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The Francophone African and Caribbean historical novelist and
the quest for cultural identity

Kyoore, Paschal Baylon Kyiiripuo, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1991

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THE FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN HISTORICAL NOVELIST AND THE QUEST FOR CULTURAL IDENTITY

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * *

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1991

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Paschal Baylon Kyiripuo Kyoore
1991
To my late father, Germano Kyoree "Naanu"

My late mother, Monica Kyiiripuo Kyoree "Iwaa"

My brothers and sisters; You taught me

wisdom and human dignity
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Much has been written about the European historical novel. However, the African and Caribbean historical novel in French has not received the attention it deserves. Considerable research has been done on Negritude poetry, which shares many ideological concerns with the African and Caribbean historical novel, but until now, scholars have not devoted an equivalent effort to the study of the African and Caribbean historical novel as a genre and as a form of socially committed writing.

In my study, I propose to define the term "historical novel" and to focus on the type of historical novel that has emerged in Francophone Africa and the Caribbean. In general terms, the historical novel can be defined as a novel inspired by actual historical events. In such novels, the evocation of a genuine past is crucial to the act of fictional creation. As Alfred Sheppard says, "without the Past, the Historical Drama and the Historical Novel would have no interest, no use and no meaning" (1930, 10). He goes on to argue that the definition of the term "historical novel" must recognize a past in which imagination plays an important role.
According to this definition, the historical novelist creates fiction from his or her imagination which, however, employs the facts of history as its essential raw material. It is this quality of imagination that guides the novelist in choosing what aspects of history to focus upon and what aspects to omit. This selection on the part of the novelist is dependent upon where he or she places primary emphasis and upon the ideological stance that lies behind the fictional creation.

Critics like Arnold Bennet have argued that the author of an historical novel re-creates an age in which he did not live (in Sheppard, 15). In my opinion, this criterion does not provide a sufficient basis for defining the historical novel, because the authors of such works in many cases witnessed at least some of the events they recount in their narratives. As such cases demonstrate, history cannot be arbitrarily defined in terms of a distant time period; history continues to occur in the present. What distinguishes a historical novel from any other novel is therefore the fact that the historical novel is mainly inspired by actual historical events in a way that other forms of novels are not.
Jonathan Nield introduces another possibility for defining the historical novel when he argues that "a novel is rendered historical by the introduction of dates, personnages or events, to which identification can be readily given" (Sheppard, 15). In Sir Walter Scott's work for example, we encounter the most important personalities of English and, to a lesser extent, French history: Richard-the-Lion-Hearted, Louis XI, Elizabeth, Mary Stuart, Cromwell, etc.

As Sheppard points out, historical novelists are faced with the problem of selection. They must continually decide what to reject and what to select in terms of events, characters, and other markers of historical time (Sheppard, 85). This selection process can have different sorts of impact on the reader. For example, it can draw attention to events or characters generally regarded as insignificant by historians. From this perspective, the selection process influences readers' perceptions of history. They are made to re-evaluate their own understanding of history because this selection questions certain commonly accepted interpretations of history as it is recorded within the context of a certain canon.

Authors of historical novels also frequently introduce minor characters and fill in gaps left by
documentary history. For instance, Scott's "hero" is always a more or less average English gentleman. He generally possesses a certain, though never outstanding, degree of practical intelligence, as well as moral fortitude and a sense of decency. Ivanhoe is a "romantic" Medieval knight who is a correct and decent but average representative of the English petty aristocracy. The choice of such a character therefore lends importance to characters who have little or no importance in the eyes of historians.

The choice of minor characters to "fill in the gaps" of history enables novelists to go beyond historians in making history "come alive" by enhancing the vividness of events and demonstrating how they affect real people—people with whom readers can empathize. In depicting an inarticulate mob for example, serious historians have little opportunity to document the responses of individuals, whereas the historical novelists are free to invent individuals whose responses enable readers to experience what it must have been like to participate in such events (Sheppard, 238).

According to Paul Veynes, history involves the narration of true events, whereas novels present imagined events as if they were true. In this context, history resembles a science, although it differs from
scientific endeavors in the sense that it seeks not to acquire knowledge about the singularity of events, but about their specificity, about what is intelligible about them. Although he contends that history is impersonal, he also points out that it shares certain characteristics with historical fiction:

L'histoire est un roman vrai et la conception que l'histoire se fait de la "causalité" historique est exactement la même que celle que se fait un romancier de la causalité, telle qu'il la met en œuvre dans son roman... (1970, 423-424).

In his book Comment on écrit l'histoire, he goes on to argue that historians must make choices to avoid narrating small details that would detract from the larger picture they are attempting to create. Choice is also necessary to avoid the indifference that readers would feel if all facts were treated as equally valuable. However, choice always introduces an arbitrary factor, for historians must always fill in the gaps with hypotheses—what Veynes calls "rétrodiction" (the historical synthesis that results from the process of "filling in"). Because this process occurs in the writing of history as well as in the writing of historical fiction, the authenticity of all historical narration is questionable. For, how can anyone measure the extent to which the author of a history has filled in the gaps of his narrative with
the products of his own imagination? As long as the notion of history itself remains ambiguous, the concept of the historical novel will also be problematic.

In this study, I will discuss the problem implied in the claim to historical authenticity made by African and Caribbean writers, for such claims are by their nature based on an ideology that views "History" as an important ingredient in their quest for authentic cultural identity. The use of historical facts in these novels is problematic as well because we know that, in the final analysis, they are still works of fiction.

The writer most commonly associated with the development of the genre that has come to be known as the historical novel is Sir Walter Scott. Through his meticulous attention to minute details, Scott created a vivid sense of local color in novels such as *Ivanhoe* and *Waverly*. As suggested in Sheppard's definition of the historical novel, Scott enhances the vividness of events and seeks to evoke their impact on individual people. The attempt to convey an impression of this impact has in fact become a defining characteristic of the historical novel, often enabling writers to underline the moral and political lessons they would like readers to draw from their works.
The economic and ideological basis for Scott’s historical novels derives in part from the transformation that occurred in people’s existence and consciousness as a consequence of the French Revolution (1962, 31). According to Georg Lukács, Scott’s historical novel is the direct continuation of the great realistic social novel of the eighteenth century. The enormous social and political transformations of the past provoked a feeling for history, an awareness of historical development in England. Scott takes advantage of this sentiment by seeking to embody the most important stages of English history in his writing. As Lukács points out, he does so by portraying the struggles and antagonisms of his society by means of characters who, in their psychology and destiny, always represent social trends and historical forces. Lukács concludes that:

Scott’s greatness lies in his capacity to give living human embodiment to historical social types. The typically human terms in which great historical trends become tangible had never before been so superbly, straightforwardly and poignantly portrayed. And above all, never before had this kind of portrayal been consciously set at the center of the representation of reality (Lukács, 45).

The principle of typicality described by Lukács can also be found in African and Caribbean historical novelists, as can Scott’s awareness of the connectedness of past, present, and future. Elaine
Jordan believes that a Romantic principle of piety and continuity lies at the heart of Scott's writing: a sense of the past that is necessary to a proper sense of the present and the future (Baker, 1985, 146). This same sense later became a driving force behind the writing of African and Caribbean historical novels. Lukács regards Scott as a patriot who was proud of his people and their history, and according to him, this cultural pride is essential for the creation of genuine historical novels. A similar pride in their people also characterizes the writing of African and Caribbean historical novelists.

Scott was not the only important European historical novelist who was inspired to write novels that expressed this sense of cultural pride. It has often been a driving force behind the historical novelist's search for an authentic identity. In France, Alfred de Vigny in his historical novels goes back to the time of Richelieu in order to reveal, in artistic form, the historical sources of what he considers as "errors"—the socio-political systems that have impeded a positive transformation of French society. Unlike Scott, Vigny makes the dominant figures of history the main characters in his novels. His portrayals of them are generally accompanied by moral reflections. Like Victor Hugo, he perceives
history as a series of moral lessons for the present (Lukács, 77). In fact, this tendency is nearly always evident in historical novels.

Lukács defends the view that "the great task of the historical novel is to invent popular figures to represent the people and their predominant trends" (317). He further argues that there are important similarities between the classical period of the historical novel and the historical novel of the twentieth century. Although both aim at presenting the historical movement of popular life in its living relation to the present, the twentieth-century historical novel is more closely linked with the great and urgent problems of the present. For Lukács, this emphasis on the present contrasts sharply with the earlier historical novels of, for example, Gustave Flaubert.

Lukács also discusses the way in which a writer's political commitment achieves expression in the historical novel. For him, the writers of contemporary historical novels have the opportunity to promote a better understanding of the people's heroic struggles against imperialist exploitation, and oppression, for today's historical novelists depict the historical forerunners of these struggles (Lukács, 345). Lukács' concept of the European historical novelists is also
applicable to African and Caribbean historical novelists, for they too are inspired by the forerunners of the present generation in their struggle against colonial hegemony, exploitation and oppression—in this case the slavery and colonialist institutions that were imposed on them by Europeans.

To understand the ideological basis for the sort of historical novel that emerged in francophone Africa and the Caribbean, one must view the writing of its practitioners within the context of the Negritude movement. Negritude was a cultural and political awakening of Black intellectuals in a world dominated by European hegemonic discourse that sought to impose a Euro-centric concept of the world on them. Black intellectuals were interested in going back to their roots to define their own authentic cultural identity in terms of its linkage to Africa. Indeed, historical factors had made it necessary for them to undertake the search for cultural identity in the first place, for such a quest involves their need to affirm a viable cultural identity in a world that had denied the very existence of their culture.

The idea of cultural authenticity was central to the development of the Negritude movement, the origins of which can be traced back to the American Negro-Renaissance movement at the beginning of this
century. In 1903, W.E.B Dubois wrote *The Soul of Black Folk*. In it, he questioned the American racist system, and contended that Black Americans had as much right to freedom as did any other citizens. Dubois' writing served as an inspiration for Negro-Renaissance works and later influenced African nationalists like Blaise Diagne, Kwame Nkrumah, and Jomo Kenyatta. Members of the Negro-Renaissance group in America not only denounced repression; they also re-asserted their pride in their Black African heritage. In their manifesto, for example, they declared that they wanted to express their personality without shame or fear.

Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and other Black poets of the Negro-Renaissance movement had a significant influence on Black intellectuals from Africa and the Caribbean during the 1930s. In particular, they impressed the Negritude writers with the manner in which they asserted their African origins with pride (Resteloot, 1963). Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, Léon Damas of Guyana, and Aimé Césaire of Martinique were the three most important figures in the Negritude movement.

Senghor himself credits McKay with being the true initiator of the values he associated with the Negritude movement. In his writing, McKay had attacked Christianity and the whole system that had legitimized
slavery, colonization, and the assumption of Black social inferiority. He recommended a return to the values of the people who had maintained their "instinctive personality". McKay and other Black American poets expressed their return to their roots by adopting African rhythms in their works. This spirit of "retour aux sources" had a profound impact on Negritude writers. In his novel Dominique nègre esclave, for example, the Martinican historical writer Léonard Sainville attacks the hypocrisy of European Christian missionaries who contributed in their own way to the perpetuation of slavery.

In essence, the American Negro-Renaissance paved the way for the Negritude movement. Black African and Caribbean intellectuals had direct contact with their American counterparts who were studying in Paris during the 1930s. Like the Black Americans, African and Caribbean intellectuals experienced the racial prejudices that characterized the white-dominated social and political system in which they were obliged to live. To a certain extent, they faced the same realities as Black Americans did. The recognition of this fact fostered a strong sense of solidarity between Blacks of the diaspora and Africans at that time. This sense of solidarity is manifest in their common quest for a viable cultural identity.
When Antillean intellectuals published the journal *Légitime Defense* (with a title borrowed from a poem by André Breton), they helped catalyze the conscientization process in this quest for an authentic Black cultural identity. They attacked racial prejudice. They affirmed a pride in their African origins. They denounced the literary mimetism characteristic of Antillean writings of the time, and they called for a revolutionary movement like that exemplified by the American Negro-Renaissance. Edward E. Jones, an American student who was studying in Paris at the time, describes the phenomenon this way:

*Ces étudiants voulaient faire cause commune avec leurs frères noirs dans leurs efforts pour faire face au monde soit indifférent soit hostile des blancs [...]. Cette ambiance a facilité la naissance de la prise de conscience raciale dont l'idée [...] de la Négritude est sortie* (1974, 68-69).

Somewhat later, Senghor, Césaire, and Damas founded the journal *L'Étudiant Noir*, which served as a vehicle for the articulation of similar aspirations. At the same time, a movement called "Indigénisme" was developing in Haiti, and its avowed purpose was the assertion of Haitian pride in the African origins of the people.

European ethnologists also played a significant role in the revalorization of Black culture. For
example, Leo Frobenius in *Histoire de la civilisation africaine*, Maurice Delafosse in *Les Noirs de l'Afrique*, and others helped discredit the prejudices that Europeans had developed over the centuries about Africans. The works of these European ethnologists served as an inspiration to Negritude writers, among whom were the historical novelists whose works will be examined in the present study. These ethnologists were reacting against the Euro-centric view of Africa and Africans. In effect, they were challenging the perception of the African as a "bon sauvage". European racist theories such as those advanced by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, who viewed Africans as living in a pre-logical state, could not be ignored. Indeed, the ethnological debates that took place during the 1920s and 1930s in France were crucial in the transformation of the attitudes that Africans and Caribbeans themselves had toward an Africa that had until then largely been regarded as the "Dark Continent". European intellectuals contributed in no small way to the conscientization of the world with regard to European misperceptions of other peoples. Léon Fanon in his study of the myth of the black in French discourse, traces the origin of such discourse and demonstrates how it manifested itself in French literature as well as in French colonial
language usage. He also stresses the important role played by French intellectuals in rejecting the stereotypes of black people in French discourse:

Àprès la seconde guerre mondiale [...] des intellectuels français de plus en plus nombreux dénoncent de plus en plus ouvertement les mythes relatifs à l'Afrique noire qui meublaient confortablement les esprits (1968, 194).

Jean-Paul Sartre, Gaston Bachelard and Marcel Griaule were among these European intellectuals, and they supported the founding of the journal Présence Africaine as well as of the publishing house of the same name. Fanouhd-Siefer remarks that the articles in the first issue of Présence Africaine of 1947 represented an attempt to rehabilitate the black person within the concept of Euro-centric hegemonic discourse of the "Other".

Founded by Alioune Diop in 1947, Présence Africaine published its first issue concurrently in Paris and Dakar and soon became the principal organ of Black activism at the time. According to Kesteloot, Présence Africaine was also supported by other important French intellectuals such as André Breton, Albert Camus, Théodore Monod, Michel Leiris, and Georges Balandier (Kesteloot, 254) as well as by black intellectuals like Senghor, Césaire, Richard Wright, and Paul Hazoumé—one of the historical novelists
whose work will be considered in the present study.

Although the journal was not created solely for political purposes, it inevitably served as a forum for black intellectuals and for Europeans sympathetic to their cause, for all those, in fact, who desired to question the colonization process and its consequences for Black people everywhere. The publication of the proceedings of the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists is an excellent example of the role the journal played in awakening people to the injustices inherent in colonialism. The articles published in the journal at this time reveal the intense awareness of Black intellectuals about their situation vis-à-vis the colonial master.

In his address at a conference at the "Centre International" of Bruxelles in March 1958, Alioune Diop emphasized the link between political engagement and the cultural independence for which Black peoples were fighting. He argued that: "les hommes de culture, en Afrique, ne peuvent plus se désinteresser du politique, qui est une condition nécessaire de la résistance culturelle" (Kesteloot, 264).

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, French colonial writers had sought to justify the claim of the so-called "mission civilisatrice". Their works constituted a literature
that claimed to present the truth about an Africa that Europeans tended to see only in exotic terms, but this perception of their culture was precisely what prompted African and Caribbean historical novelists to propose alternative visions of the past as well as of the present.

To understand the historical backdrop against which blacks from Africa and the diaspora found it necessary to re-evaluate their identity in the contemporary world, one needs to understand the nature of Euro-centric perceptions of Black people in general. Lord Lugard, a British Governor of West Africa during the colonial era, might be considered a representative spokesman for this point of view. In 1922, for example, he defended European rule over Africa in the following terms:

As Roman imperialism laid the foundations of a modern civilization, and led the wild barbarians of these islands along the path to progress, so in Africa today we are repaying the debt, and bringing the torch of culture and progress, while administering to the material needs of our own civilization (1980, 22).

Lugard's own declaration makes it clear that the ultimate purpose of colonization was economic gain for Europe and not the desire to attain some abstract humanitarian ideal of sharing European "civilization" with Africans. In his work, Fanoukh-Siefer describes
how European perceptions of black people emerge in
their writing and in turn contribute to the oppression
of the supposedly inferior "Other", whose image they
themselves have created:

European literature was therefore one medium through
which stereotypes about other peoples were created.
Black intellectuals reacted to this situation by
taking recourse to the same weapon. They used fiction
to subvert widely held negative images of black
peoples.

Negritude discourse and the historical fiction
inspired by it represent attempts not only to correct
the misconceptions and myths of the European "Other";
they also subvert this discourse in a concrete
fashion, as Fanough-Siefer explains:

Un des traits principaux du nègre—tel qu'il est présenté dans le mythe—est son indolence, sa paresse congénitale. En mettant l'accent sur l'inaptitude du nègre au travail et sur son aptitude remarquable à la flânerie, les coloniaux croient saisir ainsi la dimension majeure de l'âme nègre: presque tous déplorent ce qu'ils considèrent comme une inclination du nègre pour la vie facile, et s'insurgent
The crucial issue here is the emphasis on what Europeans considered to be the laziness of black people, for this image of laziness served as an effective way of creating "otherness" in the minds of the colonized peoples. It also served as a justification for the so-called "mission civilisatrice". European perceptions of black people were necessarily conditioned by such stereotypes. Slavery and colonization had been rationalized by Europeans on the basis of their conviction that the black race was an inherently inferior race. This discourse was subverted in the Negritude-influenced historical fiction that is the subject of the present study. Others have discussed this relationship; for example, previous scholars of Glissant's works have studied his re-writing of history in fictional terms, but they have not examined in detail how Glissant textually subverts the Euro-centric discourse of the Other.

In European discourse, terms like "civilized" and "primitive" were often applied to Africans and to other colonized peoples in ways that assumed the universal applicability of European discourse. European scholars tended to interpret the African
world view in terms of a mind that was supposedly "primitive" in comparison to that of "civilized" Europeans. Lévy-Bruhl's "mentalité prélogique" is a characteristic example of such thinking. As a Professor at the Sorbonne, Lévy-Bruhl had a significant impact on French perceptions of Africa. Fanoudh-Siefer explains the influence of Lévy-Bruhl and his universalizing contemporaries in the following terms:

[...] La littérature et la politique se sont rencontrées. Il fallait montrer au monde que les populations noires étaient arriérées, primitives, adonnées au fétichisme et à la superstition, embourbées dans une mentalité prélogique et irrationnelle. Après cela, on avait bonne conscience, d'autant plus qu'on avait la caution scientifique que constituaient les travaux de Lévy-Bruhl sur la mentalité primitive (à la fin de sa vie, du reste, Lévy-Bruhl est revenu sur ses conclusions, avouant le mal qu'il a permis [...] [171]).

Colonial hegemony was therefore viewed as justifiable on the grounds that theories such as Lévy-Bruhl's supposedly provided a strong scientific basis for the European's right to colonize others. Lévy-Bruhl's renunciation of his earlier concept of the "primitive" is particularly significant because it demonstrates that colonialist discourse was less scientific than its proponents had claimed.

Fanoudh-Siefer goes on to show how the use of terms such as "fetish", "sorcerer" and "superstition"
helped to perpetuate the European concept of the African as a primitive "Other" (171). He then remarks that people often used Lévy-Bruhl’s theories in framing their interpretations of their relationship with colonized peoples: "Levy-Bruhl embrassait, à travers le mot de primitif, non seulement les vrais primitifs, mais aussi tous les colonisés en général et en particulier ceux qu’on appelle maintenant 'les hommes de couleur’" (Fanoudh-Siefer, 171). This statement illustrates how colonialist discourse implicitly claimed universal validity for its underlying assumptions. After all, it was in the colonialists’ interests to see all colonized peoples in a way that, in their eyes, justified their destruction of other peoples’ cultures.

Levy-Bruhl’s confession is revealing in the sense that it graphically illustrates the type of "scientific" theories that were used to justify colonial enterprises. In his Carnets he confesses:

J’avais déjà mis beaucoup d’eau dans mon vin depuis vingt-cinq ans [...]. J’abandonne une hypothèse mal fondée [...]. Je ne parle plus d’un caractère prélogique de la mentalité primitive [...]. Du point de vue strictement logique, aucune différence essentielle entre la mentalité primitive et la nôtre [...]. J’affirmerai, une fois de plus, que la structure logique de l’esprit est la même chez tous les hommes et que par conséquent les "primitifs", tout comme nous, rejettent la contradiction quand ils l’aperçoivent [...] (257-281).
In these terms, Lévy-Bruhl dismisses the scientficity of his own previous theories. Nevertheless, these non-scientific theories exercised an enormous influence on the perceived relationship between Europeans and their colonized "other". One of the major goals of the historical novelists considered in this study was to create a counter-discourse that would subvert the commonly held, stereotyped images based on these non-scientific theories.

The stereotyped image of black people as infantile is evident in the remarks of Frenchmen such as Reverend Maurice Briault, who compares Africans to big children. In fact, he was convinced that "la meilleure définition du Noir est que c'est un grand enfant, un enfant qui reste tel jusque sous les cheveux blancs" (quoted in Panoudh-Siefer, 174). In colonialist discourse, the image of Africans as children served to justify European theories of African dependency. They argued that Africans needed Europeans because they were incapable of developing on their own. By means of such arguments, colonial conquest and its attendant consequences could be presented as justifiable.

In twentieth-century Africa, colonialists thought they discerned features that could be identified with people who had lived in Medieval France or in other parts of the world during previous centuries. Some
writers equated black people with characters such as those ridiculed by La Bruyère, La Fontaine, and Rabelais in their writings (Fanoudh-Siefer, 180).

