2	4	Humorous	Stresses <i>débrouillardise</i> of NCO-s as against child-like guile of natives.
7	<i>La nuit verte</i>	MARCHAND René	Off.	n.d. [1928]	Guinea pre-WWI	1	2	2	4	0	Melodrama	Opposes noble savages to pervert mulattoes.

8	<i>Le char des dieux</i>	PEYROUTON Marcel	Adm.	1930	Cameroun '20	4	3	5	3	4	Life of administrator	Realist	Opposes bush D.O.s to paper-wallahs in Paris.
9	<i>Barabane</i>	PRÉVOST M.-P.	Off.	1928	Congo pre-WWI	2	2	4	3	3	Self-discovery	Mystical	Africa 'kingdom of the Devil', necessity of conversion of poor heathen brutes.
10	<i>La paix nazaréenne</i>	DELA-VIGNETTE Robert	Adm.	n.d. [1929?]	Niger WWI & '20	3	4	4	4	4	Self-discovery	Literary	Partly autobiographical.
11	<i>Tropique</i>	DEMAISON André	See 3	n.d. [1930]	Senegal (Casamance) pre-WWI	3	3	2	3	3	Life of a young trader	Realist	Probably autobiographical.
12	<i>Iroko, Samba & Cie</i>	MONMARSON Raoul	Empl., journ.	1930	Ivory Coast '30	2	2	4	0	0	Life of lumbermen	Popular	Africa the killer...
13	<i>Tornado</i>	*ESME Jean d'	Adm., pr. w.	n.d. [31]	Fr. Congo '20	1	1	4	1	0	Administrator v. native revolt	Melodrama	Heroic administrator cuckolded by nasty planter.
14	<i>Les paysans noirs</i>	DELA-VIGNETTE Robert	See 10	1931	Haute-Volta '20	3	4	4	4	4	One year in D.O.'s life	Literary	Considered as a handbook of district administration.
15	<i>Les Blancs dans la cité des Noirs</i>	*RANDAU Robert	Adm.	1935	Haute-Volta '20	3	4	3	3	3	Relation of colonials with country	Satire	Same actual events as 14. <i>A clef</i> . Allusion to Gide (nasty). Africans know, Whites don't.
16	<i>Les anthropophages</i>	MÉGRET Christian	LSC, pr. w.	1937	Togo '20	1	1	1	0	0	Mad administrator wants to build road	Satire	Bitter lampooning of <i>mission civilisatrice</i> and relations between Whites.
17	<i>Pardon des termîtes</i>	DEMAISON André	See 3	1939	W. Afr. '30	2	2	4	2	0	Short stories	Realist	Hardness of African nature. Ridicules British legal formalism.

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18	<i>Soleil noir</i>	PILOTAZ Paul (Swiss)	Planter	1939	Guinea '30	4	4	4	3	4	Literary	Sympathetic toward Africans.
19	<i>Intrigues de la forêt</i>	DEMAISON André	See 3	1940	Ivory Coast pre-WWII	2	1	4	2	3	Realist	Courageous pioneers, brutish savages.
20	<i>La nuit des fétiches</i>	DIDELOT Roger	Empl., pr. w.	1941	Senegal (Casamance) '30	2	1	4	1	0	Popular	Treacherous fetish-priests, lecherous British villain.
21	<i>Vertiges</i>	DURAND Oswald	Adm.	1943	Guinea '20	4	3	3	0	0	Flamboyant	Borders on lunatic fringe.
22	<i>Latitudes</i>	DEMAISON André	See 3	1944	Senegal pre-WWII	2	0	4	2	0	Realist	Strong silent men and all that.
23	<i>Les impériaux</i>	*ESME Jean d'	See 13	1945	Eq. Afr. pre-WWII	2	2	4	2	4	Popular	Empire builders against savages and wild nature.
24	<i>Manière blanche</i>	*ROISSARD Jean	Empl.?	1946	Haute-Volta, Ivory Coast '30	1	4	1	1	1	Mauve	Alludes to same actual persons and events as 14 and 15.
25	<i>Le Blanc qui s'était fait nègre</i>	GUILLOT René	Inspector of Education	1946	Soudan '30	3	3	3	3	4	Literary	Redemption of former soldierly brute.
26	<i>Olo</i>	*NAVARRE Pierre	Off.	1949	Congo '30	2	3	4	3	4	Popular	Good ruthless pioneer against capitalist trust and timid administration.

27	<i>Bayembo</i>	CAZAC- HÉBERT Simone	Adm.'s wife	1949	Congo '20 to '40	3	4	4	4	5	Life of young <i>évolué</i>	Ladylike	Sympathetic to Africans. Shallow ethnography.
28	<i>Va-t'en avec les tiens !</i>	GARNIER Christine	Adm.'s wife, pr. w.	1951	Togo post-WWII	2	4	2	1	2	Race relations	Hoax	First presented as written by African girl. <i>A clef.</i>
29	<i>La part du ciel</i>	PILOTAZ Paul	See 18	1951	Guinea	4	4	4	3	3	Self-discovery	Literary	Africa as revealing inner truth of white men's character.
30	<i>Combat avec l'homme</i>	PILOTAZ Paul	See 18	1952	Guinea	4	4	4	3	3	Self-discovery	Literary	Africa as revealing inner truth of white men's character.
31	<i>Kanda</i>	PILOTAZ Paul	See 18	1954	Guinea	4	4	0	0	3	African life	Literary	Rather good ethnography.
32	<i>Les conteaux sont de la fête</i>	CHÉRY Christian	Trad. clerk	1954	Niger '50	1	1	1	1	1	Tribal riot	Sensational	Based on actual riots in Niamey. Strongly ra- cialist.
33	<i>Ciel de poivre</i>	CHÉRY Christian	See 32	1955	Niger '50	1	1	2	1	0	Thriller cum symbol	Sensational	Rather obscure as to what it symbolizes.
34	<i>La grande fauve</i>	CHÉRY Christian	See 32	1955	Niger '50	1	1	2	1	1	Life of young trader	Sensational	Racialist and anticoloni- alist.
35	<i>Chemin d'homme</i>	*BASSON Pierre	Adm.?	1955	Ivory Coast post-WWII	1	4	4	3	0	Self-discovery	Pseudo- Hemingway	A bad pastiche of <i>The Old Man and the Sea.</i>
36	<i>Le géant du grand fleuve</i>	*CURAL Roger	Adm.?	1956	Mali, Niger post-WWII	4	5	4	5	4	Self-discovery	Literary	Good ethnography.
37	<i>La machine à faire des dieux</i>	*SAINT-GIL Philippe	Engineer	1956	Cameroun '50	2	2	4	2	0	Self-discovery	Pedestrian	Could happen anywhere else.
38	<i>Bleu d'outre-mer</i>	MONOD Sylvain	LSC	1957	W. Afr. '20	2	2	2	2	2	Satire of colonial life	Humorous	Set in 1924, insists on ab- surdity of colonization.

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						Africa	Africans	Europeans	Race relations	Future			
39	<i>La possession de l'Équateur</i>	PELLERIN Pierre	Empl.?	1957	Congo pre-WWI	2	3	4	3	3	Self-discovery	Pedestrian	Life of pioneer traders, call of the wild.
40	<i>Passage du jeu</i>	GAUTHIERAU Raymond	Adm.	1958	Ivory Coast '50	4	3	3	2	1	Sad end of white men's burden	Literary	Failure of race relations at independence.
41	<i>Les indésirables</i>	*CROUZOL Jean	Adm.	1958	Cameroon '50	2	2	2	1	1	Absurdity of colonisation	Angry-young-mannish	Good description of casual talk among Europeans. Based upon actual events.
42	<i>La monnaie du retour</i>	KOLAR Jean (Czech refugee)	Trader	1959	Cameroon '50	2	2	3	1	1	Hostility of Africa to White	Literary	Same observations as 41 (also same events and locale).
43	<i>Cram-cram du Niger</i>	*BÉARN Pierre	Adm.	1959	Soudan pre-WWI	3	4	4	4	0	Love story	Cheaply exotic	Healthy naive eroticism of Nature's children.
44	<i>Azizah de Niankoko</i>	CROUZAT H.	PWD, Architect	1959	Togo '50	3	2	3	2	1	Race relations, politics	Popular	Stupidity of political emancipation.
45	<i>Histoires d'herbes</i>	*MÉROT Paul	LSC ?	1959	Cameroon '20 to '50	3	3	3	2	2	Short stories	Pedestrian	<i>A clef</i> —sails close to libel action.
46	<i>La colère noire</i>	*MARTEL François	Adm. ?	1960	Togo late '50	3	2	2	1	1	Politics just before independence	Brutal	Disillusion of hopes about race relations—everything rotten in K. of D.