While paying tribute to Maurice Delafosse and other European ethnologists who had demonstrated intellectual honesty and scientific prudence in their attacks upon the Euro-centric discourse of the other, Fanoudh-Siefer laments the fact that most of them continued to interpret African culture through the grid of their own European worldview. Roland Barthes also denounces the Euro-centrism of the official colonial language after the Second World War. He argues that such a language was not meant simply to communicate, but to intimidate. Thus, official colonialist language perpetuated the myth of the primitive other. As Barthes points out:

Le vocabulaire officiel des affaires africaines est, on s’en doute, purement axiomatique. C’est dire qu’il n’a aucune valeur de communication, mais seulement d’intimidation. Il constitue donc une “écriture”, c’est-à-dire un langage chargé d’opérer une conscience entre les normes et les faits, et de donner à un réel cynique la caution d’une morale noble. D’une manière générale, c’est un langage qui fonctionne essentiellement comme un code, c’est-à-dire que les mots y ont un rapport nul ou contraire à leur contenu. C’est une écriture que l’on pourrait appeler cosmétique parce qu’elle vise à recouvrir les faits d’un bruit de langage, ou si l’on préfère, du signe du langage (1957, 155-161).
Barthes thus underscores how colonial language itself revealed the mechanisms of European exercise of power. Europeans were not interested in genuine communication with the colonial "subject". For this reason, the language they used was filled with messages that were meant to intimidate and thereby to facilitate the control of colonized peoples. Confronted with the myths that had been perpetuated by the sort of language described by Fanoudh-Siefer and Barthes, African and Caribbean writers, including the historical novelists under discussion in the present study, transformed these negative images into positive ones—a process that was developed by the early adherents of the Negritude movement.

The theme of a "retour aux sources" was a central preoccupation of the Negritude writers, and in their quest for a viable cultural identity, they espoused traditional African values and motifs. For example, Senghor glorifies the African woman, the black woman, and evokes childhood memories of his native Senegal in his poetry. His basic impulse was to create a literary work based on a knowledge of his own people's history and culture. Similarly, the four historical novelists treated in this study all adopted the Negritude concept of "retour aux sources" as a center of focus in their own work. In fact, it is for this very reason
that they chose to create fiction inspired by the "true history" of their own people. When they wrote novels inspired by the history of slavery or the history of the colonial period, they were drawing upon the same ideological backdrop as the one that had been utilized by the Negritude writers.

For the writers treated in the present study—Nazi Boni, Paul Hazoumé, Léonard Sainville, and Edouard Glissant—the impulse to write historical novels can only be understood within the context of the Negritude movement. Boni was an active participant in it. He even dedicated his historical novel, Crépuscule des temps anciens, to Senghor. Hazoumé was also involved with the Negritude movement, and his Doúcicini reflects the Negritude rejection of the idea that Africa was a "tabula rasa" before the arrival of the Europeans on the continent. Sainville too was an active participant in the Negritude movement. He worked all his life for the affirmation of Black cultural identity, and his commitment to the Negritude cause is clearly reflected in his historical novel Dominique nègre esclave. Glissant is more of a progressive Negritudist, for he believes in going beyond what the early Negritude writers sought to achieve, as he intimates in his novel Le Quatrième Siècle. In Glissant’s view, black people from the
Caribbean need to look toward the future instead of remaining stultified in an ostensibly glorious past. His concept of "Antilleanité" is a variation of the Negritude concept; it represents an attempt to find a way out of the present predicament and to create a better future.

The first chapter of my study focuses on the ambivalent situation of Hazoumé as an "évoluté" writer. The ideological basis behind the portrayal of traditional power structures in Doguicimi will be examined closely to illustrate how Hazoumé creates an anti-colonial discourse while portraying the Dahomeyan kingdom on the eve of European colonial rule. At the same time, I will discuss the pro-colonial dimension of Doguicimi in order to explore the problematic nature of the "dialectic" between history and fiction. In historical fiction, the direction in which this dialectic moves will always be determined by the ideological position of the writer, and Hazoumé’s ambivalence toward French colonialism is a dominant shaping influence in his novel.

In his novel, Doguicimi is the wife of a Prince, Toffa, who has left the city to participate in a war waged against the neighboring Mahi. The Dahomeyans are defeated, and it is not known whether or not Toffa is still alive. Toffa’s rival, the designated heir to the
throne, tries to seduce Doguicimi during her husband’s absence, but Doguicimi resists all his advances. During a second war against the Mahi, the Dahomeyans are victorious, but at that time, they discover that Toffa has already been killed. Doguicimi decides she will be buried with the skull of her beloved husband. She cannot be dissuaded from her resolve, not even by the "Vidaho", the man who has been trying to seduce her ever since her husband went off to war. At the end of the novel, Doguicimi insists upon being buried alive with her husband’s skull, exemplifying an extraordinary courage, fidelity, and love.

One important theme I will explore in this first chapter is the use of a female hero as an indication of the writer’s ideological position. Hazoumé glorifies the heroine in a way that is characteristic of Negritudist discourse. Although the novel is hardly feminist in the modern sense of the word, it is significant that Hazoume portrays a female character who has the courage to challenge the traditional male superiority complex. Doguicimi herself delivers an extended diatribe against male dominance. The use of a female hero is also important in this historical novel because it conveys a positive image of the African woman. The truth about the history of the Dahomeyans is that women played a crucial role in their society.
Amazons were an important force in the Dahomeyan army, for they actively engaged in combat at the time of war, a fact which is often downplayed by historians and novelists alike. Hazoumé's idealistic portrayal of his heroine also serves as a symbol of pride for the present generation of African women in a male-dominated society.

His depiction of the power structure of the Dahomeyan kingdom is particularly significant because it clearly demonstrates the falsity of the Euro-centric view that Africa was a continent without culture in pre-colonial times. What Hazoumé demonstrates is that the Dahomeyan kingdom had a highly developed culture with an elaborate power structure. The establishment of this fact alone is a major step toward the definition of a viable cultural identity that was not wholly dependent upon European universalist conceptions of "civilization".

In Doguicimi, therefore, readers are confronted not with a "civilizing" process implemented by superior Europeans, but rather by a conflict of civilizations. This conflict is reflected in Toffa's long speech at the beginning of the novel. In this speech, he tries to persuade the Council of Elders that the Europeans are no true friends of the Dahomeyans. He points out their selfish political and
economic interests, as evidenced by their introduction of slave trade. The idea to be stressed here is that the anti-colonial discourse is placed in the mouth of Hazoumé’s exemplary hero, Toffa, who seeks to explore the truth about the relationship between the indigenous Africans and the European invaders. This truth is characteristic of nearly all colonial encounters, and Hazoumé underscores it in his attempt to re-write the history of his people in his own quest for an authentic cultural identity.

Inspired by true history, the fictional Doguicimi demonstrates that Africans had their own socio-political systems before the advent of colonialism and that the history of African peoples did not begin with colonialism. By extension, the novel also suggests how colonialism destroyed indigenous institutions and imposed European systems of government on the people.

However, there is an underlying internal tension in Hazoumé’s anti-colonial discourse because he himself was ambivalent toward French colonialism. The position he adopts at the end of the novel actually undercuts the ideological stance implicit in the novel itself. George Hardy’s preface to Doguicimi and Hazoumé’s own epilogue to the novel defend the overall impact of the French colonial presence in the area and
thereby deconstruct the anti-colonial thrust of the narrative.

The ambivalent position of the African and Caribbean novelist in his anti-colonial stance is dramatically reflected in the case of Hazoumé, who wanted to see the end of many aspects of the civilization he portrays in Doguicimi. For example, he was opposed to slavery and human sacrifice. At the same time, he wanted his readers to recognize the nobility of characters like Toffa, Guézo, and Doguicimi. In a sense, this tension is an integral part of Hazoumé’s psyche. As an "évolué, he sought to be French, but as an African, he was attempting to assert his independence and his cultural identity in the face of a civilization that denied it. Part of this ambivalence is explained by the fact that Hazoumé himself did not come from the Dahomeyan kingdom, but from the area of Porto Novo, which had frequently been menaced by Dahomey.

This tension is apparent not only on the thematic level of the novel, but also in its narrative style. The long arguments between Toffa and other members of the Council of Elders (about whether or not to go to war against the Mahi) take up several pages in the novel. On the thematic level, Toffa and other Elders are debating an issue that is crucial to the
African-Caribbean historical novelist. How does one assert one's identity when one is an "évolué" in the French system? On the narrative level, the debate between the Elders enables Hazoumé to portray direct exchanges between the characters—to portray the palaver that is such an important element of African culture. Issues are settled among the Elders.

On the thematic level, the debate among the Elders also reflects the ambivalent position of Hazoumé himself. What role does European education play in his search for and his assertion of cultural identity? In *Dogoncimi*, there is a dialectic between his own traditional African heritage and the European cultural values inculcated in him during his formal education. In novels about colonial and post-colonial periods in Africa, the culture conflict is often reflected on the level of the characters. In Hazoumé's historical novel about pre-colonial Africa and the beginning of colonialism, however, this conflict is reflected primarily in the writer's own position as a French "évolué".

The second chapter of my study deals with Nazi Boni's *Crépuscule des temps anciens*. In re-writing the history of his people, Boni presents the heroic struggles of his ancestors against French invasion as an inspiration to African nationalists who were
struggling at that time for independence. In effect, the writing of Crépuscule des temps anciens was an overt rejection of the Euro-centric image of Africa as a "Dark Continent". Like Hazoumé, Boni sets out to demonstrate that African history did not begin with the advent of colonialism. In the pre-colonial era, there were highly developed socio-political institutions among African peoples such as the Bwa, whom he depicts in the novel. From this perspective, his re-writing of African history also constitutes an assertion of pride in the African cultural heritage.

European writing about Africa constitutes what has often been called "colonial discourse". In his Colonial Encounters, Peter Hulme argues that the basic idea behind colonial discourse was the need to produce something for Europe, to articulate procedures, modes of analysis, kinds of writing, and clusters of imagery that suited the European view of the Other (1986, 56). In his novel, Boni depicts how the Europeans, more specifically the French, encountered the Bwamus and imposed colonial rule on them by force, but he also shows how the Bwamus resisted the European idea of producing something for themselves. The Bwamu civilization portrayed in Crépuscule des temps anciens reflects not the perspective of an outsider, but the vantage point of a writer who is part of the culture
he is describing. Inspired by the true history of the Bwa, Crépuscule des temps anciens sustains the argument that Africans had their own civilization before the advent of colonization. The corollary of this argument is the contention that the European colonial enterprise destroyed civilizations such as that of the Bwanu. Boni's account of the senseless destruction wrought by colonial rule in Upper Volta re-inforces the ideological thrust of the novel as an example of anti-colonial discourse.

My thesis is that Boni re-wrote the history of his people in order to establish the truth about colonial encounters in general. Re-writing the history of his people implies a questioning of European concepts of pre-history. As Hulme has pointed out, Europeans defined history as the presence of written records. The premise is that we know what happened in historical societies because there are written records that preserve the truth about them. Pre-history is always seen by Europeans as having ended with the colonial encounter. But Hulme argues that written records, like archeology, are texts that must be read and interpreted. In writing Crépuscule des temps anciens, Boni redefines such terms as "history", "civilization" and "culture". The definition of these terms cannot, he argues, be the sole preserve of the
West. Boni’s discourse therefore serves as a counter-discourse that undercuts European discourse about the Other—the Other in this case being the African.

As Edward Said asserts in his book *Orientalism*, the relationship between the West and the Other has been a relationship based on power, domination, and a complex hegemony. According to him, the Europeans’ conviction that they are superior to other peoples defined their concept of the Other. Imperialism, Said declares, was posited upon the binary typology of advanced and backward races, cultures, and societies. Said further argues that the Oriental was assumed to be the member of a subject race and therefore had to be subjugated (1978, 40). This argument also obtains in the case of the European scramble for and partition of Africa. The image of the Other promulgated by colonialist discourse is precisely the image that the African and Caribbean historical novelist seeks to correct.

By presenting colonial hegemony against the backdrop of Bwa civilization, Boni draws attention to the way in which European hegemony had destroyed African civilizations such as that of the Bwa. His treatment of history clearly undermines the colonialist argument that Europeans had brought
civilization to Africa. As Aimé Césaire argues in Discours sur le colonialisme, colonization de-humanizes the colonizer himself. This argument is strikingly illustrated by Boni’s historical novel, in which the French senselessly massacre the Bwas because they resist invasion. One of the reasons for this dehumanizing action is, Senghor argues, that colonialism was not based on the mutual exchange of cultural values. This lack of mutuality is a key aspect in Boni’s portrayal of the situation in Crémuscle des temps anciens. The French brutality in their first encounter with the natives offers an example of this colonial hegemony. The political and economic interests of France superseded any idea of a possible exchange of cultures in the colonial enterprise.

In the writer’s attempt to re-establish the truth about his people, history is crucial, and that is the point emphasized by Manessy in his preface to the novel:

Le Crépuscule des temps anciens est une œuvre attachante à plus d’un titre par la sincérité de l’auteur, anxieux de ne point trahir son peuple, par la vivacité et l’exactitude de ses descriptions, par la matière même du récit qui commence par une évocation de l’âge d’or pour s’achever dans le sang et les ruines de la grande révolte de 1916. De cette révolte et de sa reprise, le Bwanu porte encore les stigmates: son indépendance y a péri, son équilibre démographique en a été pour longtemps rompu, son territoire s’est ouvert
In terms of its influence on the writer's ideology, the traumatic experience recalled here is significant. Manessy is emphasizing the fact that the advent of colonialism also had a profound effect on African civilization. As he rightly points out, Boni is not portraying a civilization that has been completely wiped out. The culture of the indigenous people has, to a large extent, survived the shock of colonial encounters, and that is why Boni himself calls on African researchers to help safeguard their cultural heritage, as he did in writing a historical novel about his own people.

Boni's rejection of the Euro-centric view of Africa, calls into question some of the major assumptions behind the usual distinctions between center and periphery. In colonialist discourse, the West is perceived as the center. The "Other", or the African, is relegated to the periphery. Boni's novel rejects this interpretation of African civilization. According to him, European culture was being imposed on people who already had a well-developed culture of their own. For the Bwas, as for most other peoples in Africa, the first confrontation with Europeans was the
beginning of a cultural contact that was never based on mutual exchange, but rather on the forcible imposition of European culture on the Other.

Cheikh Anta Diop's theories in his *L'Unité culturelle de l'Afrique Noire* are relevant to Boni's chronicle of the Bwa people and to Hazoumé's chronicle of Dahomeyan people in the sense that they too were attempting to re-establish the origins of African history. Anta Diop's study unequivocally rejects the Euro-centric view of African history. Like Diop, Boni believes that Africans should study the past not just for the sake of learning about their own history but to assimilate the lessons that are embedded in it.

These historical novelists tried to do in their way what African historians like Diop and Adu Boahen accomplished in their writing; in other words, they reinterpreted the history of Africa in a way that purged it of the inaccuracies, myths, and misconceptions which were characteristic of Euro-centric history. As Boahen argues in his James Schouler lecture, most of what has been written about colonialism in Africa has been written primarily from a Euro-centric point of view. The principal preoccupation of those who wrote such histories has been the origin, structure, operation, and impact of colonialism, but as he points out, one aspect of the
situation has been consistently overlooked:

The crucial questions of how Africans perceived colonialism, what initiatives and responses they displayed in the face of this colonial challenge, and above all how they reacted after the forcible imposition of colonialism [...] (1987, vii).

The stories that Hazoumé and Boni recount are an example of how Africans reacted to colonial conquests recounted from the point of view of insiders who had been the victims of these encounters. African peoples were not passive victims of colonialism, and African historical novelists were inspired by this fact in their rejection of the Euro-centric interpretation of History.

Some European historians have even argued that the benefits of colonialism far outweighed the negative consequences of colonial encounters in Africa. According to these historians, European colonialism was beneficial to Africans themselves. In contrast to such ethnocentric representations of history, Boni portrays the Bwa kingdom as an example of what colonialism destroyed in African socio-political systems. To subvert the Euro-centric discourse of the "Other", African and Caribbean historical novelists used the same history that had served as the source of European myths and prejudices about Africans, but they presented it from the African perspective.
One important aspect of the cultural heritage portrayed in *Crépuscule des temps anciens* is the religion practiced by the Bwa people. This religion is depicted as part of what Africans must know in order to appreciate their origins, their history. In *Crépuscule des temps anciens* (as in Hazoumé’s *Dogucimi*), readers learn that religion permeates the whole life of an African people. Persuading readers to recognize the importance of this religious sentiment is one goal of Boni’s affirmation of pride in his African cultural heritage.

Like the earlier proponents of Negritude discourse, Boni demonstrates how religion serves as an important aspect of the culture of the people he is portraying in his fiction. His narrative emphasizes the fact that Africans did not need a “mission civilisatrice” to bring them knowledge about the existence of a Supreme Being. In Bwa society, order is maintained by people’s fear of invoking the wrath of the Ancestors.

The third chapter of my study will be devoted to the question of the Other in Léonard Sainville’s historical novel *Dominique nègre esclave*. In this novel, Sainville subverts the discourse of the center through his revalorization of the image of the maroon (revolted slaves who lived in the mountains and
occasionally descended to the plantations to raid their masters’ farms). For Sainville, the maroon is not a primitive savage who can be bought and sold like an object, as he had been depicted in Euro-centric discourse. On the contrary, Sainville’s maroon subverts the discourse of the master by persistently rejecting the image imposed on him by the white béké (French slave owner). He in effect established a counter-discourse of his own. Homi Bhabha perceptively argues that, in the colonial situation, one should not talk only about the discourse of the colonizer (as seems to be the case in Said’s theory), but also about the counter-discourse of the colonized. His point is particularly relevant to a discussion of Sainville, for the Martinican writer successfully reproduces this counter-discourse in his historical fiction about slavery.

Sainville was a professional historian. He even taught history at the Sorbonne for several years. He worked all his life to foster the recognition of Black cultural identity. Like Boni, he was inspired to write an historical novel as a result of his own research into the history of his people. The documentation that provided him with the raw material for the writing of Dominique nègre esclave was later used in a chapter of his "La Condition des Noirs dans les Antilles
Françaises de 1800 à 1850”—a "Doctorat d’État" thesis that he presented at the Sorbonne in 1970 after twenty years of research.

Dominique nègre esclave was published in 1951 in commemoration of the centenary of the abolition of slavery. The novel is about the history of maroon revolt in the French Caribbean during the first half of the nineteenth century. The main character is the picaresque-like hero Dominique. By comprehending the nature of Dominique's "adventures" with different slave masters, readers achieve a remarkable insight into the real nature of slavery in the French Caribbean. Dominique repeatedly changes masters, revolting and marooning at every opportunity and becoming more hardened and more witty after each experience with a new master.

Sainville believes that the maroon revolt was a crucial factor in the history of Antilleans, who are seeking to define an authentic cultural identity; therefore, he presents his major character Dominique as an important element in his own articulation of an anti-colonial discourse. Like the maroons in Glissant's Le Quatrième Siècle, Dominique is a symbol of the victimization inflicted on black people within the sado-masochist system implemented by those who benefitted from slavery. In the context of this
shameful past, the Antillean needs to re-assert himself in his quest for an authentic identity. In his famous poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Aimé Césaire touched upon the need for the Antillean to proudly assert his cultural identity by going back to his roots and by fully accepting the history represented by the maroons. Sainville adopts the same ideological stance.

Like Glissant, Sainville is a committed writer. In *Dominique nègre esclave*, his concern is to revalorize the image of the maroon in Antillean history, for he contends that the abolition of slavery did not come about solely through the efforts of people like Victor Schoelcher, as some European historians have argued. In contrast to European works that have depicted maroons as "happy savages", Sainville's anti-colonial historical novel rejects this false image by demonstrating that the maroon was neither "happy" nor "savage".

The revalorization of the image of the maroon is crucial to the historical novelist from the Caribbean because of the significance of the maroon in the history of the Antillean people, and Peter Hulme's theories in *Colonial Encounter* can help us redefine this image as we look more closely at the slave-master relationship that Sainville portrays in *Dominique*.
nègre esclave. Upon their arrival in the Antilles, slaves were baptized and given names by their masters. Branding the backs of slaves with a hot iron symbolized the master's power of life and death over them as well as his power to impose a new identity on them. This process of forced acculturation inevitably influenced the way contemporary Antilleans regard themselves. Within this context, the maroon developed his counter-discourse by revolting against the sub-human treatment that was imposed on him. This counter-discourse is what Glissant and Sainville emphasize in their historical novels. From their perspective, the maroons were heroes.

The relationship between contemporary Antilleans and the French has been shaped for centuries by the Euro-centric perception of the Other during the era of slavery. This relationship has permeated the consciousness of Antilleans to the point that many of them internalized an inferiority complex vis-à-vis Europeans. One of Sainville's major goals in writing Dominique nègre esclave was to demonstrate the falsity of this image of Antillean identity, for he is concerned with inculcating his people with a new sense of pride in their own past, in their own history. Frantz Fanon (in Peau Noire, Masques Blancs) outlined a similar project when he touched upon Antilleans'
perceptions of themselves as French citizens; he clearly demonstrated how living among the French makes the Antillean realize the illusory nature of this perception.

Fanon was a psychiatrist who studied the mentality of Antilleans vis-à-vis whites. He underscores the schizophrenic nature of the Antillean’s lack of pride in his origins, his race. The Antillean grows up in his society and is conditioned to feel a sense of inferiority towards other peoples. The following quotation summarizes Fanon’s analysis of the predicament of the Antillean black:

Quand on m’aime, on me dit que c’est malgré ma couleur. Quand on me déteste, on ajoute que ce n’est pas à cause de ma couleur [...]. Ici et là, je suis prisonnier du cercle infernal (1957, 94).

The Antillean, according to Fanon, is thus caught in a vicious circle where he finds it difficult to grow up with a sense of pride in his own cultural heritage. He becomes a victim of what is propounded in the so-called canon. Historical novelists such as Sainville and Glissant responded to this predicament with a revalorization of the image of the maroon.

In Dominique nègre esclave, Sainville not only highlights the Manichean relationship between whites and blacks in a way that graphically illustrates Fanon’s theories; he also underlines the ideological
basis for questioning the colonial enterprise and the supposedly humanitarian Western philosophies that were used to support it. After all, even French "philosophes" such as Voltaire and Montesquieu, recognized the evils of slavery on humanitarian grounds but continued to argue that it was necessary for the economic well-being of France. The Antillean historical novelist developed a counter-discourse to oppose the dominance of such ideas. Sainville's Dominique—the revolted maroon—exemplifies this counter-discourse and its implicit challenge to the supposedly universal validity of the slave master's discourse.

My fourth chapter will deal with the discourse of Antilleanity in Glissant's Le Quatrième Siècle. One of the most well-known contemporary francophone writers, a militant political activist, Glissant has published (and continues to publish) novels, poetry, and essays. He is the francophone Caribbean writer most intimately associated with the concept of "Antillanité". Briefly stated, Antilleanity is the search for an identity that would enable the people of the Antilles to reconcile their African, their Indian, and their European heritages. Glissant (like the other novelists discussed in this study) views writing as a form of political engagement. His commitment to a search for
authentic identity implies a rejection of the stereotyped Euro-centric view of Antilleans and their history.

In fact, his writing emphasizes the symbiotic nature of Antillean culture. Like the African historical novelist, he desires to re-write the history of his people to correct commonly accepted inaccuracies and to establish a legitimate basis for them to feel pride in their Caribbean cultural identity. For Glissant, as for Sainville, writing signifies an act of engagement with the world as well as a search for inner fulfillment (Silenieks, 5-15).

Glissant believes that the Afro-Caribbean writer should commit himself to a decisive act which, in the domain of literature, signals his participation in the building of a nation (L’Intention poétique p.185). Nation-building is predicated on the recovery of the past. For the Caribbean, the trauma of the past is ever present, reaching back to the genocide inflicted upon the original Amerindian inhabitants of the islands, extending through slavery and colonial exploitation, and persisting into the social injustice of the present. (Silenieks, 5-15). It is a history that, in Glissant’s words, prevents the people of the Caribbean from "possessing the land". For him, this history entails a "prophetic vision of the past"
because it rectifies the inaccuracies and falsifications that have been imposed on Black history by Europeans. Frederic Jameson offers a convenient explanatory model for this phenomenon when he contends that, as far as the archetypal figures of the other are concerned, the essential point is not that the other is feared because he is evil; on the contrary, he argues, the other is evil because he is other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar (1981, 115). Colonial power was created around this type of discourse; indeed, the society of slavery functioned on the basis of this perception of the European other, and Glissant's *Le Quatrième Siècle* develops a counter-discourse to this perception.

In my concluding chapter, I will survey the applicability of the term "historical novel" to other works from Africa and the Caribbean. A part of my objective will be to define the relationship that exists between Western models of historical writing and African-Caribbean historical fiction.

One difference between the African/Caribbean historical novel and its European counterpart as defined by Lukács is that of narrative form. African and Caribbean writers have different preoccupations from those that inspired nineteenth-century European historical novelists. For ideological reasons, they
tend to have been inspired by oral traditions. These traditions are crucial in the quest for an authentic cultural identity because they constitute the primary source for African and Caribbean history as perceived from the perspective of insiders. African and Caribbean historical novelists are generally committed writers in the Sartrean sense, although they confront an entirely different predicament from the one encountered by twentieth-century European historical novelists. This predicament derives from the fact that they belong to a people that has been colonized. The history of colonialism has an importance for them that it cannot have for European historical novelists. Even the act of writing means something different for them than it does for European writers.

Oral tradition gives the work of African and Caribbean historical novelists a sense of authenticity and underscores their rejection of the Euro-centric view of the Other. Using oral tradition also reflects these writers' desire to return to their origins. For instance, the history of the Bwamu in *Crépuscule des temps anciens* is based largely on oral traditions. Knowledge is passed on to the younger generation through legends, proverbs, and songs which serve as sources of entertainment as well as a mode of instruction. As Chinua Achebe says in his novel *Things
Fall Apart, proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten. African writers therefore attach much importance to the use of proverbs in fiction written in European languages, for this technique reinforces their pride in their cultural heritage. The use of proverbs also displays the writers' knowledge of the traditions of their own people.

In the African context, the use of proverbs is associated with the art of speech making and identified with wisdom. In Doquicimi and Crépuscule des temps anciens, the authors have frequent recourse to proverbs. The creation of an oral register through the use of proverbs authenticates the historical fiction which, for them, has an ideological function.

Another important question that I will address in my conclusion is the extent to which the African/Caribbean historical novelist has succeeded in marrying European narrative style with traditional modes of folktale narration. Boni and Hazoumé did develop effective styles that reflect the tone of the "anciens" while employing French narrative conventions. The Caribbean historical novelists were perhaps more influenced by European precedents, yet they also differ from African writers in the sense that they live in a society where creole is the mother tongue of many, although it has officially been
relegated to a secondary position. Glissant, for example, was familiar with Walter Scott and Balzac, but he had also been inspired, even during his early childhood, to write after having listened to the stories of a "quinboiseur" (a type of traditional healer who is often the source of oral history). As a consequence, his narrative style clearly reflects many traditional Martinican creole story-telling techniques.

Much has been written about the realism of the European historical novel and about the problem of recreating reality in a fictional context. Citing the names of existing places and actual people has been said to create an illusion of verisimilitude in the European historical novel. African and Caribbean historical novelists create a similar impression by insisting on the authenticity of the historical sources that serve as a backdrop to their novels. For example, Boni writes in his preface:

\[
\text{J'ai voulu, intentionnellement, que l'originalité de Crépuscule des temps anciens, résidât, au moins en partie, dans sa sincérité, pour ne pas dire, son pragmatisme (19).}
\]

As far as Sainville is concerned, he affirms:

\[
\text{Authentique [..] le cadre où se meut l'action, et pas un instant, les nécessités de la création romanesque ne viennent bousculer la réalité intrinsèque des principaux faits à travers lesquels se déroule l'intrigue (11).}
\]
The purpose of such statements in the prefaces to their respective novels is to influence readers to approach their narratives with the assumption that what they are about to read is historically authentic. In constructing their fictional worlds, African and Caribbean historical novelists also use specific facts and details to create the impression of verisimilitude.

Just as for their European counterparts, the facts of history are the essential raw materials for African and Caribbean historical novelists. They choose what aspects of history to focus upon and what aspects to omit. For this reason, readers are continually confronted with several basic questions: what is real and what is acquired in the historical novel? Do references to verifiable events and personalities guarantee that historical novels have successfully communicated the essence of actual history? In this respect, the African and Caribbean historical novel poses the same problems of interpretation as its European counterpart does. Whether in Europe or in the third world, the ideological motivation behind the writing of historical novels always has a dual reference—to the historical period in which it is set and to the contemporary period in which it is being written.
To test the validity of the conclusions drawn on the basis of my analyses of *Doguecimi, Crépuscule des temps anciens, Le Quatrième siècle*, and *Dominique nègre esclave*, I would like to examine more briefly a series of other novels by African and Caribbean writers. The Martinican writer Roland Brival’s *Montagne d’ebène* is particularly interesting in this respect because it was inspired by the same historical events as Sainville’s *Dominique nègre esclave*. However, it is a much more recent publication. Why did Brival develop a renewed interest in historical fiction during the 1980s after the Negritude concept had been repeatedly called into question by a younger generation of African and Caribbean writers. Like Sainville, Brival attempts to demythify the abolition of slavery. He adopts the same ideological stance as Sainville. However, Brival’s anti-colonial discourse is communicated as a function of the authentically African hero he creates.

In his search for an authentic cultural identity, Brival believes in the necessity of a return to Africa; for this reason, he makes his hero a pure-blooded African. In contrast, Sainville had focused on a creole hero because he was convinced that such a hero would make his story more authentic. According to him, the mixed-blood slave encapsulated
in his character the ambivalent history of the Antilles. In Brival’s novel, the locus of critical consciousness is embedded in the point of view of the black, the hero. In contrast, critical consciousness in Sainville’s novel is represented by the voice of the author himself. Although Sainville and Brival adopt different approaches to the identity problem, they both address the crucial task of using history in the quest for an Antillean identity.

Felix Couchoro’s L’Esclave will also serve as a test case for my conclusions about the African/Caribbean historical novel. Like Hazoumé and Boni, Couchoro uses traditional oral story-telling techniques to reinforce the idea of Négritude and African cultural identity, but he was less successful than they were in overcoming the stereotyped images inculcated in him by his Western education. In his historical novel, he seems to be propounding a progressive Négritude that eschews outmoded traditions. But if an African’s traditional values are at the heart of his quest for a viable cultural identity, how can he import foreign values without losing his own cultural authenticity? Although Couchoro attempts to answer this question, his attachment to European cultural models is too great, and unlike Glissant, Sainville, or Boni, he never
develops a convincing counter-discourse to undercut the colonial discourse that denied the cultural identity of his people.

Lucien Goldman's structuralist theory offers us a useful tool in an attempt to grasp the nature of the literary project undertaken by historical novelists from Africa and the Caribbean. Goldman believes that literary works arise out of social consciousness and behavior, and he seeks to establish the ways in which they are linked to society. He sought to correlate the structure of a literary work with what he came to call the "mental structure" of its author or of the social group to which its author belongs. By mental structure, Goldmann means patterns of ideas and concepts. He also sees a correspondence between the personal experiences of writers and what they write. Although I will sometimes draw upon Goldmann's methodology, my own approach to the historical novel is far more concerned with minority discourse as a rejection of the subjective interpretation of history in Euro-centric discourse. My point is that European documentary history that ignores or distorts the experience of non-European societies cannot legitimately claim to be the only valid history. African and Caribbean historians and historical novelists have, in fact, amply demonstrated the
falsity of this claim.

For Hazoumé, Boni, Glissant, and Sainville, writing was an act of political engagement which has its own moral and ideological responsibilities. Like traditional African story-telling, the African and Caribbean historical novel is not "art for art's sake". Trapped in the ambiguous situation of colonized or formerly colonized individuals, the authors of these novels probe the history that shaped their destiny in a way that transforms writing into an act of revolt against the identity that the West sought to impose upon them. My reading of the African and Caribbean historical novel is inspired by the belief that no society has a monopoly on the interpretation of history, for as Alex Haley wrote in the last paragraph of his much acclaimed novel Roots:

So Dad has joined the others up there. I feel that they do watch and guide, and I also feel that they join me in the hope that this story of our people can help alleviate the legacies of the fact that preponderantly the histories have been written by the winners (1976, 729).

My reading of African and Caribbean historical novels is therefore posited on the assumption that they constitute a re-writing of history—a rejection of Euro-centric historical accounts that have pretentiously claimed universal validity.
CHAPTER I

PAUL HAZOUMÉ: DOgüICIIMI

The focus of this chapter will be on the ambivalence of Paul Hazoumé's discourse in his novel Dogüicimi. I intend to explore the conflict between two sorts of discourse in this historical novel. The ambivalent nature of Hazoumé's discourse emerges in his attempt to offer a positive fictional account of the kingdom of Dahomey during the early nineteenth century while at the same time creating a generally positive image of the impact of French colonialism in Africa. This ambivalence can also be seen in Hazoumé's depiction of the heroine Dogüicimi, whom he uses as a mouthpiece to criticize nineteenth-century Dahomeyan customary practices and also to argue in favor of French colonialism.

As Christopher Miller has contended, the processes of projection, by means of which the colonizer's identity is replicated and his desires satisfied, are directly related to colonial policy. Translated into political terms, these projections become what Miller calls the colonial "inscription"—the imposition unto Africa of French systems of thought, the making
"French" of Africa (14). Edward Said, as Miller points out, has referred to the same phenomenon in another part of the world as "manifest Orientalism" (Said, 206). Miller argues that the fact of colonialism and its impact on African cultural systems broke down any absolute barrier between Africa and the West. Hazoumé specifically deals with this type of relationship between the French and the "colonial subject". To understand the nature of Hazoumé's ambivalence in his attempt to assert pride in his African culture through historical fiction, one must read his novel against the historical backdrop of his participation in the discursive system that Said and Miller have described. French colonial policy and its stereotypical images of reality were "inscribed" in the minds of educated Africans such as Hazoumé. The problematic nature of Hazoumé's writing is therefore a reflection of the influence that French colonial policies had on him.

As Guy Ossito Midiohouan has demonstrated, the francophone tradition in Africa dates back to the time when Hazoumé and other early African writers were receiving their education in French-administered
schools. Involvement or collaboration with the French was the rule rather than the exception with the elites of his generation; in fact, the primary objective of formal education in the French colonies was to create just such an elite by granting them access to the French language. Writers like Hazoumé served as bridges between the colonizer and the colonized (Miller, 15). He and others such as Bakary Diallo were therefore profoundly indebted to the colonial system for their education, among other things, and for the language in which they wrote. The crucial question is whether this acculturation provides a sufficient explanation for the ambivalent nature of his discourse in Doquicimi.

A clue to this ambivalence can be discovered by examining Georges Hardy’s preface to the novel. It is significant that Hardy, a representative of French colonial power in Africa, should write a preface in which he proudly claims Hazoumé as a product of French assimilationist policies in its colonies. He was the Director of the "École Coloniale" and therefore an administrator of the colonial regime. Hazoumé could not be too critical of the colonial administration represented by people such as Hardy, who regarded him as a faithful exponent of the "raison d’être" of what the French called their "mission civilisatrice" in
Africa. Furthermore, Hazoumé would never have been able to publish his novel, if he had not enjoyed the endorsement of colonial administrators such as Hardy. The point is that Hardy’s preface helps us understand Hazoumé’s position as an "évolué" writer in the French colonial context. The fact that Hardy claims him as a product of French assimilationist policies undercuts Hazoumé’s own attempt to assert a pride in his culture. The preface to Doquicimi is therefore an integral part of the overall discourse of the novel, and we need to explore it in order to understand Hazoumé’s own ambivalent stance in the novel.

From the beginning of this preface, Hardy presents Hazoumé as an example of the "good work" that has been done by French colonialism in Africa. Describing the Dahomeyan writer as a prototype of the educated elite that French colonial administrators were seeking to produce in Africa, he explicitly declares:

C’est pour la France, bien entendu, un singulier mérite que d’avoir, au lendemain même de l’installation coloniale, opéré de telles conquêtes intellectuelles et morales (9).

What Hardy suggests here is that Doquicimi is a testimony to the success of France’s attempt to "civilize" Africans. Hardy’s presentation of the novel thus introduces Doquicimi as a justification for the entire colonial enterprise in Africa. In fact, his
comment is a typical example of colonialist discourse, for it defends European imperialism on the grounds that it brought education to the indigenous people of the continent.

There is a certain irony in Hardy’s paternalist undertone, however, because, although he recognizes the value of recording the history of African civilizations, he remains adamant in insisting upon the beneficence of the French colonial enterprise that destroyed this civilization. He clearly reveals this attitude when he describes Hazoumé as:

[...] un curieux mélange de modernisation européenne et de traditionalisme africain. Si son teint ne trahissait pas son origine, vous le prendriez pour un Français de France; tout dans sa façon libre et gaie de s’exprimer, dans son allure courtoise, dans ses gestes aisés, et mesurés, dans l’aimable ardeur qui émane de sa personne, est d’un homme de chez nous (10).

According to colonial standards, therefore, Hazoumé qualifies as a "citoyen français" (to use Hardy’s own words) by virtue of what the French consider to be his successful acculturation.

In the novel itself, Hazoumé’s account of the Dahomeyan kingdom is ambivalent in the sense that it is both anti-colonial and pro-colonial. In the epilogue for example, Hazoumé not only renders hommage to the heroine Doguicimi, he also glorifies French colonialism by suggesting that the French deserved
credit for having brought an end to the wars between indigenous ethnic groups. He concludes:

Le drapeau français devait, un demi-siècle plus tard, réussir pleinement, c'est-à-dire, faire régner au Dahomey la paix, la liberté, et l'humanité (510).

In this passage, Hazoumé is suggesting that French colonialism benefitted Africans because it supposedly conferred peace and liberty upon them. Yet, throughout his narrative account of the Dahomeyan kingdom, he repeatedly acknowledges the fact that Europeans had encouraged the slave trade which had brought dissension and suffering to the peoples of the West African coast.

This insight into the true nature of the European impact on African society is clearly expressed before the first Hounjroto War in the novel, for Dogucimi’s husband Toffa argues against the waging of a campaign that was presented by the King as a revenge upon the neighboring Mahi, who had killed four European "allies" of the Dahomey. During a long diatribe in which he seeks to convince the other princes that the French are no true friends of his people, Toffa argues:

Il est temps que nous nous libérons du préjugé qui nous fait considérer les Troncs-Blancs comme des amis. Nous avons beau les traiter comme tels, ils méprisent foncièrement toutes nos démonstrations d’amitié. Ils ne sont pas non plus disposés à reconnaître le dévouement des Danhoménous pour
eux [...]. Quand, à force de protestations, nous finissons par obtenir leur amitié, elle n’est jamais profonde ni sincère. Il n’y a rien d’étonnant à cela. La différence entre les Blancs et nous est grande (41).

Toffa’s arguments are crucial for our understanding of the ambivalent discourse in Hazoumé’s novel. First of all, he recalls the historical circumstances in which colonial encounters occurred. His argument also dismisses the idea that colonialism was good for the colonized since, as he contends, it was based on a disrespect for the African’s own world view. What Toffa’s diatribe suggests is that colonialism involved a conflict of cultures in which Europeans made no attempt to understand the cultures of those they were seeking to dominate. On the basis of such passages, we can see that Hazoumé’s narrative has anti-colonial undertones.

Toffa also criticizes the European’s hypocritical attitude vis-à-vis the Dahomeyans. According to him, there can be no sincere friendship with Europeans because they had instituted the slave trade and encouraged wars among the African ethnic groups who supplied them with the human “commodity” that they bought and sold. Toffa’s attack on colonialism remains, however, highly ambivalent within the context of the novel because, while criticizing Europeans for introducing the slave trade, the author at the same
time portrays the Dahomeyans as a people who had antagonized their neighbors and Europeans as a result of their belligerent activities.

Yet this belligerence itself must be placed into its historical context. As Toffa points out in his speech to the Elders, Europeans had been enriching themselves at the expense of Dahomeyans who naively believed in the possibility of engaging in a sincere friendship with them:

Les Blancs nos amis! Les Blancs nos amis! répétabait Toffa en hochant la tête [...] Drôle d’amis que des gens qu’on entoure d’amour et qui n’en rendent jamais la réciproque, mais qui pour s’enrichir encouragent les Danhoméens à se faire tuer dans d’incessantes guerres et à s’empoisonner par l’alcool! (40).

What Toffa says here is significant for our understanding of the ambivalent nature of Hazoumé’s attitude towards colonialism. Within the novel, Hazoumé emphasizes the fact that the Dahomeyans did gain from their relationships with Europeans. They traded with them at the expense of their neighbors, who often became the victims of incessant Dahomeyan wars and slave raids. Thus, even if Toffa’s speech is anti-colonial, Hazoumé himself clearly did not approve of the role the Dahomeyans were playing in terms of their relationship to the European presence in Africa.

Toffa goes on to argue that even the gods have manifested their disapproval of the European presence
in the Dahomeyan kingdom. He explains that "Agbé" (the god of the sea, equivalent to Neptune in the European classical tradition) shows his anger by causing white peoples' boats to capsize at sea. After having accused Europeans of failing to understand Dahomeyan culture, he thus proceeds to judge them according to the standards of his own culture. Within this context, they appear to be effeminate and undeserving of the respect of people like the Dahomeyans, who believe in force as an important factor in their relationship with their neighbors. In the following quotation, we can admire the nobility which, Toffa argues, is important in Dahomeyan culture, but this nobility must be understood within the context of Hazoumé's own opposition to the way that Dahomey terrorized its neighbors by using force to subordinate them to Dahomeyan rule. Talking about the Europeans, Toffa argues:

Comment les Danhomènous, qui n'adorent que la force, peuvent-ils se lier d'amitié avec des gens qui sont la faiblesse même? [...] Le farniente des Blancs a contaminé déjà les Noirs qui vivent à leur mode à Gléhoué; ceux-ci ne se rendent dans la capitale que portés dans un hamac où on les voit mollement assis. C'est sans doute pour préserver les Danhomènous de la souillure qui résultent de leur contact avec ces immondes bêtes de mer qu'Agbé se fait furieux, trouble la mer, suscite d'impétueuses lames qui engloutissent parfois leurs canots ou les brisent quand ils veulent aborder notre côte (41).
In this passage, Toffa presents a certain ideal in Dahomeyan culture, but although Hazoumé admired nobility, he could not accept the excesses carried out by the Dahomeyans in the name of preserving their customary practices.

What Hazoumé admires in Toffa is his sense of duty towards his society. He sacrifices his life in the war against the Mahis, even though he knows that this war has been unjustly forced on his people by their Sovereign King—Guézo. Toffa obviously respects the traditions of his people, but the war against the Mahis was primarily a slave-trade raid. So, if Toffa represents the ideal sense of force for the Dahomeyans, he is also a symbol, for Hazoumé, of what the Dahomeyan kingdom came to stand for in the history of the nineteenth century as recorded in written form by Europeans—a society infamous for its brutal and inhuman activities. Toffa therefore represents an anti-colonial discourse, for he unequivocally criticizes Europeans; at the same time, Hazoumé’s portrayal of Toffa serves as an overt criticism of the political ambitions of nineteenth-century Dahomey.

Doguicimi, the title character in the novel, also exemplifies Hazoumé’s ambivalent attitude toward colonialism, for although she respects the customs of the ancestors, she publicly questions the Sovereign’s
totalitarian rule. She is portrayed as a loving, caring mother, for even though she does not have any children of her own, she treats all the children of her co-wives with such kindness that they flock to her house until they are forbidden to do so. Doguicimi's goal is not to overturn the system; in fact, her own speeches reveal a complete willingness to accept the idea that the male should be the head of the family. She herself never questions the fact that Toffa is her master. Thus, in one sense, Doguicimi is an exemplary noble female character.

Nonetheless, her attitude represents a threat to the commonly accepted Dahomeyan assumption that the woman is the "property" of her husband and her Sovereign. For example, she challenges the king's abuse of power in several ways. She attacks him verbally, calling him "le monstre" and describing him as somebody who has "la folie des grandeurs" after he has insisted upon going to war against the advice of Toffa and others. Her behavior is even more disrespectful in her gestures. Standing with her hands on her waist, one foot in front of the other, and spitting on the ground in disgust, she defies the customs of her people. She had, in fact, adopted the "attitude d'une personne prête à la lutte". The king's anger and nervousness show that her defiance of the
status quo has had its desired impact. Doguicimi’s questioning of the king’s absolute power is thus, from one perspective, a questioning of traditional African values.