47	<i>Le grand porteur</i>	*MARTEL François	See 46	1961	Tchad post-WWII	3	4	4	4	3	Self-discovery	Hemingwayish	Symbolic hunt—brotherhood of Man. Rather like 36 .
48	<i>L'arbre et le voyageur</i>	PLANCHON Michel	?	1962	Tchad, Cameroun post-WWII	4	4	4	4	4	Self-discovery	Hemingwayish	Closely resembles 47 . Same author?
49	<i>Esobé ou Nos maris d'hier</i>	CAZAC- HÉBERT Simone	See 27	1962	Congo '30 to '60	3	4	4	4	4	Evolution of African women	Lady like	Sympathetic to Africans and work of Roman Catholic missions.
50	<i>Périple clandestin</i>	Poisson Georges	Adm. (cashiered)	1963	Afr., general post-WWII	1	1	1	1	1	Stupidity of colonial policy	Heavy satire	Political attack against 4th Republic by former vichyite.
51	<i>L'état sauvage</i>	CONCHON Georges	Clerk, French Senate	1964	Central Afr. Rep. '60	1	2	1	1	1	Absurdity of everything	Literary	Goncourt Prize 1964. Balandier's comment: "Ubu africaniste".
52	<i>La lumière vient du Sud</i>	CARDON C.M.	PWD then PRO	1965	Jibuti WWII	3	5	1	2	3	War in Jibuti	Bitter	Factual and strongly autobiographical. Author communist.

sometimes to both (*e.g.* **3**, **13**); there is no missionary, although I know at least two novels written by French missionary clerics—one published, by the Roman Catholic boy-scouts association, on Cameroun, one, by the French Evangelical mission, about Gabon.

The three sectors are ordered according to a strict social hierarchy, embodied in the official rules of precedence on public occasions. The overall order is that given above, administration-mission-private enterprise, each sector having, in turn, its own internal hierarchy, roughly as follows:

1. Administration
 - a. the Governor
 - b. secretariat and heads of technical services
 - administrators

}	regional officers
}	district officers
 - c. colonial service (*cadres généraux*) and army
 - d. local civil service
2. Missions
 - a. Roman Catholic
 - b. Protestant
3. Private sector
 - a. local directors of big firms (at headquarters)
big planters, lumbermen, etc. (upcountry)
 - b. agents of big firms
small planters, hotel owners, etc.
 - c. clerks, mechanics, small shopkeepers, etc.
 - d. beachcombers, remittance men, delinquents

There are overlappings of these categories as well as individual upgradings. Thus people with minor positions in 1-*d* rank with 3-*b* or 3-*c*, while members of the board of the Chamber of Commerce rank with 1-*b*, like Roman Catholic bishops. There are also racial and national nuances. Sectors 1 and 2 are not racially exclusive: there are Africans in administration and in missions, but no foreigners in the former. On the other hand, sectors 2 and 3 are divided between French and non-French, with French on top. French Protestant missionaries, however, are generally considered as not quite French and rank with foreign Catholic priests.¹ In sector 3, foreigners are

1. The interdenominational, international (French and Swiss) Société des Missions Évangéliques had missions in Gabon, Cameroun and Togo. There were a few individual French missionaries in charge of schools or of Bible translations in Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian missions elsewhere. On the other hand a relatively high proportion of higher officials in the colonial service were Protestants—at least one-tenth while the over-all proportion of Protestants in France is under one-fortieth. Some of them had obviously non-French names—Scots or Dutch, etc.—which tended to confirm the idea that Protestants were aliens.

divided into 'Europeans' and others, 'others' in this case being Greek, Syrian and Lebanese (in slang *sirocs* or *siroccos*) and Portuguese (*Pétruquets*), petty traders often known as *mercantis*, while French petty traders are rather *margouillats* (lit.: 'gecko lizards'). African entrepreneurs sometimes rank in 3-*b*, African former NCO-s in 3-*c*, but, on the whole, sector 3 is much more racially exclusive than 1 and 2.

The position of sector 2 is never seriously contested in the sample, even in novels (6, 7) where Protestant missionaries are presented as German or Anglo-Saxon spies. In fact, the missionaries represent a rather marginal group in much closer contact with the Africans than which the 'colony'. On the other hand there is a bitter strife between sectors 3 and 2. Most writers belonging to sector 3 accuse the officials and especially the administrators of being idle parasites cuddling and/or tyrannizing the natives and opposing the economic development through redtape and incompetence. The D.O. is often an effete, cowardly, intellectual cuckold attempting to set the superstitious and/or pretentious natives against the red-blooded, virile pioneers.¹ The army is generally exempt from this kind of attack, the loyal African tirailleur or NCO being opposed to the *parvenu* African civil official.² Conversely, in many novels written by officials, the *colon* appears as a ruthless exploiter who threatens peace and order (*not* law and order) by his racial bigotry and lack of understanding of the African milieu.

These descriptions of strife become more and more frequent in the most recent novels, up to the point where everybody is at daggers drawn with everybody else and nobody but the hero, and possibly a Roman Catholic missionary, understands anything about the local situation (*e.g.* 32, 34, 46.). In older days the tiny non-African community was tighter and, at the same time, more open to the African

1. 52% of the cadets of the classes '38 to '45 of École Nationale de la France d'Outre-Mer were the sons of civil servants or armed forces officers; a further 40% were the sons of *cadres* or professional people; some 8% of the names have a particle *de*, *du*, etc., considered (quite wrongly in some cases) as a sign of nobility. All this tends to show that the higher ranks of the colonial service were recruited rather high up in the French middle class. As other *grandes écoles*, ENFOM was a way of access to the upper middle class open by competitive examination to the sons of *petite bourgeoisie*. The social origins of people in sector 3 were much more mixed; principal agents and directors of big firms were often university graduates (Bachelors or Masters of law) who had flunked the colonial service examination.

2. For some reason there is no mention of native officers comparable to that of faithful or treacherous risaldars or subadars in Anglo-Indian novels, this despite the fact the first African officers were commissioned in the 1850's and played a big part in the conquest of Africa (brigadier-général Dodds who conquered Dahomey in 1894 was *un enfant du pays*, *i.e.*, a Creole from Saint-Louis). The relations between negro and white officers were for a long time summed up in the bitter proverb "Brothers-in-arms yes, brothers-in-law, no."

milieu. Division and tension grow as it becomes more numerous and especially as white women arrive.

Even in modern times, the sex ratio of the 'colony' shows an imbalance, especially in outstations. With the exception of lady-missionaries, white women have little or no contact with the African population: the first inter-racial marriages occur only in the books published in the '50s and they are most often presented as failures, with rejection of the white wife by both Africans and non-Africans (slightly disguised actual examples in 41 and 44).¹ European women thus become an obstacle in the establishment and maintenance of racial relations, as well as a disruptive element within the 'colony'. There is fierce competition for their lawful or unlawful possession and cuckoldry is prevalent, with disturbing consequences, as cuckolds are apt to resort to dirty tricks when seeking for revenge—enrolling the help of an African sorcerer or using native poisons, for instance, which is a kind of racial high treason. In any case adultery cannot be kept a secret because the white community is highly visible against a black background; Africans either condone or give it away according to the nature of the relations between the guilty pair and the native population.² In the older novels, white women are either whores or quasi-saints; in modern ones, stress is rather placed on their capacity for adaptation to a changed environment: a frequent theme is the moral or psychological conflict between a man's work and his wife's reactions to the *milieu* (28, 41, 42), generally with tragic results.