As John Erickson rightly points out, there is conflict between Guézo and Doguicimi because the two are in opposition to each other. Guézo personifies the act of kingship, embodies the function of governing, and assumes the maintenance of a social order linked with sacred rituals that have been passed down to him from his venerable ancestors. In contrast, Doguicimi places fidelity to her husband and a respect for the sacredness of her marriage vow above all else. Erickson suggests further that Doguicimi acts as a mirror for Guézo, causing him to recognize himself and his role as a humanizer of Dahomeyan cultural tradition (484).

If Erickson’s interpretation is valid, Hazoumé is using Doguicimi to criticize the way the Dahomeyan king exercises absolute power over his people. Partly because he exercises absolute power, Guézo can declare an unjustifiable war against his neighbors in order to capture slaves for the Europeans. And Guézo can exercise absolute power because society accords him the role of spokesperson for the ancestors. The same society passes an unfavorable judgement on Doguicimi.
because her behaviour is considered to be contrary to its norms. According to them, the Sovereign has the power of life and death over his subjects, and Doguicimi deserves to die after having challenged this absolute power and called the king's infallibility into question. Mockingly, she asks him:

"Tu veux que les Danhoménôus citent ton nom après celui d’Agonglo, qu’ils t’appellent Guézo le Puissant, qu’ils célèbrent tes louanges? Rien plus ne te distingue du tyran (107)."

According to Doguicimi, therefore, Guézo would like to be recognized in history as a powerful king; he would like to be compared to the great kings who came before him. But in her judgement, his abuse of power disqualifies him for such recognition.

Doguicimi's stance vis-à-vis the Dahomeyan sovereign's exercise of power reflects Hazoumè's own attitude toward the Dahomeyan kingdom. In his quest for an authentic cultural identity, Hazoumè seeks to present pre-colonial Dahomey as the example of a well-structured society with a well-established socio-political system; at the same time, he attacks the way the Dahomeyan king wields absolute power at the expense of both the Dahomeyan people and their neighbors. This double purpose in his narrative creates a paradox.
But Guézo himself is in an ambivalent situation. The crowd is easily swayed by the decision of an all-powerful sovereign, and when he condemns the royal wife who dares attack Doguicimi, the people in the crowd turn on her because she has offended the norms of society by touching a profane individual:

*C'est juste! C'est juste! Une épouse de Panthère ne doit jamais se souiller au contact des démons! La coutume est intransigeante sur ce point. Doguicimi est plus digne de pardon que cette reine sacrilège* (112).

In this way, the crowd seems to endorse the power handed down to the king by tradition, but Hazoumé's portrayal of Guézo's power reveals another aspect of the ambivalence that characterizes his historical fiction. In fact, Guézo's power is limited by the customs of his people. Placed in its historical perspective, Guézo's declaration of war against his neighbors and his orders to carry out the traditional human sacrifices are merely actions that represent what is expected of him by his own people—the people who bestowed power on him in the first place. In other words, he is keeping alive a tradition of royal behavior.

But Hazoumé does not portray Guézo only as a tyrannical ruler, as was often the case in European accounts of the Dahomeyan kingdom. Guézo himself admits that he is only the custodian of a power that
has been handed down to him by the ancestors. His
decisions are dictated by what is expected of him by
custom:

Je n'ai pas, dans ce royaume, toute l'autorité
qu'on me suppose. Enfermé dans la tradition,
obsédé par la coutume dont je ne dois pas
m'écarter d'un pas, sollicité par mon
entourage, je ne suis le plus souvent qu'un
instrument entre de multiples mains invisibles
pour le peuple qui m'impute à tort des actes
dits royaux, mais en réalité, connus et
exécutés par mes maîtres secrets (218).

It is clear from the above quotation that Guézo (a
tyrant in the eyes of European chroniclers as well as
in those of Hazoumé himself) cannot be properly judged
unless one understands the social norms within which
he exercised his power as sovereign.

Some African historians' accounts of Guézo have
been far more generous to him than have been those of
Europeans. An example is Joseph Djivo, who describes
the historical Guézo as a generous, noble individual:

C'est un homme affable, aux manières dignes.
Réaliste, il sait concilier au besoin les
obligations de la tradition avec les exigences
de la politique. Ni les ordres des ancêtres ni
les oracles du "fa" ne sont pour lui plus fort
que l'état. C'est la raison pour laquelle,
contre la désapprobation générale des morts et
des princes, il entreprend la première guerre
contre Houmyroto en 1822 (60-61).

The war that Djivo refers to here is the war Hazoumé
recounts in his novel. In Guézo's view, his
declaration of an unpopular war against Hounjroto actually lies in the interest of his own people. This stance demonstrates the ambivalence of Guézo's position, for he feels constrained to exercise excessive power over his neighbors because tradition demands that he do so.

Although Hazoumé's pride in African culture is reflected in his depiction of Dahomeyan society as a well-structured kingdom, he also describes in minute detail the religious practices of the Dahomeyans in a way that justifies his attack upon them. In his account of human sacrifices in the Dahomeyan kingdom, for example, he actually reinforces Western stereotypes about the supposedly barbaric and exotic nature of African societies. The following description shocks the reader's sensibilities to the breaking point:

Les "chevaux" [victimes humaines du sacrifice] tombaient, tombaient toujours. Mêmou, dont le regard ne quittait pas le bas de l'autel, ordonnait, d'un geste du bras qui s'élevait puis s'abaissait, envoi des victimes au sacrificateur. Inlassablement, Migan les achevait d'un geste large et sûr. Le sang coulait, coulait abondamment, la terre gorgée n'en voulant plus boire. Les aides du victimaire patangeaient dans la boue de sang, de pâte d'âgname vomie et de la terre, et enlevaient activement les têtes et les cadavres. Les gémissements des "chevaux" tombés face contre terre, pour redresser la tête que le cou rompu refusait de porter, la diligence des serviteurs du victimaire qui nettoyait la place [...] (165).
This passage speaks for itself. The human "chevaux" are the unfortunate captives of wars that had been waged against the Dahomeyans' neighbors. The cruelty with which the act is carried out by Mewou justifies Hazoumé's own resentment of Dahomeyan customary practices. His interest in a detailed description of the act deconstructs the possible positive image that could come out of his assertion of pride in his African heritage. The passage is significant because Mewou and Migan are Ministers to the court and therefore represent the power of the King. Their abominable acts are clearly carried out with the blessing of the King and Hazoumé wishes to underscore the fact that this was an essential aspect of Dahomeyan history.

Hazoumé would like his reader to gain an insight into the Dahomeyan belief system. The sacrificed slave is believed to carry a message to the ancestors about how well the living are maintaining the customs of the kingdom. These customary practices are part of the history of Dahomey, and Hazoumé is obviously concerned to provide an historically accurate account of it, but his perception of Dahomeyan customary practices also has an ideological underpinning. The description of the horror of the situation is not gratuitous because Hazoumé's ultimate aim is to justify his support for
the French colonial enterprise in one particular
region of the continent.

Hazoumé’s vivid descriptions of human sacrifice
imply his opposition to customary practices that had
made the Dahomeyans unpopular in the eyes of Europeans
as well as in those of their fellow Africans:

Migan immola devant le seuil de chaque
sépulcre l’esclave qui assistait à genoux,
entre deux aides du victimaire, aux
réparations de la case. La victime irait
rendre compte, au roi intéressé, des travaux
faits sur sa tombe et de l’ornement de sa
dépouille (124).

The living maintain the link with the dead by
sacrificing the slaves. In making sure that the
tradition is carried out, Guézo is appeasing the dead
kings because he knows that, at his own death, the
living will be expected to sacrifice slaves for his
sake. Hazoumé uses his vivid descriptions and the role
played by Guézo to underscore his opposition to
Dahomeyan customary practices. He arranges his
narrative in such a way as to justify his ideological
stance vis-à-vis the Dahomeyans.

An ardent Catholic, Hazoumé could not in any way
ignore the ignominies committed by Guézo and other
Dahomeyan kings in the name of the Ancestors. Yet he
did not see any contradiction between his admiration
for the ideals of the Dahomeyan kingdom and his
support for the "civilizing mission" of French
colonialism (Bjornson, xvii). But how can Hazoumé reconcile this position with his pride in his cultural identity?

His ambivalent position vis-a-vis the Dahomeyans is partly due to the fact that he himself did not come from Dahomey but rather from Porto Novo, which had been a bitter rival of the Dahomeyans since the early nineteenth-century. Coupled with his Western Catholic education, this background made it difficult for him to sympathize with the more inhumane aspects of Dahomeyan customary practices. The fact that Hazoumé became a French citizen after the First World War is another expression of the pro-colonialist stance he adopts in his fictional writing. In fact, Doguicimi does not portray an unequivocally positive image of Africans, as was the case in most Negritude writing of the period. Although he does offer a generally positive image of Guézo, Toffa, and Doguicimi, he undermines it by focusing long detailed descriptions upon scenes of human sacrifice. In other words, Hazoumé subverts the anti-colonialist potential of his discourse by dwelling upon descriptions that tend to distract the readers' attention from the "raison d'être" behind his assertion of pride in his African heritage.
Hazoumé's pro-colonialist stance is also evident in the way he uses Doguicimi at the end of the novel to serve as a mouthpiece for his own views. During the course of the novel, she becomes a symbol of nobility, but her imagined concluding remarks constitute a clear justification of French colonialism in Dahomey. If Doguicimi were still alive, Hazoumé conjectures, she would welcome the French administration of the country, even though there is nothing in his earlier portrayal of her to suggest that she would have had any opinions on the subject at all. Nonetheless, according to Hazoumé, Doguicimi would have wished for the French to intervene and to stop the expansionist activities of the Dahomeyans and their inhuman sacrifices:

Doguicimi, j'ai imaginé aussi qu'à la réception de cette mission d'Europe à la cour de Guézo tu avais souhaité plutôt l'avènement des Zoïagués—Français—qui te paraissaient réunir les qualités nécessaires pour pouvoir mettre fin aux incéssantes guerres des rois dahoméens, à la traite des Noirs et au sacrifice humain qui ruinaient le pays plus qu'ils ne l'enrichissaient (510).

Yet even if Doguicimi is opposed to the inhuman customary practices of her people, she does not necessarily have to advocate the French "civilizing mission" as the only possible alternative to them. In fact, Hazoumé's narrative itself hardly constitutes a justification for this contrived ending.
Earlier in the novel, Doguicimi herself had expressed concern about the impact of colonial rule on the culture of her people, arguing that:

Avant l'arrivée des Blancs dans ce pays, le désir de nos ancêtres était, comme leur besoin, très modeste. Votre société a imposé à nos grands-pères une nouvelle vie et placé la puissance de l'argent et la supériorité de la civilisation matérielle au-dessus de leurs préoccupations qui étaient exclusivement d'ordre moral [....]. Leur goût de luxe ne devait plus connaître de bornes; il introduisait bientôt dans leurs cœurs ces bas instincts: le faste, la cupidité, l'envie, la jalousie et l'égoïsme qui eurent pour conséquences les incessantes guerres, l'esclavage et le sacrifice humain contre lesquels les hommes de votre race s'élèvent aujourd'hui. Luttez contre la conception matérialiste que votre venue à vous, les Blancs, a introduite dans l'esprit de ce peuple (398).

Doguicimi clearly did not see the advent of colonialism as a blessing. On the contrary, she attacks French hypocrisy in criticizing the slave trade that they themselves had introduced into the area. Although she does not condone the slave trade and human sacrifice, she does point out that Europeans are as responsible as the Dahomeyans for the evil they represent. From this perspective, Hazoumé obviously fails to provide a narrative justification for the role he assigns to his heroine at the end of the novel.

Hazoumé's ambivalence toward French colonialism is compounded by his attempt to reconcile his historical
account of the Dahomeyan kingdom with a fictionalized love story involving both Doguicimi and the king who regrets not having kept her in his own harem. Part of Doguicimi’s nobility is manifested in her faithfulness to Toffa, who, ironically, expresses little respect for women and their trustworthiness. When Toffa goes off to war, Doguicimi sends him the amulettes he needs for his protection, and at the end, she asks to be buried with his skull, which had been retrieved during the Dahomeyans’ second war against the Mahis. In both instances, she is clearly depicted as a noble individual who is worthy of the utmost trust. But in this ambiguous portrayal of his heroine, Hazoumé employs various narrative techniques which clearly reveal his own ideological stance in the novel.

The ambivalence of Doguicimi reflects the ambivalence of Hazoumé’s attitude toward history—an ambivalence that emerges in his manipulative use of an omniscient narrator, whose interventions bridge the gap between the past and the present by interpreting comparisons between contemporary Dahomeyan society and the society of the historical period that inspired his fictional creation. In this way, for example, he can make an ideological statement about the African woman. He regrets that traditional values which guided women like Doguicimi are losing their force in
Mais elles sont légion aussi nos mères, c'est-à-dire des femmes qui ont été élevées dans leur famille, avec l'idée de ne se jamais prostituer, celles qui savent qu'une telle inconduite est déshonneur tant pour elles-mêmes que pour leur famille et celle de leur époux. A la pudeur native de nos mères était ajoutée, reconnaissons-le, la cruauté d'un châtiment de la part des fétiches et des ancêtres [...]. Cette crainte, puissant frein, maintient les moeurs dans leur intégrité chez les fétiches du Dahomey et fait que, par leur grand nombre, les femmes vertueuses consolent de la faute des autres qui sont encore une infime minorité, mais dont le nombre s'accroît depuis que, sous prétexte d'émanciper la femme noire, on lui facilite le divorce (509).

Through this authorial intervention, Hazoumé takes a stand on a contemporary issue—the problem of marriage and divorce. If he regrets the impact of the Dahomeyan kingdom's imperial ambitions on its neighbors, he also regrets the influence of European culture on traditional African moral systems.

This direct authorial intervention to moralize about social issues reflects the influence of oral story-telling techniques on Hazoumé. The narrator of an oral tale often moralizes at the end of his story, for the story itself always has a moral in it. Similarly, Hazoumé's fiction contains moral lessons. For example, he moralizes about the ambitions of Dahomey in the nineteenth century and about its inhuman customary practices. He also moralizes about the influence of colonialism on indigenous African
custums and traditions. But, it is important to note that Hazoumé’s moral lessons derive both from his African upbringing and from his Western Catholic education. Drawing his morality from these two different cultures sometimes leads to ambivalence, as evidenced in the position he adopts in the novel vis-à-vis French colonialism.

Another oral technique in Dognicimi is the theatrical nature of the narrative itself. At the beginning of the novel, Hazoumé uses the crier Panlingan to create a theatrical atmosphere and to give the reader the impression that he/she is about to see a theatrical representation. As Panlingan performs his daily ceremony, singing the history of the Dahomeyan kingdom, we get an insight into the way in which oral history is passed from generation to generation. Oral story-telling often involves call-and-response patterns; by going around the whole palace and by evoking the names of all the kings and their accomplishments, Panlingan is inviting the people in the palace to take part in his daily ritual for the awakening of the king. In this way, they will be participating indirectly in re-creating the history of the kingdom. Their presence and their participation is essential for the ceremony. They are part of a play that initiates readers into the intricacies of
Dahomeyan customs:

Sur les lèvres des Danhoménous qui l'entendaient, se pressaient ferventes des prières à l'adresse des ancêtres dont ils imploraient les bénédictions pour le Danhomé et qu'ils devaient continuer à protéger (15).

This passage suggests the communal participation of the people in a ritual performed on their behalf by Banlingan. The reader sees how this communal spirit is acted out by both the person on stage (Banlingan) and by the audience (the people in the palace).

Hazoumê also introduces oral story-telling techniques through the use of songs. In those sung after Dahomey has gone to war with her neighbors, the singer involves the crowd as he recounts the history of the great kings of Dahomey. For example, one song relates the tribulations of the Dahomeyans as they fought one kingdom after another. At this particular moment in the story, the singer's desire is to console the people after their recent defeat in the first war against the Mahinous. The words of the song thus serve as an encouragement to the people in the face of defeat and humiliation.

For example, the first stanza ends with the words: "Nous sommes petits par le nombre! Mais grands par la vaillance" (172). By evoking the valor of the Dahomeyan people in the past, the singer seeks to counter the psychological impact of their defeat in
the present. For the singer, the Dahomeyans will become victorious again, like their ancestors, and they will avenge their defeat. Throughout the song, the singer inspires a sense of solidarity among the people. Hazoumé uses him to reinforce a sense of the novel’s historicity.

Another oral technique adopted by Hazoumé is the frequent use of proverbs. These proverbs are translated literally from the vernacular, and even though they sometimes lose part of their original meaning, they add considerable local color to the novel. They also enhance the sense of historicity that is central to the idea of the historical novel. Adrien Huannou has commented about the influence of orality on Hazoumé’s writing, and he affirms that, although Hazoumé must have consulted written documents in his anthropological research, his primary sources were undoubtedly oral ones:

[...] La matière première de son ouvrage provient principalement de la tradition orale à laquelle il est redevable à plus d’un titre. Hazoumé tient son art de conter moins des romanciers français que des hérauts et chroniqueurs des rois d’Abomey et des conteurs traditionnels (90).

Huannou remarks further that Hazoumé embellishes his novel with other oral materials borrowed from his own Fon language. Through the use of songs and proverbs, Hazoumé gives us some insight into Dahomeyan belief
systems, for these oral materials reflect how the Dahomeyans relate with one another and with their deities. For example, referring to a king as a lion or as a tiger suggests the type of valor that is expected of that king by his own society. By incorporating such elements into his narrative, therefore, Hazoumé authenticates his historical fiction and makes Dahomeyan customs comprehensible to his readers.

Furthermore, Hazoumé employs footnotes to clarify points in the narrative and to reinforce the sense that his fictional creation is historically accurate. Footnoting is a common practice in historical novels, for it is often used to enhance the illusion of verisimilitude. By resorting to footnotes, he also adds local color to his narrative. For example, he explains that, in the Dahomeyan kingdom, measurement was done with a bamboo rod and that this practice was introduced by King Agaja. But this detail does more than add local color; it also serves to authenticate Hazoumé's fictional narrative:

Méasure de longueur créé par Agaja et qui valait environ cinq mètres. Elle lui avait servi pour mesurer la distance d'Abomey à la côte, après la conquête du royaume houëda (4).

In this instance, he is referring to a verifiable historical fact by invoking the name of an authentic King and an authentic period in the history of the
Dahomeyan kingdom, thereby lending a greater sense of authenticity to his narrative.

Hazoumè also evokes the slave-trade era in a footnote that explains the meaning of the word "zojague"—"mot indigène désignant les Français, et dont l'origine remonte aux premiers temps de la traite des Noirs" (43). By referring to the word that was used to mean the French people, he is not only heightening the verisimilitude of his narrative; he is also alluding to an important factor in the history of Dahomey—the slave trade—and bringing it into relation with the arrival of the French.

In another footnote, Hazoumè explains the customary practices that had made the Dahomeyans unpopular with Europeans and with their own neighbors:

Jého: littéralement Chambre de perles. C'est un autel élevé à la manière d'un roi et au pied duquel on lui sacrifiait. La terre en était pétée, dit-on, avec de l'huile de palme, le sang des victimes humaines et mélangée de pièces d'or et de perles, d'où son nom de Chambre de perles (24).

This footnote suggests that the description of human sacrifice in the main body of the text is inspired by verifiable historical documentation. From both written and oral sources, Hazoumè wishes to justify his ideological stance towards Dahomeyan customary practices.
All these footnotes contribute to the novel's universe of discourse in the sense that his use of historically verifiable people, places, events, and customs enhances the real-seemingness of his fiction. Like nineteenth-century European historical novelists, Hazoumè employs minutely detailed descriptions of places and events, often to the extent that he seems to have digressed from the main subject matter of his narrative. Such detailed descriptions can also evoke strong emotional responses in the reader. Thus, for example, Hazoumè's long and detailed descriptions of human sacrifice constitute one way of expressing his opposition to inhuman Dahomeyan customary practices; they also establish a basis for the reader's condemnation of these practices. Without intervening directly to moralize about the evils of such customs, Hazoumè manipulates the reader's emotions by creating a vivid picture of the cruel way in which the sacrifices were carried out.

What is most striking in Dogucimi is Hazoumè's concern for historicity. But precisely this concern lies behind the ambivalent discourse that characterizes the novel. Hazoumè's apparent anti-colonialist stance is not altogether different from that of the Negritude writers, but it is undermined by the pro-colonialist tone that Hazoumè
adopts, particularly in the epilogue to his novel. In this epilogue, he expresses his belief that a pro-colonialist attitude was justified by what he viewed as a need for the French "civilizing mission" to put an end to the expansionist ambitions of the Dahomeyan kingdom. Although Erickson does not regard the novel as an apology for colonialism, he overlooks the importance of this epilogue for any overall interpretation of the novel. Besides, a text sometimes has more far-reaching ramifications than those intended by the writer himself.

Erickson suggests that Hazoumé, mindful of the potential reaction of his French readers, included the epilogue as a "mild bit of self-serving flattery" (127). However, Hazoumé could not have been unaware of the impact of his pro-colonialist comments within the larger historical context. Attempting to re-write the history of the Dahomeyan kingdom through the use of fictional narrative, Hazoumé actually created a problematic, ambiguous discourse, for the ambivalence in the ideological position implicit in his novel reflects his own ambivalence as a so-called "évolué" writer caught between two cultures in his quest for an authentic cultural identity.

Miller points out that the historical origins of francophone African literature reflect the class
concerns of Africans who were deeply involved with the colonial system. Hazoumé is a typical example of this type of "évolué" African. Although the second generation of francophone African writers were the first to formulate a theory of African difference in French, they were, as Miller suggests, involved in a complex way with dominant issues of French culture. More accustomed to expressing themselves in French than in African languages, they articulated the principles of Negritude not in Fort-de-France or Dakar, but in Paris. Unlike some of them, Hazoumé had a thorough knowledge of the culture of the people he wrote about. His quest for identity through historical fiction in fact attests to the inspiration he found in his association with the "anciens". But it also reveals the extent to which he lived at the crossroads of two cultures. Through historical fiction, Hazoumé bore witness to the contact of cultures in Francophone West Africa at the beginning of the colonial adventure in that part of the world. Yet what stands out in his novel is the ambivalent nature of his own position vis-à-vis French colonialism and French culture in terms of its relationship to his own African culture.
CHAPTER II

NAZI BONI: CREPUSCULE DES TEMPS ANCIENS

Doguicimi was written at a time when African countries had not yet witnessed the emergence of the political parties that became active during the 1950s as the agitation for independence grew increasingly strong. In contrast, Nazi Boni’s Crépuscule des temps anciens was written at a time when most former French African colonies were about to achieve independence. Although Boni belonged to the Negritude movement with which Hazoumè had also been associated, his novel contains a different sort of discourse from that cultivated by Hazoumè. Boni’s account of the confrontation between the invading French colonial forces and the indigenous Bwa people establishes a mode of discourse that clearly subverts the Euro-centric view of Africans. Unlike Hazoumè, Boni shows no sympathy for the French colonialist enterprise in Africa.

Boni’s historical fiction is, in effect, a counter-discourse which stands in sharp opposition to the dominant Euro-centric “discourse of the other”. In contrast to Hazoumè, Boni recognized that European discourse was itself implicated in the exercise of
power. According to Foucault, discourse translates political and economic forces as well as ideological and social control mechanisms into signifying practices. Power is exercised through discourse, he contends, and this power has real effects in the real world. Like Nietzsche, Foucault was convinced that all knowledge is an expression of the "Will to Power". Following his line of argument, it would be inappropriate to speak of absolute truths or of objective knowledge. People recognize a particular philosophical insight or scientific theory as "true" only if it fits the truth criteria laid down by the intellectual or political authorities they accept—by members of the ruling elite or by the purveyors of the prevailing ideologies of knowledge. Within this context, counter-discourse is characterized by its rejection of these truth criteria. In this sense, Boni's novel is an example of counter-discourse because it was written against the backdrop of a dominant European ideology according to which Africa was assumed to be a region without civilization, without culture.
Foucault does not regard discourse as a universally valid "general text" that contains a vast sea of signification, for he is primarily interested in the historical dimension of discourse change. Within the context of African literary studies, a renewed interest in the historical impact of the Negritude movement reflects an interest in the historical dimension of such discourse change. An examination of Boni's historical fiction will enable us to develop a better understanding of this type of writing and of its impact on the evolution of discursive processes in Africa.

Born into a noble family from Bwan in Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) around 1909, Boni was elected to represent his country as a Deputy in the French parliament in 1948. In conjunction with his involvement in politics, Boni was passionately interested in the history of his region—an interest inspired by his familiarity with the Bwa people's militant resistance to the French colonial invasion that took place in their part of the continent at the turn of the century. As J. Suret-Canale recounts:

Ce peuple [Bwa] est l'un de ceux qui, dans la savane, fidèle à une civilisation millénaire purement africaine, demeurèrent à travers les siècles réfractaires à toute conquête, morale ou politique, défendant leur indépendance avec une énergie farouche (11).
My thesis is that the idea of resistance became a major part of Boni’s discourse in Crépuscule des temps anciens. His resistance to colonialism is explained by the fact that, even though he became a member of his country’s educated elite, unlike most African politicians of his time, he remained attached to the rural people. Throughout his life, he uncompromisingly opposed colonialism, and his fictional writings reflect the militancy that he felt in response to the predicament of the African as a colonized or formerly colonized person.

Before he had attended school, his childhood was marked by the traumatizing experience of the revolt that shook parts of the Sudan and Upper Volta in 1915-1916 and by the atrocious repressions that followed. These repressions are graphically depicted in Crépuscule des temps anciens. In the preface to a history book published by Boni, Suret-Canale recounts Boni’s personal experience of these events in a passage that is worth quoting at length because it explains the writer’s bitterness against colonial rule in Africa, the pride he felt in his cultural heritage, and the passion of his personal engagement to committed writing:

Accroché par des pagnes au dos de sa mère, comme tous les enfants africains, il connut l’angoisse de la fuite, les villages brûlés et "cassés", les nuits à la belle étoile, au
This traumatic experience had a strong impact on Boni, and it influenced his attitude toward Europeans throughout his country's struggle for independence from France. It became a primary motivating factor in his decision to write a work of fiction inspired by the true history of his people. Such traumatic experiences were directly related to the atmosphere that the French created in their colonies. He himself vividly recalls the imposition of taxes and the infamous "travaux forcés" of the French colonial period that followed the military conquest of the region he describes in Crâpuscule des temps anciens.

As a teacher in the Ivory Coast during the early 1940s, Boni repeatedly expressed his bitterness toward the racist Vichy government. The Director of the École Primaire Supérieure de Bingerville, where he was teaching mathematics, says of him in his report that: "M. Nazi Boni regarde les instituteurs européens..."
cet air de supériorité qui semble leur dire: 'Que pouvez-vous contre moi? Je suis arrivé.'

(Suret-Canale, 13). The tenor of such comments illustrates the resentment of colonial officials who bristled at Boni’s refusal to accept his supposedly inherent inferiority vis-à-vis Europeans. This refusal exemplifies Boni’s resistance to colonial rule—a resistance that resurfaces in his fictional creations. In this sense, his attitude contrasts sharply with that of Hazoumé, who collaborated with the French because he sincerely believed in their so-called "civilizing mission".

As a politician in the Assemblée Nationale Française, Boni remained attuned to the aspirations of his people. He fought for the rights of the "anciens combattants" from Africa. At the same time, he campaigned against certain customary practices of his own people, particularly those practices that he considered as impediments to progress, morals, or evolution (e.g. premature or forced marriage and certain funeral rites). Even though he was primarily concerned with re-asserting pride in his African origins, he did not accept traditional customs without questioning them. Suret-Canale declares that Boni had an advantage over other Africans because he was a man who, though educated in European schools, never lost
contact with his people. For some African intellectuals, the "retour aux sources" or the "retour en Afrique" was a difficult process. Sometimes it was not successful. Boni did not have to return to Africa because he had never cut the umbilical cord that linked him to his people. He was proud of his rural origins, and this pride is reflected in his detailed knowledge of the traditional customs he depicts so graphically in his novel. He himself remarks that:

En matière d'historiographie, je me refuse sans équivoque à être "conformiste". Dans l'état actuel de l'histoire africaine, être conformiste, c'est tourner le dos à la vérité historique, c'est accepter de forger pour l'Afrique une histoire "sans visage" (13).

What Boni says here is also true of his stance toward historical fiction, for in his historical writings as well as in his historical fiction, Boni refuses to compromise with regard to the interpretation of the history of his people.

As I pointed out in the introduction, Boni was influenced by the Negritude movement's attempt to revalorize African culture against the backdrop of colonial discourse. His compatriot, the renowned historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo, writes that the experiences of African soldiers who had fought for France in the Second World War awakened them to the arbitrariness of their supposed inferiority vis-à-vis Europeans (1972).
It was for this reason that the "anciens combattants" began to agitate for equal rights, for the same treatment that had been accorded their French counterparts with whom they had fought side-by-side during the war. Their agitations had a catalyzing impact on African nationalists fighting to obtain their independence from France. Boni's attitude toward colonialism was to a large extent inspired by the experience of these "anciens combattants". He himself fought for the independence of his country from France because he did not believe that his people should continue to be subjugated to foreign rule.

In a sense, Boni came to consider himself as a spokesperson for the collective consciousness of his people. The writing of historical fiction enabled him to speak in their name and against the European colonial enterprise that had sought to annihilate their culture. A committed writer in the Sartrean sense, Boni clearly announces his intention in the preface to his novel, and this purpose is strikingly similar to that of Sartre's "engagé" writer. As Sartre explains:

L'écrivain "engagé" sait que la parole est action: il sait que dévoiler c'est changer et qu'on ne peut dévoiler qu'en projetant de changer. Il a abandonné le rêve impossible de faire une peinture impartiale de la société et de la condition humaine (781).
Boni takes a stand in his historical fiction. He writes about the human condition, about the colonized subject, in the hope that he can help correct misconceptions that Europeans have disseminated about the history of his own people. His act of engagement is expressed through fictions in which he restates the position he adopted in declaring his political engagement.

Like Hazoumé, Boni seeks to create a discourse capable of questioning Euro-centric misconceptions about pre-colonial Africa. One way in which he does so is by recording the true facts about the powerful and well-structured socio-political systems of the Bwa people.

To assert a pride in his Bwa culture, Boni recounts how the Bwa people had developed their own political institutions before the advent of colonialism. And to subvert Euro-centric myths about Africa and Africans, he provides a detailed portrayal of the power-structure in traditional Bwa society. In La Vie des Noirs d'Afrique, André Démaison argues that, before the advent of colonialism, African peoples only recognized an allegiance to the family, to the ethnic group with its chiefs, and to the ancestral totems. According to him, such allegiances held people together as a community in a situation
where there was no sense of belonging to a nation comprised of different ethnic groups. Démaison was one of the French intellectuals who sought in good faith to make Africa better known to a world in which everything was still perceived and understood in relation to European standards of value. Nevertheless, even he fails to grasp a crucial aspect of African history—an aspect to which both Hazoumé and Boni draw attention by means of their historical fiction. For example, Boni’s depiction of the Bwa kingdom demonstrates how a well-structured African system was destroyed by its encounter with the West. Within this system, there was an idea of nation. European colonization introduced this concept only in the limited sense that Europeans created arbitrary borders between their colonies after engaging in what has come to be known as the "scramble for Africa".

Like Hazoumé, Boni demonstrates that European political domination of the continent had devastating effects on the institutions of Africans. Unlike Hazoumé, he portrays how the Bwas were governed according to the norms of the ancestors and how they related with their neighbors. Boni is not critical of the traditional institutions that he describes in his historical fiction, but he does not have to deal with the political ambitions of the Bwa people as Hazoumé
did in depicting the Dahomeyans, many of whose traditional systems he clearly condemned. Unlike Hazoumé, Boni is an insider passionately concerned with the historical reality of a people from whom he descended. The fact that Boni himself was a Bwa provides a political incentive that Hazoumé (who was not a Dahomeyan) did not have. This incentive certainly helps to account for his more positive stance toward the people he is depicting in his novel.

In Crépuscule des temps anciens, readers learn that Bwa socio-political institutions are governed by the "Conseil des anciens" of Wakara, a body which oversees the political stability of the society. Unlike Hazoumé in Doouicimi, the focal point for Boni is not a royal family represented by a king and those who help to sustain his power. On the contrary, his militancy expresses itself through the political power he ascribes to ordinary people.

To subvert the Euro-centric notion that colonialism was for the good of the colonized, Boni underscores the importance of what actually took place during the French colonial invasion of the region and how these events were perceived by the Africans living there. As Homi Bhabha points out, there was not just the discourse of the colonizer during the colonial era. There was also the counter-discourse of the
colonized. Hence, the Bwa people were not merely passive observers of the colonial conquests which were to shape the destiny of their region. They actively resisted the incursions of the French. In an important footnote, Boni recounts how the French themselves reacted to Bwa resistance. Like his fellow historian Adu Boahen, Boni focuses on an aspect of colonial history that has often been neglected or distorted—the reaction of the native peoples themselves to the brutality of colonial conquests.

Boni emphasizes the usual European blindness toward this aspect of history when he describes how the French Chief Administrator Vidal perceived the war with the Bwa:

Pour en comprendre l'exacte signification, il est nécessaire de dire le fanatisme violent, le mépris absolu de la mort, l'audace et le courage tranquilles dont ont fait preuve les rebelles au cours des combats les plus meurtriers. Il faut dire aussi l'étroite cohésion, la discipline merveilleuse, l'esprit de solidarité et de sacrifices qui les animait et les portait aux actes d'héroïsme les plus troublants. Des hommes, en grand nombre des vieillards, des femmes, des enfants, en groupes ou isolément, préféraient se faire tuer ou se laisser enfumer et griller dans les cases incendiées, plutôt que de se rendre, malgré la promesse de vie sauve qui leur était faite, ne voulant même pas profiter des facilités d'évasion que leur offraient les ténèbres de la nuit ou le retrait momentané de nos tirailleurs, pour échapper à la mort certaine qui les attendait (233).

This footnote clearly reveals the inhumanity that was inflicted on Africans during the process of conquest.
and colonization. But Boni is also interested in the heroic counter-discourse of the Bwa people, for even the reaction of the French administration cannot conceal the fact that the Bwa fiercely resisted colonization.

As Homi Bhabha contends, the goal of colonial discourse is the creation of a space in which a "subject people" can produce a knowledge that is controlled by the surveillance of the colonizer. Boni's fiction provides an excellent example of this process. According to Bhabha, colonial discourse seeks authorization for its strategies by producing a stereotypical knowledge that is antithetically evaluated. This sort of discourse is illustrated in the above quotation, for despite his admiration for the courage of the Bwa in resisting the incursions of the French army, Vidal does not expect a supposed "inferior" people to prevail against the military might of a supposedly "superior" European power.

Bhabha also contends that a primary objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a racially defined population of degenerate types in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction (154). Against this backdrop, Boni's interest in historicity enables him to depict accurately the consequences of French
colonial rule and to reject the notion that colonialism was good for those who were subjected to it.

In pursuing this goal, Boni portrays a Bwa society that was knit together by a strong sense of communality. Relationships between people in this society were governed by their shared faith in the conviction that they all descended from the same ancestors. In this sense, Boni’s narrative is again characteristic of Negritude writing that confronts the West with the assertion that there are fundamental differences between African and European ways of life. In Bwa society, as can be seen in Boni’s *Crépuscule des temps anciens*, the responsibility of the individual extends to the society at large because each family is considered to be a microcosm within the larger unit, the extended family.

For example, during the festival of the Ancestor Diyiou, relatives from distant places are welcomed not as guests but as members of the same family. For Boni, this spirit of belonging constitutes part of his pride in his own cultural heritage; it is also an integral component of the African religious sentiment, which he, like Hazoumé, refuses to idealize. In his preface, Boni states that he does not agree with those who demand that African writers should present an idyllic
image of society. Unlike Hazoumé, however, Boni's narrative refuses to pander to a European taste for the exotic. As he himself explains:

D'aucuns seront tentés de me reprocher de n'avoir pas estompé certaines réalités d'apparence primitive. Cette attitude procèderait d'un complexe. Je répugne au vide du clinquant. J'ai voulu intentionnellement, que l'originalité de "Crépuscule des Temps Anciens" résidât, au moins en partie, dans sa sincérité pour ne pas dire son pragmatisme (19).

Yet Boni's attitude is different from that of Hazoumé, who resented the Dahomeyan people (an ethnic group to which he did not belong) for their political ambitions and on account of their inhuman religious practices. In contrast, Boni posits his discourse upon an acceptance of the perceptions on which Bwa religious practices were based. A Bwa himself, he had a more profound sense of commitment to the people he was depicting than did Hazoumé.

Boni's depiction of his main characters Kya and Terhé demonstrates his detailed knowledge of the Bwa belief system. Anthropology and fiction are well married in Boni's depiction of the relationship between the two men, on the one hand, and between them and the rest of society, on the other. The political rivalry between them reveals a manichean tension between good and evil in Bwa society, for according to the Bwa perception of the world, the supernatural (or
unexplainable) manifests itself in the daily life of the people. For example, in Boni’s description of the yearly festival during which relatives come from long distances to Bwa land, the real-seeming physical world fuses with the world of the unknown in a way that resembles the "magical realism" or "marvelous realism" of Latin America writers:

Ils pilent des enfants dans les mortiers, les réduisent en marmelade, les roulant en boules à la manière des scarabées. Puis, il leur suffit de souffler dessus pour les réssusciter! Il faut absolument voir ces choses (72).

Magical realism here means the ability to manipulate the supernatural by resurrecting the children after pounding them in the mortar. The supernatural is described as an integral part of the reality of the Bwas, although the last sentence in this passage suggests that Boni is conscious of his Western readers, for whom the African supernatural world would be unfamiliar.

Boni’s sense of historicity also becomes apparent in the way he describes how the Bwas live in fear of the wrath of the gods. The spirits of the ancestors protect good people like Téché but castigate evil ones like Kya. Téché is protected by the ancestors because he never cheats in a game or during a war. He is a loyal warrior who kills to defend his land and to
deliver it from the enemy. He kills to redeem people from oppression and to preserve the honor of his family and his society. Yet when he engages in such behavior, he is merely carrying out his duty to the ancestors. In contrast, Kya kills for pleasure and against the laws of the land. When he undertakes an unjustifiable expedition against the neighbors of the Bwa, he violates the laws of the ancestors and dies tragically. Society considers his fate to be a sort of retributive justice because his actions did not enjoy the blessing of the ancestors. Punished by the gods, he does not have the sympathy of his own people:

On reconnut que la victime avait tous les torts. Les deux villes n’étaient pas en état de guerre. L’expédition de Kya ne se justifiait pas et ne pouvait en aucune façon bénéficier du soutien des Ancêtres et des divinités (211).

In this passage Boni demonstrates how religion governs the life of the people. At the same time, he is dismissing European claims that Africans needed to be colonized because they were innately belligerent people. Unlike the Dahomeyans in Hazoumé’s Doquicimi, the Bwa wanted to live peacefully with their neighbors—an attitude that was generally overlooked or distorted in Euro-centric historical writings.

When Kya is punished by the gods for his actions, his fate serves as an example for the rest of society,
and Boni's description of him reveals a profound understanding of the psychological impact of guilt within the Bwa cultural context. Because Kya has killed and desecrated the land against the laws of the ancestors, he is haunted by evil spirits:

[...] ses nuits, affirmaient, étaient hantées des fantômes de ceux qu'il abattait. Ils entraient, ressortaient, revenaient, tournoyaient, chuchotaient, remplissaient jusqu'au matin sa maison d'un piétinement indéfinissable. Ils froufrufaient derrière les greniers, dans le plafond, faisaient voler en éclats maintes objets. Kya ne trouvait pas le repos dans son sommeil infesté de cauchemars. Il voyait toutes sortes de figures grimaçantes, de squelettes mouvants qui exécutaient une ronde dégingandée (64).

Here again, readers are confronted with a marvellous realism. What happens to Kya is beyond rational explanation. For the Bwa people, it is possible to explain why Kya sees spirits that others cannot see, for not everyone becomes the target of evil spirits. Yet the supernatural events that happen to Kya are accepted by society as the normal way the gods express their anger towards an individual.

As Mbiti has written, African religion underlines the humanness of man vis-à-vis the other reality from which he derives his origin as well as his continuing well being; that reality is God. Kya might be regarded as powerful by his human victims, but he and society are constantly being reminded of the omniscience and
omnipresence of the Supreme Being. Man cannot have his way if his actions are not endorsed by the ancestors. For example, Kya’s father Icwun, cannot invoke the evil spirits on Têrhé because the latter is under the protection of the gods:

Toutes ses démarches aboutirent à des résultats troublants. Il apprit que Têrhé était né sous le signe du succès et du bonheur, que son avenir était faste, que ceux qui tenteraient de jeter un sort sur lui, subiraient l’effet du boomerang, car il jouissait de la protection des dieux (168).

Like an anthropologist or a historian Boni explains how Bwa society interprets the reaction of the gods, yet readers cannot help but realize that Boni’s fictional rendering of the Bwa also reflects his profound personal knowledge of their spiritual reality.

This knowledge is enhanced by his skillful use of Bwa legends and myths. To subvert Euro-centric notions about the Africans’ lack of religion before the advent of colonialism; for example, Boni incorporates into his narrative an account of Bwa creation myths and a description of the relationship that existed, according to Bwa legend, between man and God at the beginning of time:

Boni's description of Bwa society during the precolonial period is characteristic of Negritude writing, for it conveys the impression that Bwa society resulted from a perfect harmony between God and his creatures and that this idyllic society lost its stability when it came into contact with the hegemonic cultures responsible for colonial conquest.

Just as European fiction sometimes draws upon Greek and Roman mythology or the Christian Bible to lend dignity to more common place scientific representations, Boni exploits the mythology of his people to provide a profoundly human, spiritual dimension to his story and to counter the impact of Euro-centric discourse about Africa. By placing the creation story at the beginning of the novel, he is employing a stylistic device that enables him to situate the Bwa people in the global perspective that characterized their own view of the world. As Mbiti has argued, creation stories in Africa may vary, but there is nearly always a general belief in God as the Creator of all things (58).

In Boni's account of creation in Bwa mythology, some of the symbols would be familiar to European readers. According to the Christian Bible, for example, Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because they disobeyed God. Boni alludes to this
story in recounting the Bwa version of creation:

Il semble en effet, qu'à l'époque, le
Grand-Maître-de-l'Univers eût conservé à cette
fraction de l'Humanité une portion du paradis
terrestre jadis légué à Adam et Ève (23).

In this version of creation myth, a woman first ate
the forbidden fruit and broke the bonds of trust that
had existed between God and man at the beginning.

Il fallut la négligence d'une femme, il fallut
ô malheur! qu'une femme transgressât les
recommandations de Dambéni pour que, furieux,
le ciel s'envolât haut, très haut, très très
haut, encore plus haut, emportât et ses
richesses et ce qui alimentait le genre humain
(23).

Like the Christian version of the creation myth, Bwa
creation stories tend to portray women in negative
terms, although Boni himself glorifies the heroine of
his novel just as Hazoumé had done with Doguicimi. As
in the Christian Bible, the bond between human beings
and the divine are broken after a woman betrays the
trust that had been placed in them. Furthermore, in
both stories, man must toil for his survival after the
woman ate the forbidden fruit.

Boni's idyllic account of the Bwa belief system
accords with his Negritudist objective of confronting
the West with a more positive image of Africa than the
one that Europeans had promulgated to justify
Christian proselytism as well as their "civilizing
mission". He clearly ascribes the destruction of Bwa
institutions to the arrival of European colonialism.
In a footnote, he himself decries the negative impact
of colonialism on Bwa religious practices, pointing
out how some of them, such as the Do, had disappeared
entirely as a consequence of Christian influence in
the area:

Le culte du Do régresse avec l'évolution et
les progrès du christianisme. À Bwan, il a
cessé d'exister depuis 1958 (203).

Such footnotes reinforce the sense that Boni's account
of Bwa religious rites is historically accurate, but
they also underscore the impact of French colonialism
on the culture of the people who had become the
victims of it. The era in which these changes were
taking place was truly the "crépuscule des temps
anciens" because it was the time when indigenous
institutions were collapsing. Under these
circumstances, Boni's plea for African researchers to
help preserve their rich cultural heritage takes on a
tone of urgency. Like Hazoumé, Boni emphasizes the
fact that Africans did not need a European "mission
civilisatrice" to believe in God. In fact, that
"mission civilisatrice" actually destroyed the belief
system that held the Bwas together and rendered
coherent their belief in a single God.