Results tend to be tragic because violence is almost always a risk or a temptation: colonial society is a rather lawless one. As observed before, its motto, in the best of cases, should be 'peace and order' rather than 'law and order'. 'Law' in this case means French (in one case, 17, British) law, sometimes rejected *en bloc* as the symbol of an obsolete, degenerate *bourgeois* society (9), more often kept as a cherished value—for home consumption only. Its straightforward application in an African context can only lead to ludicrous catastrophes at best (4, 6, 17), at worst to dramatic breaches of peace and order with heavy losses of life (32, 41, 46). The good official is one who knows how to circumvent law without actually breaking it, the wisest way to do it being to balance a couple of equally stupid (stupid

1. The racialist stereotype of the Negro's craving lust for white flesh seldom occurs in colonial novels (only in 7 in the present sample). One finds much more often the theme of the immorality of European sexual mores as judged from African standards.

2. Rivalry between an African and a European woman for the love of a white man appears only in 28. This novel was a literary hoax; it was first sold under the pretence of having been written by an African girl. All the European characters are drawn from life (names *not* obtainable on request): Garnier's *pro tem*. husband had to be transferred to another territory to escape reprisals.

in the local context) laws against one another.¹ Yet the private *colon* generally thinks that all kinds of laws and regulations are invented by metropolitan *idéologues*, and applied by stupid officials, only to prevent *him* from succeeding in his work, and his reaction is to resort to violence and open breach of what he considers to be but a lot of useless and noisome hypocrisies (23, 34). This leads, of course, to acute conflict with the officials. There is, however, a point of agreement between them, that is a common detestation of that hateful do-gooder, the metropolitan visitor, always an uninitiated outsider who cannot understand anything of what is really going on in Africa and is eternally predestined to write and say unjust, injurious and blasphemous nonsense about it—even if he duly confines himself to printing verbatim the complaints and denunciations of his hosts (15 about Gide, 41).²

On the whole the colonials are over-sensitive about metropolitan opinion of, or indifference to, them and their problems. There is a slight but distinct paranoid strain in most colonial novels, with signs of both megalomania and persecution complex. I believe a psychiatrist could probably draw from these data a clinical description of a peculiar expatriation complex in which patients are unable to feel at ease, or at home, either in their own country or in Africa.³ There is a recurrent theme amongst native characters in these novels to the effect that “all white men are mad.” This is probably a projection of a common feeling of moral and psychological uneasiness, which seems to affect even more the people with no or little contact with the

1. A rather common theme in French culture which embodies an apparent contradiction between love for legal fine points, and acute defiance of law and lawyers (cf. Rabelais, Courteline, etc.). However, violence is rejected as barbarian or un-French: this is one of the reasons why colonials are suspicious and unpopular characters in French public opinion.

2. Randau has his central character allude to secret official reports (still classified) on unsavoury homosexual incidents during Gide's trip to AEF. It seems that Gide and some of his friends attributed the widespread hostility of Africans toward homosexuality to the reactionary, bourgeois influence of the colonials, especially the missionaries. In fact there were homosexuals amongst colonials in all categories, and ritual forms of sexual inversion in several African societies.

3. There is a hostile stereotype of the colonial in France, recently revived by polemics about the war in Algeria. Tropical diseases such as malaria and amoebic dysentery are sometimes considered in a class with venereal diseases. With the possible exceptions of missionaries and, to a lesser extent, army officers, colonials are supposed to be ignorant, brutal, lecherous, lazy and very wealthy, often with a criminal record. There were actually a small number of former convicts, *interdits de séjour* or *relégués*, in Africa (cf. Balandier's *Afrique ambiguë*, on Totor le Bagnard, who was second only to Schweitzer as a Gabonese attraction), but they were very far from setting the tone of the local white society. In the early '50s stones were sometimes thrown at cars with colonial matriculation plates in French communist-dominated proletarian suburbs.

African milieu. It is my experience that, while a number of men living alone in the bush were often (and sometimes quite deservedly) accused of being slightly crazy (*loufoque, piqué*), actual cases of acute mental diseases occurred chiefly in outstations and towns, and among women in a rough proportion of 5 to 3 (during my first three-year tour in West Africa, 3 women and 2 men, out of a European population of about 200, had to be certified).

3. This uneasiness is due in part to the hostility of the climate and the landscape. There are few favourable comments on those points: several writers—probably those with a healthy constitution—praise the wide open spaces of savannah country or the lushness of tropical vegetation (**4, 5, 18**), but in most cases Africa is presented as somewhat hellish, especially the rain forest (Frenchmen hate wild trees even though they like to plant civilized ones). There are several recent Hemingwayish tales of big game hunting (**35, 36, 47**), but, on the whole, wild animals are rather a nuisance. Food, rather than the tricolour, is a rallying symbol amidst this wilderness and so is, to a lesser extent, drink, although alcoholism is a kind of tropical disease closely linked with, and as dreaded as, black-water fever (according to colonial folk-medicine, Scotch whisky does not cause black-water fever).

4. The attitude toward Africans is far harder to synthesize. Generally speaking it is rather less sympathetic among modern writers and in novels set in Equatorial Africa or in the forest regions of West Africa: people of the Western Sudan are, on the whole, nice chaps, people of the coastal forest and the Congo basin treacherous, brutish clods. There are prestigious tribes: the Bambara, Fulani, Hausa, Mossi, and—an exception in Equatorial Africa—the Fang. The Wolof and the Kwa-speaking peoples of the Slave Coast are known as ‘Sénégalais’ and ‘Dahoméens’ (including, in fact, the Togolese), rather than by their ethnonyms. The villainous tribes are but seldom recognizably identified (the Bete in **7**, Bonjo in **26** are exceptions), and individual bad men and traitors are rarely given a precise tribal affiliation, even when the novel describes actual events having occurred in well-known circumstances (*e.g.* **41, 46** describing contemporary troubles in Togo and Cameroun without naming the Ewe and Basaa). In a minority of the sample (*e.g.* **12, 16, 35, 37, 38**), the local people are just a part of the landscape, on a level with the heat, the dust or the mud, or, conversely (**2, 3, 18, 27, 31, 49**), they are the principal or sole subject of the novel. In the latter case the ethnography is often poor and shallow, most writers being satisfied with a superficial and condescending description of exotic customs. A number of books

in this category were clearly intended for a metropolitan audience and some were successful enough in France.¹

The ethnography is much better in the shop-talk books (8, 10, 14, 15) intended for a colonial audience. It is very uneven in the more recent books centering either on race relations or on self-discovery.²

As can be expected a fair or good standard of ethnographic knowledge goes together with sympathy towards the Africans, and, quite often, with an optimistic view for the future of race relations and of Africa herself. The qualities most generally ascribed to the 'good' Africans (especially those of the Western Sudan as mentioned above) are closely linked with the self-stereotype of the good Frenchman: he is a brave warrior and a canny peasant, has a sense of humour and a taste for food and women, the old are wise and clever. Working with Africans is like playing a game of cards (5, 6, 14, 15), the African opposing his knowledge of the terrain and customs to the colonial's technique, authority and foresight. The most privileged case of friendly, even brotherly, cooperation is fighting a common enemy—in fact the smiling *tirailleur* is a popular character even in French metropolitan folklore, much to the disgust and exasperation of the younger African intelligentsia.

Hostility toward Africans, conversely, goes with a superficial, external description of their customs. While the 'good' African is certainly neither 'noble' nor 'savage'—or only rarely either—, the 'bad' one is quite ignoble and quite savage: ugly, cowardly, treacherous, stupid, bound to superstition, and living in a state of filth and degradation (2, which was acclaimed in France, but not in Africa, as a masterpiece of liberalism and anticolonialism). He can only be governed by brute strength and there is little or no hope of educating him—he is condemned by history and shall have to be either replaced by a superior race or for ever kept in strict obedience by the colonial.