Like other early African writers who incorporated
historical and sociological dimensions in their
fiction, Boni links his account of the Bwa belief system with a strong sense of community. As in much of the Negritude writing of the period, Boni's Crépuscule des temps anciens presents African society as imbued with a communal spirit that was lost as a consequence of contact with Western culture. In describing this communal spirit, Boni clearly understands it from the vantage point of an insider. Using the myths and legends of the Bwa people, he shows how the extended family system enabled people to live in a spirit of communality—a spirit reinforced by belief in the family's totem (an animal regarded as sacred because it represents the spirit of the ancestors). It is Gin'le the "ancien", well-versed in the traditions of the land, who explains the significance of the totem to the younger people.

The communal spirit is clearly expressed in the way the Bwa celebrate the "Yumbeni" festival of the ancestor Diyoua. For example, it becomes apparent in the property concept behind the treatment of domestic animals during the festival:

[...] les Nimisis ou "Neveux", les "enfants des sœurs" c'est-à-dire tous ceux dont les familles maternelles sont originaires de Bwan, ont plein droit de se les approprier. Ils ne peuvent prétendre à l'héritage de leurs oncles, mais en revanche, sont autorisés à rafle leurs biens dans certaines circonstances. En l'occurrence, cette pratique prescrite par la coutume dure aussi longtemps que la fête (74).
To give readers an insight into the Bwa concept of family relationship, Boni explains the unfamiliar and emphasizes the fact that the term "nephew" is understood in a wider sense than it is in Western societies. Once again, he is resorting to a Negritude discourse that presents African institutions and belief systems as fundamentally different from those of Europe. Negritude discourse thrived on "difference," and although Boni does not specifically mention this difference, it is constantly being suggested throughout his narrative. In the above passage, he is not only interested in describing how the "Yumbeni" festival was performed; he is also interested in showing how different it is from Western practices.

Like Hazoumé, Boni owes his knowledge of Bwa culture to his long contact with the "anciens". In societies profoundly shaken by the impact of colonialism, the "anciens" remained the guardians of a vanishing tradition. Only through them can ethnologists and historians like Hazoumé and Boni discover the oral sources of the history of their people. The contribution of the "anciens" was crucial for Hazoumé and Boni because they had been heavily influenced by Western culture as a consequence of the French formal education they had imbibed. In fact,
Boni’s narrative reinforces the oft-quoted saying by the Malian Amadou Hampâté Bâ who declared that, when an old man (or an old woman) dies in Africa, a whole library has burned down. In Crépuscule des temps, the "anciens" are the unifying force in Bwa society. They remind their society what is acceptable and what is unacceptable according to the customs of the ancestors. The "anciens" are therefore the guarantors of tradition and those who maintain the communal spirit.

Boni also reinforces his portrayal of the communal spirit in Bwa society by his account of marriage customs. Indeed, Negritude writers often dwelt on such customs to justify their rejection of European value systems. In Boni’s novel, the marriage between Tézhé and Badoumfi is a societal affair that concerns more than two individuals. It concerns the entire community and requires that the august "Conseil des Anciens de Wakara" give it their blessing. As Nicolas Atangana has affirmed, marriage in traditional African society is an initiation into adulthood, allowing the couple to take their rightful place of responsibility in society (136). What Boni does is to present Tézhé and Hakanni as an ideal couple. Hakanni respects the customs, breaking her pot as a manifestation of her love for Tézhé when she hears the latter’s name.
mentled by scmdxx^ Fijiinence, Boni undersoaros
the ocnnunal dimension in the polygamous marriage that
unites Terhé with Hakanni and Hadounfi.

Although Boni is far from being a feminist writer,
the legends and myths of Bwa society inspired him to
glorify the African woman in a characteristically
Negritude manner. In fact, there are many similarities
between the ways in which Hazoumé and Boni close their
novels. Boni does not use his heroine to support
French colonialism as Hazoumé had done, but his
heroine in Crépuscule des temps anciens does show her
absolute love for her husband by refusing to withdraw
from the blood pact she had signed, thereby accepting,
like Doguicimi, the fate of a woman willing to die
with her husband.

Having signed a blood pact with Terhé, Hakanni
refuses to renounce that pact after Terhé dies as a
result of having been poisoned by Lowan, who had never
abandoned his desire to kill his son’s rival. Hakanni
refuses to accept her mother’s advice to cancel the
blood pact and to save her own life. When her request
to be buried with Terhé’s corpse is refused, she
shocks everybody by revealing the secret of the blood
pact she had signed with Térhé:

Au moment de l’inhumation, Hakanni demanda à
partager la tombe de Térhé. On la repoussa, la
coutume ne le permettait pas. Elle insista et
finit par révéler le pacte de sang qu’elle
avait conclu avec son amant. On resta interloqué (254).

Even though Hakanni does not succeed in having herself buried with her husband (as Doguicimi did), she dies shortly after her husband’s funeral.

Her stance is particularly noble in the sense that she refuses to commit suicide, as some members of the society had feared, because she respects the customs of her society and does not want to be given the dishonorable burial that awaits those who kill themselves. Among the Bwa, the corpse of a suicide victim is dragged to the burial ground and thrown into a hole. As Boni reports, "Elle [Hakanni] mourrait normalement, aurait des funérailles régulières et s’en irait en beauté" (255). What is underscored here is her dignity in wanting to be remembered as a woman who had died honorably.

Although such an ending has melodramatic overtones, readers cannot help but admire Hakanni’s nobility. Like Toffa in Hazoumé’s Doguicimi, Terhé is portrayed as an exemplary man who deserves the honor of having a wife who remains faithful to him even in death. Boni’s dirge at the end of the novel is reminiscent of Hazoumé’s epilogue about Doguicimi:

La paix soit avec vous, Terhé et Hakanni. Vous avez mérité du Bwamu et de l’Humanité. Pâti-Râ et Pâti-Han, partez unis et heureux vers les paradisiaques rivages et l’Au-délà où ne sévissent ni la haine ni le poison. Symbole
Allowing them to enter a realm in which there is no hatred, Hakanni’s and Terché’s departure symbolizes the end of the ideal world represented by pre-colonial Bwa society. Boni regrets the “crépuscule des temps anciens” and imagines Hakanni in a world where she will not regret having left behind a society that had fallen under the influence of an invading foreign culture. His use of a female hero to evoke the image of an ideal society is itself an ideological statement that reasserts his pride in his own cultural identity and rejects ethnocentric European claims to superiority.

Despite similarities with Doguicimi, however, the narrative form of Crépuscule des temps anciens is more efficient than that of the earlier historical novel because, although Boni draws on the same oral narrative techniques as Hazoumé, he does not indulge himself in the long ethnographic digressions that characterize Doguicimi. Everything that occurs in Crépuscule des temps anciens revolves around the same theme: the destruction of Bwa socio-political institutions and the collapse of a well-structured belief system as the result of French colonialism.
The influence of oral tradition on Boni's narrative manifests itself in many ways. The guardians of the oral tradition are the "anciens", with whom Boni "traded" for a long time. The Crier in Crépuscule des temps anciens (as in Dogucimi) serves as a catalyst, symbolically reminding the members of society every night that they belong to the same family. In this sense, he represents the knowledge and wisdom of the "anciens". Yet the Crier is not the only one who symbolizes this sense of historicity in the narrative, for the griot also plays a significant role in Boni's textual quest for a viable cultural identity. In fact, the griot in Crépuscule des temps anciens serves as the eyes and ears of Bwa society. What he sings about individuals such as Terhé reflects the value system that is operative in his society. The Crier himself resembles the griot, convoking the villagers to listen to the message that Gnassan, the Chief of the land, has for them. The Crier also assures the approval of the griot, who testifies: "Kin! kin! kin! Grand'père ta parole sonne comme l'or..." (43). A unifying force in Bwa society, the griot has an ideological function in the sense that he preserves the sense of unity and harmony that characterized pre-colonial Bwa society.
He encourages a respect for individual values and an aspiration to make positive contributions to society. He sings the honor of the individual, the family, the clan. For example, he praises Terhé in the following terms:

Terhé! tu es un guérier invincible, l'incarnation de la puissance humaine, le bouclier des opprimés, le porte-drapeau de toutes les causes de justice, le symbole de la vertu et de l'homme (147).

Such praises reflect the norms of society and give expression to the cultural values of the Bwa people. He exclaims: "Le lion s’est remué! Son panache et ses grelots se sont envolés!" (147). Terhé thus becomes a symbol of what masculine strength and courage stand for in society. Because the lion is symbol of strength and endurance, the audience understands why the griot refers to Terhé in such terms. When he describes Terhé as the prototype of the Ancestor Djokandjo who had been invincible in war, the griot becomes a mouthpiece for Boni’s own opinion about the role of people like Terhé in the history of the Bwa people. Boni’s use of the griot in this fashion clearly demonstrates the importance of oral tradition in his re-writing of the history of his people.

To enhance the sense of historical verisimilitude in Crépuscule des temps anciens, Boni also creates a feeling of local color by including literal
translations of words taken directly from the Bwa language. For example, the white Catholic missionaries are called "mon père-wa", and Protestant pastors are called "nansawuni wa". In fact, throughout the novel, Boni uses Bwa words such as "Nansarawa" for white people, "Dombeni" for God-the-Great, "Mb'woa" for Ancestor or Grand father, "Kanni-nipoa" for cave dwellers, "Yenissa" for elderly people and "Brawa" for young people. Boni provides translations of such words to facilitate comprehension by those unfamiliar with the Bwa language, but his use of them is a significant narrative device that serves to authenticate his historical fiction.

A related device is his use of Bwa legends and folktales to create a sense of local color, which in turn reinforces the impression of historical authenticity. For example, at one point he relates:

Il y a, dit "Ancêtre", de cela environ trois cents ans moins vingt, le Bwamu jouissait d'un riche trésor de mystère et de magies, d'ineffables délices qui déteignirent sur les aieux des grands-pères des pères de nos pères (21).

In this passage, Boni is acknowledging the source of his knowledge about Bwa history by referring to the "anciens" as the "Ancêtre". The "anciens" are the guardians of the traditions of the people, so by recalling what he has learned about the history and
legends of his people, Boni is re-asserting his pride in the past when Bwa kingdom was rich and powerful. By doing so, he rejects the false Euro-centric notion that the history of his people began with colonialism.

In other legends that Boni invokes, animals and natural phenomena such as thunder and lightning take on anthropological forms. For example, in the legend about creation, thunder and lightning are presented as if they were human beings:


Lightning and thunder have a significance in Bwa mythology. They are represented as brother and sister who need each other’s advice; suggesting that humans too can learn the moral of Karanvanni, who listens to the sister Hahovanni’s advice all the time. The legend is therefore recognized as the source of a moral lesson for society. For Boni, this relationship is important because it is part of the history of his people, and he is interested in historicity.

The wisdom behind such legends is also transmitted to the younger generation by means of riddles such as those posed by the xylophonist: "J’ai rencontré un
excellent couturier vêtu d'une blouse d'aiguilles. Qui dévine?" (38). He gives another riddle about sexual attraction between males and females: "Mon grand'père faisait allusion à un sanctuaire broussailleux qui exerce sur le serpent un attrait irrésistible". What this riddle means is that the Bwas believe there is a natural attraction between men and women. Moral lessons on sex are often referred to in indirect terms because it is taboo to express them in plain terms. Like the legends, these riddles have the effect of moralizing because, apart from being a source of entertainment to the audience, they teach the group's moral values, especially to the young. By drawing on them, Boni recognizes their importance as a force of cohesion in the socio-political systems of his people.

Boni also uses songs to invoke a sense of historical and cultural authenticity. For example, he cites war songs that inspire the Bwa to defend their land against foreign invaders. Often the record of past experience contained in these songs serves as an inspiration to African nationalists who were fighting for the independence of their countries at the time that Boni was collecting his material and writing his book. For example, one of the war songs exhorts Bwa warriors in the following terms:

Allez! allez! allez!
Bwan! à Bwan! à Bwan!
By recalling songs that reflect the valiant attitudes of the Bwa in the past, Boni is not only asserting pride in the ancestors who resisted colonial occupation; he is also, like a griot, singing the praises of the militant nationalists of his own generation.

As I have already suggested above, Boni's use of footnotes to explain unfamiliar words and expressions or to relate the episodes in the story to verifiable historical events or personalities also serves to lend an aura of historical accuracy to his fictional narrative. For example, Boni devotes a page-long footnote to the historical evidence for his version of the events that transpired between the Bwa and the invading French army. In this footnote, he cites specific dates and the names of actual historical personages such as Colonel Motard, the Administrator Maubert, and the late Chief of the Karé district, Dambio Coulibaly, who betrayed his own people by fighting on the side of the invading French forces in the battle of May 1916 (234). The point is that Boni the historical novelist, is also an archivist who
substantiates his account by citing the fruits of his research in footnotes. In this sense, his historical fiction is clearly motivated by interests similar to those that inspired nineteenth-century European historical novelists before him. However, his use of footnotes also have another purpose that would have been quite foreign to his European predecessors, for Boni was intent upon rejecting everything that European colonialism represented.

From an ideological point of view, Boni had much in common with Hazoumé. The major difference between them is that, whereas Hazoumé's *Doquiçimi* reflects the author's ambiguous situation as an "évolué" writer, *Crépuscule des temps anciens* is an unambiguous anti-colonial statement. By weaving Bwa legends and myths into a true historical account, Boni communicates a sense of how the Bwa themselves perceive life and interact with each other and with the spirits described in their legends.

As Ngugi Wa Thiongo has said, a writer tries to make readers view not only a certain kind of reality, but also to view that reality from a certain angle of vision that is generally, although perhaps unconsciously, structured around the interests of a certain class, race, or nation (1981, 6). The validity of Ngugi's argument is clearly apparent in the case of
Boni's historical novel. His portrayal of the Bwa belief system is itself an ideological statement, and his discourse falls under the general rubric of Negritude discourse. But unlike some adepts of that movement, he does not present an idyllic image of the Bwa or of African society in general, although he does seek to restore an appreciation for the value of African culture in a world where discourse is related to power.

As Amilcar Cabral has said, the value of culture as an element of resistance to foreign domination lies in the fact that culture is a vigorous manifestation on the ideological or idealist plane of the physical and historical reality of the society that is subject to domination (41). Boni's historical fiction reinforces this idea by showing how the revalorization of African culture can serve as an instrument of resistance to the European colonialism that seeks to subjugate other cultures to its own interests. Motivated by the same ideology that inspired his historical research, Crépuscule des temps anciens re-creates a Bwa worldview that defies the stereotyped notions of Euro-centric discourse and implicitly exhorts readers to repudiate it. Although it has some characteristics of the classical European historical novel, it is above all a novel that is fundamentally
African in its underlying ideology as well as in the narrative forms that Boni adopted from oral story-telling techniques.
CHAPTER III

LEONARD SAINVILLE: DOMINIQUE NÉGRE ESCLAVE

In this chapter, I will examine Dominique nègre esclave by the Martinican writer Léonard Sainville. My thesis is that, for Sainville, the revalorization of the image of the maroon is crucial in the Antillean's search for an authentic cultural identity. By studying the process of "chosification" (to borrow a term from Césaire) that characterized the treatment of the slave in the Antilles, I will argue that Sainville's historical fiction reveals a strong sense of ideological commitment. His fiction was motivated by a desire to subvert the Euro-centric discourse of the "Other" by intimating that the maroon was a hero who was denied his rightful place in the history of the Antilles. In Dominique nègre esclave, he presents marooning as a counter-discourse to the dominant discourse of the slave master. I intend to demonstrate how the slave master created "othermerness" in slaves and how the slaves reacted to this predicament in a way that enables Sainville to see them as the heroes of their own emancipation.

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Like Glissant after him, Sainville demonstrates through fiction that the Antillean must first try to understand himself. In the process of creating an authentic discourse of his own, he must initially strive to understand the discourse of the ancestors against the backdrop of European colonial hegemony. In *Dominique nègre esclave*, he identifies the oppositional discourses of the slavery era and then demonstrate how they worked against each other.

An early supporter of the Négritude movement, Sainville also believed in the necessity of adopting a Marxist approach to the liberation of oppressed peoples—a belief that was partly responsible for the confrontation with the French government. In *Dominique nègre esclave*, Sainville creates an anti-colonial discourse that makes him a committed writer in the Sartrean sense of the word. According to Sartre, a committed writer cannot ignore what is happening in society. Writing is, for him, a form of engagement with society, and it should be used as propaganda, as a means of declaring one’s solidarity with one’s times. Sartre argues that writers need to ask themselves what aspect of the world they want to
reveal, and what changes they want to bring about as the result of this revelation. In his view, "revealing" the world represents an attempt to change it. For this reason, he contends that the committed writer should abandon the impossible dream of painting an objective or impartial picture of society and of the human condition in which it participates (781). Sainville's writing is dictated by his commitment to changing the human condition: to rehabilitating the place of Black people in history. In revalorizing the image of the Black in Dominique, he, like other Négritude writers, is declaring his solidarity with his times.

Like his African counterpart, the Antillean historical novelist has experienced the effects of European colonial rule. By the time Sainville wrote Dominique in 1948, slavery had been abolished in the French Antilles for a hundred years and Martinique had become a part of France—a "Département d'Outre Mer"—two years previously. Within this context, Sainville's discourse in Dominique is that of an angry "subject" of a French domination that had promulgated many false stereotypes about his race. The novel is Sainville's response to a situation in which his own people had been relegated to the periphery by a dominant Euro-centric discourse. Influenced by his
background as a professional historian and political activist, his choice of a specific period in the history of Antillean slavery resulted from his own scholarly research in the area. In a doctoral thesis that he presented several years after his novel appeared, he explained the importance of the fictional version of his research work, emphasizing that, by marooning and by persistently defying the system that had turned them into beasts of burden, Antillean slaves had themselves brought about the dismantling of the institution of slavery (1970, 1294). Therefore, his choice of specific events was clearly motivated by a sense of pride in his people and in his culture. He desired to re-write that part of Antillean history which had always been distorted in Euro-centric discourse. The medium he chose was the subversive discourse of the revolted slave.

Sainville’s revalorization of the image of the slave in Dominique was actually inspired by the development of Antillean discursive processes that are quite similar to those described by Michel Foucault in Surveiller et punir. The systematic attempt to dehumanize and deculturalize the slave was one manifestation of what Foucault analyzes as the exercise of power. In Surveiller et punir, he traces the history of the prison and shows how, through the
years, French society viewed physical punishment as a corrective method. The dehumanizing treatment of the slave cannot be divorced from this concept of punishment in French society during the period depicted in Sainville’s fiction. From the concept of bodily chastisement, French society moved toward the idea that the chastisement of the soul was a more effective method of punishment. This shift in attitude occurred during the nineteenth century. In Sainville’s Dominique, the slave was subjected to the chastisement of body and soul. According to Foucault, the French regarded punishment as a means of intensifying society’s awareness of the severity of a crime. The crime itself had to be brought to light through confessions, speeches, and other activities that served to publicize it. Punishment was thus supposed to be inflicted in public so that the culprit would be appropriately humiliated (59).

Foucault’s analysis of French society and its concept of punishment could also be applied to the situation of the Antillean slave and especially to the revolted maroon who was often publicly humiliated. Sometimes his body was even mutilated in the presence of the other slaves. In spite of the “Code Noir” that was passed by the French government to monitor the way slaves were handled by slave masters, the severest
punishment that could be inflicted on a slave master for breaking the law was a mere scolding. This situation, as Sainville testifies in *Dominique*, helped reinforce a clear division between the races by defining the black "other" as a slave. The dehumanization and public humiliation of slaves were intended to make them "confess". These measures were also addressed to other slaves who might contemplate the act of marooning. However, this "chosification" of the black is the starting point for the emergence of an important counter-discourse on the part of the maroons in Sainville's historical novel. In speaking about the birth of the concept of punishment in French society, Foucault explains:

Le supplice fait partie de la procédure qui établit la réalité de ce qu'on punit. Mais il y a plus: l'atrocité d'un crime, c'est aussi la violence du défi lancé au souverain. C'est ce qui va déclencher de sa part une réplique qui a pour fonction de renchérir sur cette atrocité, de la maîtriser, de l'emporter sur elle par un excès qui l'annule. L'atrocité qui hante le supplice joue donc un double rôle: principe de la communication du crime (59-60).

The crucial idea in this passage is the perception of crime as a challenge to the power of the sovereign. The atrocity of the punishment brings out the truth; it also certifies the power of the sovereign. It is part of a ritual which ends in the triumph of power.
The same ritual is re-enacted in Dominique, where the maroon is punished in a way that supposedly undermines the rationale for his revolt against the system and underscores the power of the white bèké. If crime is a challenge to the power that the sovereign exercises over the people, the main actor in this social drama is, as Foucault points out, the people themselves; their real and immediate presence is required for the "ceremony" to have the required effect.

The system that existed in the Antilles during the centuries of slavery was indeed a testimony to the power that the European master exercised over the "inferior" other. Perceived primarily as an economic object, the Antillean slave was subjected to a "justice system" that obliged him to recognize his powerlessness before the law. In contrast, the white bèké was untouchable before the law and could disregard it at will. He represented the status quo which the whole system had been devised to maintain as it was. However, the maroon subverted this system through the persistent revolt that Sainville portrays in his fiction as a crucial factor in Antillean history.

Dominique calls into question the entire discourse that justifies this status quo. For Sainville, the
maroon was the "néglateur" of a system analogous to the one that Foucault examines in his study. Césaire was also responding to this situation when he wrote:

Et ce pays cria pendant des siècles que nous sommes des bêtes brutes; que les pulsations de l'humanité s'arrêtaient aux portes de la négrerie; que nous sommes un fumier ambulant hideusement prometteur de cannes tendres et de coton soyeux et l'on nous vendait sur les places et l'aune de drap anglais et la viande salée d'Irlande coûtaient moins cher que nous, et ce pays était calme, tranquille, disant que l'esprit de Dieu était dans ses actes (Cahier, 38-39).

In this passage, Césaire is demonstrating the dehumanization imposed upon black people by slavery. Many European intellectuals had justified this practice. According to them, the slave was a mere economic object. Césaire's anger at this scandalous situation resembles Sainville's own desire to re-valorize the image of the maroon in his historical fiction. As Césaire had done before him, Sainville depicts graphically the predicament of the slave, but he also presents the maroon as a hero who refuses to accept his situation docilely.

In the novel, Dominique and Azais (the head of the maroons) symbolize one aspect of Antillean history that has been neglected or distorted in Euro-centric history. They persistently refuse to be objects in the eyes of the slave masters; however, their exercise of
power fails to eliminate the counter-discourse of the maroons. Dominique, Azais, and their companions subvert the "subject" image that the white men were seeking to impose on them. In the process, they also subvert the image the whites have created for themselves. In effect, the maroons are challenging the dominator-dominated relationship on which this white self-image depends. In other words, the confrontation of the maroons with the white beké creates a new type of relationship and proves that the white master's definition of the relationship is not the only possible one. Black people had not been created to be dominated by Europeans, as the latter contended; in fact, Sainville's portrayal of the confrontational relationship between the maroon and the slave master undermines assumptions that had always been taken for granted in the dominant European discourse.

In his preface, Sainville claims that his novel had been inspired by the true history of Azais and Hibo, two maroons accused of having killed another maroon, Moco. In the novel, he uses their authentic historical names, and Azais actually has the personality of his historical model. As Sainville reports, there is an archival account of what transpired in Guadeloupe between Azais and his captives in 1837:
le 21 et le 22 ont été jugés Azais et Hibo accusés de meurtre avec préméditation sur la personne du nommé Moco. Azais, marron dans les bois de la Souffrière, s'était mis à la tête d’esclaves fugitifs et avait construit un camp. Au nombre de ses compagnons se trouvaient Anne, sa soeur, Moco, au sieur de Blainville, Hibo, au sieur Cardonnet (9-10).

This preface needs to be read as part of the discourse of the entire novel. It prepares the readers for the character they will discover in Azais because the fictional Azais in the novel corresponds closely to the historical Azais of the preface.

Like his historical homonym, Azais creates a power structure around himself in a way that defies the subject image that is commonly associated with slaves by their masters. For the slave master to exist in the image he has forged for himself, he needs to maintain the image of the inferior other that he has imposed on the slave, but Azais’ discourse subverts the image that white békés like Donzolet have of themselves.

The novel itself opens with an example of the white béké’s discourse of power—the flogging of Jean-Pierre on the "quatre-piquets". Donzelot creates an image of superiority around himself in order to keep the slaves in a perpetually subservient state:

Il voulait avoir l’allure terrible, car on procédait à un châtiment et tout “l’atelier hommes” avait été convié à la cérémonie (13).
This quotation reveals the existence of the same power structure that Foucault analyzes in his work.

Donzelot's "allure terrible" emphasizes the power he exercises over the subject other. Making sure that all the slaves witness the punishment meted out to the "culprits" is a way of "legitimizing" the whole process, of making it an established institution in the eyes of the slaves. It is a concrete way of defining the slaves' otherness in a system where the white béké's power determines how society functions.

Jean-Pierre was being punished because he dared to behave in a way that was not in the interest of the slave masters:

Ne s'était-il pas laissé surprendre avec les trois autres sacrifants à mâcher de la canne, la veille au soir, peu après le retour des champs? Ne savaient-ils pas tous ces Nègres, que leurs vols répétés causaient le plus grand dommage aux propriétaires? Ne leur donnait-on pas la nourriture en suffisance? (14).

In this passage, Sainville adopts an ironic tone to underscore the white béké's opinion about a slave who is eating sugar cane to avoid starvation. The author's description of the slave master's reaction seems detached, but its sarcastic tone draws attention to the predicament against which the maroon was revolting.

The maroons in Dominique do not docilely accept the image of themselves as mere economic objects.
Freedom is crucial to them, and living in the
mountains under the leadership of Azais is an open
defiance of the whole economic and political system
based on slavery. If slavery in the New World stripped
Africans of their human identity and dignity, the
stance of the maroon represents their fight to regain
a fully human status:

A l'échelle des marrons vivaient et
prospéraient les intérêts, les sentiments, les
vices, les vertus, qui formaient le complexe
psychologique et social de la grande société
de laquelle ils s'étaient mis en marge; mais
il y manquait l'esclavage et l'avilissement
(58).

Azais personifies authority, an authority which poses
a threat to the status quo. Under his leadership, the
maroons exercise self-discipline; in fact, the system
they create for themselves living in the mountains is
an uncompromising rejection of the image of the other
that had been imposed by Euro-centric discourse. The
rules and regulations established by the maroons for
themselves disprove the myth of the slave as a being
who was incapable of doing anything for himself.

Colonialism thrived on the myth that Africans,
Blacks, were backward people who needed European
civilization. The activities of the maroons
contradicted the assumption on which this myth was
based. According to the myth, Africans and other
colonized peoples were incapable of making progress by themselves. They needed somebody else to tell them what was good for them. Needless to say, that somebody was by definition the white man. By organizing a maroon society in the mountains, Azais effectively subverts the power exercised by the white beklé and by all those in Europe who benefit from slavery. His character effectively symbolizes the pride of Antilleans, descendants of slaves, in their ability to seize the historical initiative. However, the maroon who best represents this pride in the ancestors is the main character Dominique himself.

By comprehending the nature of Dominique’s "adventures" with different slave masters, the reader achieves insight into the life of a slave in the French Caribbean. Dominique is a picaresque-like hero—persistently challenging the status quo, revolting and marooning at every opportunity, and becoming more hardened and more witty after his experiences with each new master. For Sainville, this attitude makes Dominique a symbol of the anti-colonial discourse that rejects all that the institution of slavery represented.

Dominique serves the ideological purpose of Sainville’s anti-colonial discourse in the sense that he embodies the history that is being rewritten in the
Antillean writer’s search for a viable cultural identity. He symbolizes a rejection of the exercise of power by French society as it has been defined by Foucault. Through Dominique, Sainville demonstrates that the slave was not a passive "subject" in a purely assimilationist system. A maroon of the first order, Dominique resents the system from the beginning and constantly poses a threat to it. Even during his childhood, he is a potential hero. Even then, he desires to liberate himself from his subject state and yearns to create an anti-colonial discourse that would accurately represent the history of his people. In the eyes of the whites, however, Dominique incarnates the devil image they associate with all maroons.

Precisely this image provoked Sainville’s anti-colonial discourse in the first place, for he reverses its significance. Ironically, the negative image associated with the maroon makes him a hero in the eyes of the black Antillean, and this image makes him an appropriate symbol of the writer’s anti-colonial discourse. In the eyes of the whites, blacks are incapable of the love that one human being can feel for another. This stereotyped idea is illustrated during the trial of Azais and the other maroons when the whites express surprise that a slave could love a woman the way Moco loved Azais’ sister:
"Tiens, les Nègres peuvent aimer à ce point, comme des Blancs? s'étonna le "cinq ficelles". Bizarre, n'est-ce pas? fit le Gouverneur avec un gros rire (95).

This conversation encapsulates the European's implied perception of the slave as being incapable of normal human sentiments.

In his relationship with the white masters, however, Dominique demythifies such stereotypes. For example, he endures physical torture, a daily occurrence in the life of a slave, with courage. He defies the power of the white béké, refuses to cry as he is tied to the "quatre piquets" and then flogged:

Le colon connaissait bien Dominique. Il le tenait pour une des brebis galeuses de l'atelier, une de ces "têtes de nègres" obstinées, vindicatives, "sournoises", un véritable "enfant de garce" que les mauvais traitements, l'emploi même des moyens de terreur semblait ne pas pouvoir réduire (16).

When Dominique spits in disgust as he is tied to the "quatre piquets", he challenges the image that the white society has created for itself, underscoring his own dignity as a member of the black race.

Slavery was an inhuman institution that sought to deprive blacks of their human dignity. Sainville creates a positive counter-image of the slave and of black people in general through his portrayal of Dominique:

Ni les blessures du fouet et celles de l'amour-propre, ni les affres de la faim ou
Through Dominique, Sainville expounds his Négritude ideas. Significantly, Dominique is not a mulatto, but a pure black. Even though Dominique’s mother had slept with many men, his father was certainly a black man: "Dominique, câpre ‘cent pour cent’, n’était certainement le fils d’un béke ni d’un mulâtre" (20). Sainville emphasizes the family lineage of his hero because, according to him, it makes the latter more appropriate as a symbol of his anti-colonial discourse.

But Sainville’s portrayal of Dominique differs from the way his compatriot Roland Brival portrays his hero Macouba in La Montagne d’ébène, which was inspired by the same historical events. Although a pure-blooded African like Dominique, Macouba was not born into slavery. Sainville seems to suggest that, for his hero to be a more authentic representative of Antilleans’ quest for identity, he needs to be born into the system like Dominique.

Dominique’s initiation into adulthood is accompanied by his early encounter with sexuality. Made to join the "petite bande" at the age of ten, he
undergoes a metamorphosis as his eyes are opened to the realities of slavery. For him to become the hero of a later maroon revolt, he must first experience a physical and psychological initiation:

As a result of having experienced the dehumanizing conditions of slavery, Dominique realizes while still a child that he is no more than a commodity in the eyes of the white man. The impulse that is triggered by this insight enables him to gain back his human dignity and thereby to become a symbol of black dignity and pride. He does not hesitate to hit a supervisor who had been cruel to him, despite the fact that he will be imprisoned for his "offence" and subjected to utterly inhuman treatment.

Even in prison, Dominique fights to defend his own humanity. By doing so, he categorically rejects Euro-centric myths about the black man's inherent dependency and docility—myths that were used in
European discourse to justify the inhuman treatment of slaves:

Il [Dominique] était un esclave. Mais il voulait vivre, il voulait être fier, il ne voulait pas être broyé par la machine. Il voulait être lui (28).

Dominique's "prise de conscience" in this passage underscores his pride in himself, in his race. His determination to survive the rigors of slavery is the driving force that ultimately enables him to undercut the power of the white bêché.

In their rejection of the image of the other imposed on them by the white bêché, Antillean slaves revolted in a variety of ways. Apart from marooning, they often resorted to poisoning as a way of creating a counter-discourse. Poisoning the masters' animals diminished the economic power that was also reflected in the "chosification" of the slave:

À la méchanceté, ils répondaient par une méchanceté plus grande. Le sadisme du maître trouvait, en face de lui, une fureur de vengeance et de destruction qui semblait inapaisable (276).

By creating a counter-discourse in response to the sub-human treatment to which he and the other slaves are subjected, Dominique actually subverts the economic power base of the slave masters and thereby diminishes their power over him and his people.
Sainville also focuses on the reaction of the slaves vis-à-vis other dimensions of the cruel system that has been imposed on them. For example, Dominique's courage when he is being sadistically tortured with a hot iron arouses the reader's sensibility to the breaking point, but it also disproves the Europeans' stereotyped notion about black men:

Un homme s'approcha du feu et se saisit d'un fer à l'extrémité complètement rougie. Dominique serra les dents et ferma les yeux pour ne point voir. Il concentra fortement sa pensée sur Léontine et sur son enfant. Il sentit la cuisson à son épaule gauche et un grand élanement. Il se raidit. Une deuxième cuisson, un deuxième formidable éclair qui traversait tout son être (286).

This graphic description underscores the cruelty of Dominique's punishment, but it also emphasizes his ability to survive physically, to resist in a heroic manner. In this description, Sainville does not simply highlight the relationship between blacks and whites in the Antilles; more importantly, he creates an ideological basis for questioning the entire colonial enterprise and the supposedly humanitarian Western philosophies that were adduced to support it. If the French had created codes of behavior for slaves in order to keep them perpetually in a subordinate state, Dominique disregards those codes and obliges readers to recognize their inherent brutality.
In his book *Nous et les Autres*, Tzvetan Todorov analyzes the French perception of the "Other" in a way that we can also apply in our study of the relationship between the white bekké and the slave in Sainville's *Dominique nègre esclave*. It is a relationship based on the Euro-centric discourse of the Other. In his study, Todorov demonstrates how ethnocentrism permeated the works of writers such as Pascal and La Bruyère. Reflecting French society's perceptions of other people, such works help us understand why many Frenchmen regarded it as "normal" to dehumanize the slave in the most sadistic manner.

In this sense, Todorov's study illuminates the rationale behind the dehumanizing of Dominique and the significance of his ability to revolt against it.

As Todorov points out, works such as Renan’s *L'Origine du langage* assume the superiority of the white race:

"Visiblement, c'est encore la providence qui décide du rôle dévolu aux différentes populations du globe; la race blanche est seule pourvue de la dignité du sujet humain, les autres races devant s'en tenir à des fonctions instrumentales: elles n'existent pas en elles-mêmes mais seulement dans l'optique du projet impérial auquel est prédestinée la race blanche (1989, 134)."

According to Todorov, Renan argues that expansionist wars were perfectly legitimate as long as they were not waged between races that belong to the superior
class, but rather by peasants and people of working-class origins. Colonial wars, in Renan’s view, were the ideal (134-135). For Hippolyte Taine and Gobineau too, Europeans were innately civilized; in their view "civilization" is an inherited characteristic and cannot be acquired (147). This concept permeated white Antillean society, which regarded the black person as inherently uncivilized.

Todorov goes further to point out the absurdity and hypocrisy of the official position adopted by French government officials toward the plight of slaves. For example, Alexis de Tocqueville tried to reconcile his ethical opposition to slavery with his position as a French Deputy. While arguing for the right of slaves to be free because nobody had the right to possess another human being, Tocqueville acknowledged that the wealth of the slave traders was a legitimate property (Todorov, 221). In order for France not to be ruined by the abolition of slavery, he concluded, the former slave territories had to be maintained under French colonialism. Even for well-intentioned Europeans like Tocqueville relationships with other peoples were perceived largely in terms of the political and economic benefits they entailed for Europeans. Such discourse permeated European literary and political writing well
into the colonial period. For this reason, Dominique needs to be read against the backdrop of colonial hegemony, for only in this context can we comprehend the counter-discourse that characterizes the Antillean historical novel and, more specifically, the role of the hero in Sainville’s novel. Dominique is a victim of the system that Todorov describes. He also challenges that system.

Dominique’s relationship with the white bèké also introduces another crucial element of slavery—the treatment of the female slave who was in many ways the ultimate victim of European perceptions of the other. The slave was an economic object, but the female slave was even more completely stripped of her dignity, for she was obliged to satisfy the sexual needs of her fellow slaves as well as those of her lecherous masters. Beverly Ormerod has shown how the conception of a child fathered by a white man represented a female slave’s only hope of obtaining better living conditions and upward social mobility for her descendants (1985, 58).

Ormerod also shows how the female slave was deprived of her right to determine the sexual uses to which her own body was put. Required to become a breeding machine for future labor, the female slave was obliged to sleep with whichever male was chosen
for her by the slave master. In his *Discours Antillais*, Édouard Glissant touches upon the
bestialization of the female slave as an object of production:

Le maître entend que l’esclave lui appartienne, jusque dans la fonction de reproduction. Le plaisir ni la jouissance de l’esclave ne sauraient être pris en compte, tout de même que pour un étalon. Sa marge de manœuvre sexuelle est contrainte à la marge bénéficiaire du maître [...]. La jouissance n’est pas un acquis, n’est pas un projet, c’est un dérobé. Ce n’est pas un prolongement de soi; c’est ce qui est déduit de l’Autre, l’Autre toujours présent, voyeur invisible et réprimant (1981, 294).

As Glissant explains, the male slave considered sex with the female slave (even if it were rape in the sugar-cane fields) as a theft of the master’s power and as a means of gaining revenge on the master. If the master was truly a “voyeur”, the male slave’s “flirting” with the female slaves became a subtle way of defying the latter’s power (293-302).

The female slave cursed her own pregnancy and often resorted to abortion, which was not uncommon because it was regarded as preferable to bearing a child who would be enslaved from birth. Even in the slave ships that transported them to the New World, the female slave was dehumanized by the constant rape of the "slave owners". Glissant underscores the psychological and sociological importance of this
phenomenon in Antillean history, and as can be seen in Sainville's *Dominique nègre esclave* and in his own *Le Quatrième Siècle*, the "chosification" of the female slave represented a crucial dimension of this process.

Glissant makes this point poignantly in the following text:

> Dans l'univers absolument fou du bateau négrier, là où les hommes déportés sont annihilés physiquement, la femme africaine subit la plus totale des agressions, qui est le vol quotidien et répété d'un équipage de marins rendus dénuts par l'exercice de leur métier; après quoi, au débarquer sur la terre nouvelle, la femme a sur l'homme un inappréciable avantage: elle connaissait déjà le maître (1981, 297).

For this reason, the "chosification" of the female slave is more profound than that of her male counterpart. The female slave not only has to contend with a denigration of her race, but also with a demeaning image of her sex.

Yet her humiliation as a female reinforced the white world's view of her as a symbol of the subjugated inferior black race. As René Depestre explains:

> La femme esclave en tant que valeur d'échange et d'usage, était encore plus reifiée et aliénée, car elle devait satisfaire à la fois les besoins sociaux du maître et ses besoins sexuels: à l'heure du repos de "sexe-guerrier-blanc" immolait joyeusement ses préjugés raciaux dans le sexe somptueusement incolore de la femme noire (1980, 97).
In other words, the woman symbolizes an objectified Otherness. Sainville's use of this insight can be seen in the fact that Dominique must live with the pain of knowing that his "wife" Léontine has slept with white males. For him, sleeping with a white girl would be an appropriate revenge on the race that has dehumanized his own. The omniscient narrator of the novel even allows the reader to enter into the psyche of Dominique as the latter contemplates his plan to avenge the lecherous activities of the white bêke with black female slaves. Unfortunately, Sainville does not endow the female slave with the same subversive power that he accords to Dominique, who actually challenges the assumptions on which the bestialization of the female slave are based. He, not Léontine, confronts the power of the white bêke on behalf of the women who are the ultimate victims of the white man's lechery.

For Dominique, the fact that the white bêke can sleep with black female slaves whenever he desires to do so represents one form of degradation of the Black race. It reminds him that he is not a free man, but only an object to be exploited for the profit of the white bêke. This insight makes him more determined than ever to subvert the false image imposed on his race. He creates his own counter-discourse by establishing an amorous relationship with Marguerite
Marinois, his master’s daughter. Their relationship is not a simple love adventure. It is a symbolic relationship because it represents the type of relationship that would not be acceptable in a society based on the unequal status of white masters and black slaves.

Dominique breaks the barriers established between races in this society, and his act has a profound significance within the context where it takes place:

Trois siècles de colonisation unissaient cette fille de l’Europe et ce descendant d’indigènes africains. Trois siècles d’esclavages, un monstrueux amas de préjugés, l’orgueil d’une race avilie et torturée continuaient à séparer ces deux êtres. En ces premières minutes qui les rapprochèrent, frémissants et angoissés, tous les complexes nés de cette histoire habitaient peut-être leurs cerveaux (271).

When Dominique makes love with Marguerite for the first time, he is engaging in a symbolic act because he is calling into question centuries of supposed European superiority. In his relationship with her, he puts himself and his race on the same level with the race of the dominator—the white béké—an equivalence that the Euro-centric discourse of the slave master had denied. By revealing the hypocrisy of this discourse, Sainville invites his reader to reflect on the whole enterprise of colonialism and its attendant consequences.
If the institution of slavery created a barrier between races, Dominique and Marguerite realize that love can transcend these barriers. In this sense, Sainville seems to be suggesting that harmony between the two races is possible. The account of a love affair between Dominique and Marguerite demonstrates that, far from being a devil, the black slave can be attractive to a white woman. Besides, the relationship between Dominique and Marguerite is not a banal love story. Sainville uses it to create a positive image of the slave and to subvert the false image of the black race in Euro-centric discourse.

Among the masters under whom the picaresque-like Dominique serves, only Marinois has a human attitude towards his slaves, but he goes bankrupt and is ejected from the system. Marinois' sense of morality makes him different from other members of the béké society to which he belongs. He is too human to survive in a system that thrives on the dehumanization of the other. The picaresque experiences of Dominique afford him the opportunity to comment on the nature of other slave masters and to recognize how different they are from Marinois. Like the picaresque hero, Dominique becomes increasingly hardened as he experiences life under the iron hand of different masters, but his experiences take on a symbolic
significance because they encapsulate the experiences of all slaves.

As is the case of picaresque heroes in European literature, chance plays an important role in Dominique’s life. For example, after Dominique and his lover Léontine have been separated for a long time, chance brings them together at one of the occasional meetings when slaves gather at nightfall for music and dancing. Another example is the capsizing of the ship in which Dominique and other slaves are escaping to Antigua, an incident that leads to the adventures Dominique experiences on that island. A chance occurrence thus affords readers the opportunity to discover the extent of Dominique’s determination in his quest for freedom. The creation of a picaresque-like hero in *Dominique* is an ideological statement in that it enables Sainville’s hero to be exposed to a broad range of authentic discourse at the “periphery” of the French colonial system. After all, the picaresque hero belongs by definition to the lower class, and Dominique’s wanderings permit Sainville to depict the historically complex context in which the maroon revolts took place.

In his subversion of Euro-centric discourse, Sainville not only creates a black hero, he also attacks the hypocrisy of Christianity, which was used
to deculturalize colonized peoples and to inculcate in them a sense of blind obedience toward the master.

Sainville’s Marxist ideology surfaces in his portrayal of the hypocritical missionaries who played such an important role in perpetuating the inhuman system of slavery. In Dominique, Christian proselytism was an instrument for creolizing slaves, and creolization was the beginning of the dehumanizing process for them. In this context, creolization involves the loss of cultural identity that occurred when blacks were obliged to adopt Western values in lieu of the ones they had brought with them from Africa. The whole enterprise of Christianization in the Caribbean was based on the argument that Africans did not have a religion and could only attain salvation by acknowledging the Christian God.

In the novel, Léontine believes what she has been taught from the Bible, and her naiveté has a strong effect on her psyche because it convinces her that she and others like her are inferior to white people. According to Christian-influenced Euro-centric discourse, blacks are descendants of Ham who had been cursed by his father Noah. Dominique himself rejects this idea; he himself is an atheist. In fact, he expresses his doubts about the Christian God in no uncertain terms to Léontine:
Ton bon Dieu, ce n’est pas le dieu des Nègres: c’est un dieu pour les bêkes, un bon dieu pour les maîtres. S’il existe, c’est un salaud. Mais il n’existe pas [...]. Dis-moi, ton bon Dieu, pourquoi il nous a laissés, nous les Nègres esclaves, pourquoi il nous a laissés dans le souci comme ça...(279-280).