The theme of impossible communication between cultures—or races—begins to creep in after World War I, and becomes prevalent after World War II, at a time when the non-African group became more and more numerous, and more and more inner-directed. This "black is black and white is white and never shall the twain meet"

1. The use of the word 'culture' in the anthropological meaning (Tylor's) is still strongly opposed by classical scholars in French universities. *La culture* is a European, or even a French monopoly; the Chinese, Indian and Arabs are allowed *une civilisation*; Africans, Englishmen, and other noble savages may have nothing more than *coutumes*.

2. I have said nothing of the very frequent theme of self-discovery; the hero finds himself by enduring the hardships, or discovering the novelties of a wholly foreign milieu. The degradation story (24) is but a case in this category. The study of this self-discovery theme would be very useful and rewarding but belongs to psychology rather than to sociology or anthropology.

TABLE II

Ref.	Title	Author	Job	Date of publication	Locale and period of action	View of					Main theme	Style	Observations
						Africa	Africans	Europeans	Race relations	Future			
A	<i>Karim</i>	SOCE Ousmane	Clerk, LSC	1935	Senegal '30	4	3	3	3	4	Life of young <i>évolué</i>	Factual	Typical of pre-WWII Senegal: pre-nationalist. Hero seeks and finds balance of evolution and tradition.
B	<i>Drame d'amour à Aného</i>	COUTCHORO Jean-Félix	Clerk, trade firm	n.d. ['40]	Togo '30	4	3	0	0	4	Crossed love	Naive	Not a single allusion to colonial situation.
C	<i>L'enfant noir</i>	CAMARA LAYE	Engineer	1953	Guinea '40	5	3	3	3	4	Life of young Malinke	Poetic	D.O.'s authority taken for granted, and accepted. Many nationalists still say book was written by white man.
D	<i>Le regard du roi</i>	CAMARA LAYE	See C	1954	Africa (timeless)	5	4	3	3	4	Self-discovery	Surrealistic, poetic humour	Same observation as above: many Africans won't believe book was written by one of them.
E	<i>Ville cruelle</i>	BIYIDI Alexandre (Eza BOTO)	Teacher (in France)	n.d. [1955]	Cameroun '40	2	2	2	1	2	Social change	Naive	Revolt of hero as much against traditional gentocracy as against colonialism. Character of sympathetic gentarme is actual.
F	<i>Le pauvre Christ de Bomba</i>	BIYIDI A. (MONGO BETI)	See E	1956	Cameroun '40	2	2	2	1	1	Failure of Roman Catholic mission	Bitter humour	White people presented as rather well wishing, but quite unable to understand Africa.

G	<i>Une vie de boy</i>	OYONO Ferdinand	Diplomat	1956	Cameroun '40	3	4	1	1	2	White colonial society	Harsh	In fact a description of Africa according to French stereotypes—a pastiche of Simenon.
H	<i>Afrique nous t'ignorons</i>	MATIP Benjamin	Magistrate	1956	Cameroun ?	5	5	?	?	?	?	Crazy	Main theme seems to be race relations. A very confused and confusing book.
I	<i>Le vieux nègre et la médaille</i>	OYONO Ferdinand	See G	1956	Cameroun '40	2	2	1	1	1	Absurdity of colonial regime	Humour	Much truer to actual situation than G . Based on actual facts. Same gendarme as in E .
J	<i>Le roi miraculé</i>	BIYIDI Alexandre (MONGO BETI)	See E	1958	Cameroun '40	3	3	3	2	1	As I	Humour	Also based on actual facts. Same observations as for E and F . Author has become permanent resident in France.
K	<i>Un piège sans fin</i>	BEELY-QUENUM Olympe	Pr. w. (in France)	1960	Dahomey '50	2	3	3	3	1	General absurdity of life	Romantic	Author says his rather unlikely plot is based on actual facts. Lives in France.
L	<i>Kocoumbo, l'étudiant noir</i>	AKE LOBA	Magistrate (Ivory Coast)	1960	France '50	3	3	3	4	4	African students in France	Factual, rather naive	All too factual description of author's own experience. Hero is saved by a French D.O. Strongly denounced by nationalist intelligentsia.
M	<i>Chemin d'Europe</i>	OYONO Ferdinand	See G	1960	Cameroun '50	2	2	2	1	1	Life of young <i>évolué</i>	Bitter humour	Even 'hero' is dubious character, almost a crook. Satire of MRA.
N	<i>Les dernières paroles de Koïme</i>	ATTA KOFFI Raphaël	?	1961	Ivory Coast '40	3	4	0	0	4	Love story	Naive	Almost no allusion to white men and colonial situation.

is, of course, in direct contradiction to the political philosophy of assimilation, which is implicitly or explicitly rejected by the modern writers. The fault is laid at various feet, without any general agreement, except at the level of a new kind of *malaise* piling up upon the expatriation complex. We can call it the decolonisation complex and explain it, at least partly, by the difficulty of adapting oneself to a rapidly changing social situation, where social relationships become to a large extent unpredictable. Some writers blame the very nature of things, the specific character of the two cultures, without any judgment upon their intrinsic value (42), others (not represented in this sample)¹ blame the wicked white men or, conversely, the irredeemable Africans and the stupid metropolitan politicians (44); a last group blame everybody and the general absurdity of life (28, 32, 34, 51). In the latter case there is a conjunction between the actual circumstances of decolonisation and the general trend of French (and Western) contemporary literature.

5. It may be of interest to make a quick comparison of the 52 novels in the sample with a similar sample of 14 novels by modern African writers.

Only one of these novels (G) shows a total, systematic hostility toward all white characters save one (and this is a missionary).² For all the others the observations made about the first sample still apply in a general way, sometimes symmetrically, sometimes parallel. All but the two first ones describe the pre-independence period and, when they deal with inter-racial or intercultural relations, show in most cases the same kind of pessimism: Africans and Europeans, even if they are of good will, cannot really communicate nor understand each other (F, H, I, J, M). The two novels which seem to postulate the reverse view (D, L) were severely criticized by the African intelligentsia as kowtowing to colonialism. The best of the 'descriptive' novels are the three oldest (A, B, C), the more modern ones (H, K, N) being very much like some of the shallow pseudo-ethnographic books in the first sample. This poses a difficult question: are these resemblances due to the similarity of subject or does acculturation through French education change the African authors' views of their own

1. There are many novels of this type, but they don't answer my criteria since they were written by casual visitors. Miss Madeleine Rousseau, chief exponent of this view, was a resident (she worked with the Education Service in Senegal) but is not a novelist. She is the inventor of this interesting theory that classical Greek is nothing else than common Negro-African.

2. This book, *Une vie de boy*, gained more praise from French critics than any other Camerounese novel. Yet it is the only one which would justify the usual mention "All resemblance to any actual person, etc." It was successful in France because it conforms to the French stereotype of colonial life.

problems and countries? The most significant test would be to compare their novels with those texts of oral literature which deal with the colonial situation and with race relations. I know but a few texts of this type, all from Southern Cameroun. One is a long epic about the German conquest and the 1916 campaign. Its central figure, Hauptmann *Mendômô* von Hagen, is presented in exactly the same light as the African heroes of similar epics describing the legendary origins of the tribes: this would seem to cross-check my impression that the first administrators were, so to speak, africanized into the African social landscape. The other texts are more recent short satirical songs about well-known Europeans (including myself). They are much more difficult to interpret (and to collect): some are heinous, others just ironical or even mildly amused. Several informants told me it is rather honorific to be mocked or criticized in songs of this type, because, especially in recent years, it was a proof that people cared about you, that you were somebody to their eyes. If this be true, then there is a sociological significance to the fact that some of the novels in the second sample (**B**, **C**, **N**) scarcely or never mention Europeans.