In this passage, Dominique questions the validity of what Christianity teaches because he finds it hypocritical in light of the plight of black people. Sainville demonstrates here that, unlike Léontine, Dominique has a "prise de conscience" with regard to the ideology behind the sort of Christianity that was taught to slaves. This "prise de conscience" enables him to become the symbol of the counter-discourse that Sainville wants to create around the maroon revolts.

Sainville does not ignore the fact that some Christian missionaries defended the cause of the slaves and wanted to see the system abolished. The difference between Catholics and Protestants is suggested by the fact that the Protestant missionaries seem to have been more human in their approach to the evangelization of slaves. For example, when Dominique takes refuge in British Antigua while seeking to gain his freedom, he encounters Reverend Samuel, who champions the cause of the slaves and fights for the abolition of slavery at the risk of being persecuted by his own people (147). But the positive image of
Reverend Samuel does not diminish the hypocrisy of the Christian churches which most whites attended in the belief that such institutions preserved their own supposed superiority. This phenomenon reinforced the idea of difference, and even today it continues to reinforce the Western system of values that prevent Antilleans from attaining their true freedom.

Antillean writers have generally denounced the role played by the Christian church in perpetuating slavery. Similarly, novels about pre-independence Africa have tended to adopt the same stance with regard to the Catholic church. In this context, it is relevant to recall how Pope Pius V decreed that all colonized people were pagans and should be submitted to slavery in order for their souls to be saved. Sainville categorically rejects this idea in Dominique nègre esclave.

The baptism imposed on slaves newly arrived from Africa played an important role in this acculturation process. As Maryse Condé has pointed out, the term "nègre bossale" referred to newly arrived slaves after they had been baptized. This usage of the term reveals how Europeans perceived blacks as naturally evil beings who needed the Christian God in order to be saved:

Le nègre est sans contredit une espèce inférieure, mais le baptême par la force de la
bonté divine le fait enfant de Dieu [...]. Le noir est naturellement enclin au mal, pourri de vices. Seule la connaissance de la parole de Dieu, la discipline pénitentielle peuvent venir à bout de leurs détestables tendances (24).

Maryse Condé’s insight into the béké mentality is the same as that which underlines Sainville’s portrayal of Christian missionaries in Dominique. Dominique and the other slaves are regarded as naturally evil and therefore in need of the Christian faith in order to save their souls from damnation. But this perception is only a pretext to protect the economic and political power base of the dominant white society.

As Maryse Condé further attests, everything, including the taste for food, was imposed on the slave by the master. He was made to live in a perpetual state of dependency—a situation which persisted after the abolition of slavery:

Les esprits des xviie et xviiie siècles n’envisageaient pas que le sauvage d’Afrique, transplanté aux Caraïbes, puisse produire une forme de culture originale et ne lui laissaient d’autre choix que d’oublier son moi précédent pour naître au sein du Nouveau Monde (6).

The whole thrust of Sainville’s ideology in Dominique is to portray how these concepts were perpetuated through the treatment of slaves and how the slaves themselves reacted by creating their own counter-discourse.
Sainville's criticism of the church is clearly part of his anti-colonial discourse. If contemporary Euro-centric discourse about the people of the Antilles was profoundly influenced by the institution of slavery, Antillean writers need, he felt, to articulate an authentic cultural identity that does not deny this history but redefines it from their own point of view.

One aspect of Antillean history that Sainville touches upon in his novel is the class interest of the mulattoes. The mentality of contemporary Antillean society has been forged from centuries of antagonism between different classes—an antagonism that persisted after the abolition of slavery and the elevation of Martinique and Guadeloupe to departmental status in the French republic. In Dominique, the class interests of the mulattoes and the white békés do not coincide, but the attitudes of the mulattoes also alienate them from the black slaves; at the same time they must defend themselves against the denigration imposed on them by the dominant discourse of the white béké. They are not accepted by the white béké class, and yet they refuse to identify with the predicament of the slaves. Many mulattoes even speak out against the abolition of slavery. As Sainville demonstrates in Dominique, slave society was a highly stratified
Although slaves, unlike mulattoes, were usually deprived of education, Dominique learns how to read and write at an early age, thereby disproving the myth that his race is inherently inferior in intellectual terms. Nevertheless, Sainville places his Négritude discourse in the mouth of a mulatto, Pamphile, who does recognize the syncretistic nature of Antillean culture. Pamphile is proud of the black heritage that originated in Haïti, the first independent black state in the modern world. According to Pamphile, whites owe their wealth to the inhuman exploitation of black slaves:

Il ne faudrait pas oublier que leur fortune, leur position, ils ne les doivent qu'au travail des Noirs. Nos ancêtres étaient des esclaves. Ils sont morts sous le fouet. Nous ne devons rien à ces békés: C'est eux qui nous doivent tout (219).

Sainville sees Pamphile's "prise de conscience" as a crucial factor in the liberation of black people from European bondage. Through Pamphile, he is making an ideological statement about the history of the Antilles. The wealth of the white population has, he insists, been acquired at the expense of the black slave.

In contemporary Antillean society, social class is partly determined by skin complexion. To a large
extent, skin color determines one’s status in Antillean society. As Frantz Fanon has convincingly demonstrated, Antilleans have grown, through the centuries, to hate themselves. In their attempt to make themselves acceptable to the "center", they have failed to create an authentic discourse of their own. In Dominique, Pamphile symbolizes this predicament. The task that Sainville set for himself in his historical fiction was to rehabilitate black people and to give them back their rightful place in history. He does this by demonstrating how Pamphile, symbol of the syncretistic Antillean culture, shows pride in his origins. In this sense, he differs greatly from other mulattoes, who, in the eyes of the slaves, are part of the oppressor class.

Sainville’s Marxism predisposes him to place considerable emphasis on class interests, which he regards as intimately related to race interests. He recognizes that the dominant position of Euro-centric discourse has been determined to a large extent by economic interest. As he demonstrates in the novel, slaves are conscious of the economic interest they represent for the "center", and in their struggle for freedom, they often threaten these economic interests. They do so by marooning and by descending, from time
to time, on the masters' plantations, which they often destroy.

Through the exercise of power, Europeans created a world in which their discourse was perceived as universal. By correcting the inaccuracies of European accounts of Antillean history and by revalorizing the image of the maroon, Sainville subverts the discourse of the center and challenges the view of human nature by means of which it justifies itself. Because Dominique's adventures imply a three-hundred-year "chosification" of black slaves during a time when a Euro-centric discourse was evolving to justify European exploitation of the other, Sainville's narrative tends to follow a traditional chronological pattern that exposes readers to the reality of historical evolution in the Caribbean. A major innovation in Sainville's novel is his depiction of the way in which people living on the periphery systematically undermined the dominant discourse. Using a single omniscient narrator throughout Dominique, Sainville tells about historical events that took place in the 18th and 19th centuries. He even specifically dates certain parts of his narrative, thereby clearly locating the whole narrative in a concrete historical period. For example, he refers to the slave revolt of St. Pierre
in 1831 (76), and the last chapter of the novel is titled "1848"—a significant date for the French Caribbean because it was the year slavery was abolished in the Antilles. Significantly too, the "story" ends at a point when the slaves revolt and Dominique runs away to join the others in freedom. The use of specific and verifiable dates in historical fiction is significant because it helps create a sense of verisimilitude. Within this context, his revolt against the dehumanizing situation of the slave and his action at the end of the novel served to rehabilitate the image of the maroon and to place it within a "real" historical context.

Dominique opens with a chapter about the "quatre-piquets"—a brutal practice intended to condition slaves into docilely accepting the image of them created by the slave masters—and it closes with a chapter about the emancipation of the slaves in 1848. This structure clearly reinforces Sainville's ideological message. The conclusion of the novel is a "happy ending" that contrasts with the tragic opening of the novel, for it suggests that the slaves earned their own freedom, as Dominique himself did when he escaped from prison to join the other revolted slaves:

This dramatic ending suggests an optimistic perception of cultural "métissage" in the Antilles—a society in which the historical legacy of maroons needs to be recognized. Significantly, it is Dominique's fellow former slaves who release him from the shackles that still bound his hands when he escaped from prison. Dominique has acquired an almost supernatural power to defy the béké and to walk into freedom with the other former slaves. The closing of the novel is therefore an ideological statement which suggests that Dominique and the maroons in general succeeded in creating a concrete counter-discourse to the discourse of the white béké.

All the novels discussed in this study were inspired by historical events. It is of course a truism to contend that history is characteristic of the "historical novel", but as Paul Veynes has argued, historical fiction articulates the specificity of historical events and makes them intelligible on a human level. Sainville accomplished this goal by creating fiction around the maroon revolts in the nineteenth century.
Like Hazoumé and Boni, he too was inspired by true historical events, and like them, he refers to historical facts in the novel. As he himself explains:

Si le personnage central est une fiction, il n’en est pas moins représentatif d’une condition, et sa psychologie que je me suis efforcé de rendre authentique n’est que le reflet de celle de l’homme noir antillais en lutte contre le régime qui l’opprimait, il y a un siècle, et comme elle m’est apparaue à travers les textes (11).

Although Dominique and the other characters in the novel are partially fictional, they symbolize the reality of Antillean history—a reality that can be verified in actual historical documents. Dominique’s experiences were inspired by three centuries of slavery in the Antilles, and the fictional portrayal of them marries fact and fiction to create an authentic discourse of the Antillean people.

Dominique is the main character in the novel; however, the particular historical incident that Sainville cites in his preface as the inspiration for his fictional creation does not involve Dominique, but rather the trial of Azaïs and the other maroons, of whom Dominique was one. Although Azaïs is an important character in the novel, most of the action revolves around Dominique. Thus, in his fictional version, Sainville shifts the reader’s attention to a character who is not the real hero in the particular historical
incident that inspired his fictional creation in the first place.

Azaïs, Hibo, Moko, and Anne are actual historical characters, but Hippolyte (the maroon to whom Azaïs wants to give his sister forcibly against her will) is actually Dongar according to actual historical documents. Maintaining the original names of historical characters does influence the reading of historical novels like Dominique, because it forces the reader to reflect upon the way in which fiction can draw attention to historical meanings that might otherwise be overlooked or misunderstood.

Like Hazoumé and Boni, Sainville uses footnotes to explain words and terms that are likely to be unfamiliar to the non-Antillean reader. These footnotes heighten the impression of verisimilitude because they locate the narrative events within the specific geography and history of the Antilles. By explaining the referents in the novel, Sainville creates "l’effet du réel". His footnotes explain social factors that enable readers to understand contemporary Antillean perceptions of life. For example, in one footnote, he explains that the game called "calibandjo" is a "jeu pratiqué par les enfants antillais, et qui consiste à se lancer du haut d’une colline herbeuse en se tenant en équilibre sur la
partie ligneuse d'une feuille de cocotier" (21).

"Mulâtres", he explains on another occasion, are
"hommes de couleur ayant un épidéme se rapprochant
plus de celui des Blancs que de celui des Noirs" (20).
A "bel-air" is an "espèce de quadrille costumé dansé
au rythme d'un chant satirique" (80). Such
distinctions and socio-historical factors enable the
reader to enter into the world of the Antillean people
and their discourse.

Not only does Sainville cite true historical dates
and places, he also authenticates the historical
incidents he incorporates into his fiction through the
footnotes. In one footnote, for example, the plight of
Azais and his "accomplices" is authenticated by
referring to specific legal documents:

En réalité, seul figure dans les annales judiciaires de 1837, transcrit dans la
correspondance générale de la même année, le
procès d'Azais et d'Hibo (Cour d'Assises de
Pointe-à-Pitre, 1re session) (108).

By citing such historical happenings, Sainville is
bringing history to bear upon the present predicament
of the Antillean. The trial of Azais and Hibo is
significant in Sainville's revalorization of the
maroon because they represent a rejection of the image
of the other—an image that had been imposed on the
slave and continues to be imposed on his descendants.
In another footnote, Sainville heightens the sense of historical authenticity by assuring his readers that Antigua actually did serve as a refuge for slaves seeking to free themselves from bondage on the French islands:

\[\text{C'est le régime de contrainte et de surveillance auquel furent soumis les Noirs des Antilles britanniques entre la proclamation de l'abolition de l'esclavage et sa suppression définitive (1er août 1834-1er août 1838) (127).}\]

There is a fundamental difference between a work of art and an historical document. As Sainville’s novel demonstrates, historical fiction transcends the boundary between reality and the imagination. But even though a work of art is not the simple mirroring of a given situation or the faithful transposition of the world, it can lead to the real. History gives a meaning to anti-colonial discourse in Africa and the Caribbean. It also gives meaning to the writer’s creation of a new discourse. Thus, history authenticates the writers’ discourse, subverts the dominant Euro-centric discourse, and creates an authentic discourse in which Africans and Antilleans are no longer merely objects but rather the core of their own discourse. With this new sense of history, writers of historical novels also succeed in subverting the very notion of center and periphery.
The "effet du réel" creates a sense of verisimilitude in *Dominique*. This sense of verisimilitude has an ideological function because it underscores the anti-colonial thrust of Sainville's discourse. In effect, it prompts readers to learn more about the historical events that inspired the fictional variations on history in the first place. Sainville's choice of specific historical events was motivated by a sense of pride in his people and in his culture. He desired to re-write that part of Antillean history which has always been distorted in Euro-centric discourse.

The focus in this chapter has been on the importance of the subversive discourse of the revolted maroons. For Sainville, the image of the maroon represented a rejection of the false image that had been imposed on black Antilleans as a consequence of slavery. The subhuman state in which the slave was maintained to protect the interests of the "center" made the confrontation of discourses inevitable. In his historical fiction, Sainville demonstrates that there was not just the dominant discourse of the slave master. There was also the counter-discourse of the slave himself. Euro-centric discourse tried to deny the existence of this counter-discourse, but Sainville employed his historical novel of marooning to reaffirm
its existence and to show how it functioned.
CHAPTER IV
EDOUARD GLISSANT: LE QUATRIÈME SIÈCLE

Like Sainville, Glissant revalorized the image of the maroon when he developed his own discourse of Antilleanity in his historical novel, Le Quatrième Siècle. It too reflects the author's quest for a viable cultural identity through historical fiction. The novel is about slave revolts and about the importance of the maroon to any authentic Antillean discourse. To repossess the past, to understand it, Antilleans need, Glissant asserts, to understand their history; they need to re-write their own history against the backdrop of Euro-centric hegemonic discourse.

Some critics have tried to undermine the importance of the "black element" in Glissant's discourse because, according to them, Glissant's position on Negritude shows that he believes in a "métissage cultural" that does not lend more importance to any single element of Antillean culture. However, this argument undermines the minority discourse in Antillean culture because it seeks to justify the dominance of Euro-centric discourse on the
grounds that Glissant does not really believe in the search for a genuine black identity.

Historical factors have made the search for an authentic cultural identity quintessential for the Caribbean writer, and like Sainville, Glissant places primary emphasis on the revalorization of the image of the maroon. As he explains in *Le Discours Antillais*:

> [...] le Nègre Marron est le seul vrai héros populaire des Antilles, dont les effroyables supplices qui marquaient sa capture donnent la mesure du courage et de la détermination. Il y a là un exemple incontestable d'opposition systématique, de refus total (1981, 104).

Like Sainville, Glissant emphasizes the maroon's capacity to survive inhuman conditions and his ability to create a counter-discourse to the image imposed on them through slavery. In this way, he too is proposing a counter-discourse to demystify the Euro-centric discourse of the Other.

In the novel, Papa Longoué's family lineage symbolizes the maroons who refused to accept docilely their condition as slaves. The Beluse are a rival family whose members live on the plantations. They represent the docile slaves who had nothing of which
they could be proud at the moment of emancipation.
Papa Longoué and the Beluse therefore represent diametrically opposed world views that emerged during the history of slavery in the Antilles. The dichotomy between the maroons and the slaves of the plantation is not itself the major point. The real difference between the two families is the element of rejection in the maroon’s revolt. For Glissant, the maroon represents a concrete formulation of the black man’s rejection of the discourse of the “Other”. He argues that the role of the maroon in Antillean history must be emphasized because it has persistently been misinterpreted in Euro-centric history.

Papa Longoué represents a spiritual link with the ancestors and with the Africa from which they first came. Moreover, his African spiritual powers enable him to maroon soon after he arrives on the islands. Thanks to the barrel which gives him supernatural powers, he escapes without being pursued by the slave masters and their dogs. Moreover, he is able to cover his own traces in a mysterious way of which he alone knows the secret. Later, he invokes the power of the ancestors to liberate himself from the white béké. Glissant is particularly interested in the powers that link Papa Longoué with Africa, because they represent the basis for the articulation of a viable identity
that is not dependent on Euro-centric discourse and its stereotyping of Antilleans.

Subsequently, we learn how Papa Longoué kidnaps Louise, who becomes his wife:

Il avait marqué des signes connus de lui seul sur des sentiers par où on pourrait le poursuivre: des branchages croisés pour égarer celui qui s’engagerait dans un autre; et à un troisième croisement le noeud invisible qui attire le danger (86-87).

By employing the knowledge he had acquired before he left Africa, Papa Longoué manifests an ability that later saves him from the domination of the white béké. This ability is symbolically linked with the power of the ancestors; similarly, Glissant believes the source of the Antillean’s spiritual well-being lies in an understanding of their past.

In his eyes, Papa Longoué demonstrates how Antilleans need to maintain the link with the ancestors because it is their identity. This link to the past is through a belief system entrenched in the history of the maroons. In Le Quatrième Siècle, even ten years after the marooning of Papa Longoué, the barrel’s power has such an effect on the white béké La Roche that he himself returns it. He believes so strongly in its power that he even refuses to chase Melchior Longoué for fear that he himself will be humiliated. André Ntonfo observes that Glissant’s
image of Longoué is not that of a defensive individual who is preoccupied with preserving his freedom. He points out that Longoué and the other maroons are dynamic characters whose marooning is a positive action undertaken on their own initiative. Contrary to the stereotyped images of Euro-centric discourse, the maroon as portrayed by Glissant is not a sub-human animal who is constantly being pursued by a slave master and his dogs; in reality he is a human being who attacks, who harasses his pursuers, who sacrifices his own private interests to overthrow the established order that oppresses him and others like him (1982, 199). In this way, Glissant creates a counter-discourse that goes beyond a simple description of the dehumanization imposed on slaves by the white bêche.

Longoué's eventual victory over the slave master is presaged the day he arrives in the new land:

Il n'avait pas offert au commandant Duchêne le spectacle de la bête affolée qui regarde et se débat devant l'entrée de l'enclos préparé pour elle (55).

By his demeanor, Longoué defies the myth of the "bon sauvage", and later he proves to be a brave fighter, disproving the myth of the slave master's superior power and his supposed invulnerability vis-à-vis the slave. The slave masters' belief in Longoué's
spiritual powers suggests that their own discourse is hardly impervious when challenged by the "other", whom they regard as inferior. Significantly, La Roche dies on the last boat that smuggles slaves into the islands against the laws of the republic. The slave ship "Rose Marie" was a symbol of white dominance over the slaves, and La Roche's death on it symbolizes the victory of the revolted slaves over the institutional structure by means of which the slave masters had sought to exercise power over them.

In Le Quatrième Siècle, the young Mathieu is the symbol of a characteristically Antillean yearning. He wants to understand himself, and this desire can only be satisfied by delving deeply into the history of his people. The product of hegemonic colonial encounters in the Antilles, Mathieu not only seeks to shed the identity that had been imposed on him, but to create an authentic discourse based on the actual experiences of the people. He needs to go through a metamorphosis in order to comprehend the nature of the Euro-centric discourse that imprisons him in its false myths and stereotypes. Papa Longoué is the custodian of oral tradition, he imparts knowledge to the young Mathieu and allows him to fill the gaps in the Euro-centric history he had learned at school.
Through the diachronic narrator Papa Longoué, readers discover the unfolding of the history that has fashioned contemporary Antillean life. He recounts the history of slavery as it had been handed down to him orally by his forefathers. What Mathieu learns from Papa Longoué’s account of the slave era is that maroons were heroes. This image of them thus offers an alternative to the French perception of the slave and provides the basis for articulating a counter-discourse to the dominant one that Mathieu had assimilated at school.

The importance of Mathieu’s "dialogue" with the "anciens" (represented by Papa Longoué) is that he discovers the truth about colonial encounters in the Antilles. This truth is that colonialism and slavery were not in any way justifiable and that the colonists perpetuated a false image of the colonized in an attempt to maintain the status quo.

In the dehumanizing process, the slave was transformed into an economic object. In *Le Quatrième Siècle*, however, Glissant refutes the validity of this reductive image by creating the same sort of anti-colonial discourse that Sainville had deployed in his novel. Papa Longoué revolts and maroons as soon as he debarks from the ship which brought him from Africa. Glissant’s point is that the discourse of the
slave master was not the only discourse in Antillean history; there was also, as he shows, the counter-discourse of the slave, the dominated.

Because the vestiges of the slave era persist in the minds of contemporary Antilleans, Glissant insists that they must undergo a process of "conscientization". Daniel Guérin says:

Ici [...] nous nous trouvons en présence d’un des nombreux reliquats du passé esclavagiste. Parce qu’aux siècles précédents le maître blanc a dû dévaloriser idéologiquement l’épiderme de l’esclave pour justifier son asservissement, le blanc d’aujourd’hui, aux Antilles, ne se contente pas d’exploiter économiquement l’ouvrier de couleur, il continue à lui manifester, sous les formes les plus diverses, sa prétendue supériorité raciale (1956, 999).

The Antillean of today needs a "prise de conscience" to deal with the unjustified superiority complex that white society has developed through the centuries. In Le Quatrième Siècle, Mathieu represents this self-awareness—the self-awareness that the young Antillean needs in order to reject the demeaning image that has been imposed on him by the French educational system. By bearing testimony to this history, Papa Longoué is accepting the shameful past that Aimé Césaire in his famous poem Cahier d’un retour au pays natal exhorted Antilleans to take pride in asserting, for as Césaire pointed out, their assertion of pride in this past is a first step in the revolutionary
project of rejecting the Euro-centric perception of themselves. As suggested in the chapter on Sainville, this assertion of pride is necessary because enlightened Antilleans know that various methods have been used throughout the centuries to maintain the slave in a sub-human state. They also know that they must challenge the assumptions behind such practices if they ever hope to liberate themselves.

For the slave master, maintaining an inferiority complex among the black slaves was one way of preserving the European's perception of himself and of projecting it onto the world. In other words, Europeans viewed themselves as being at the center of the world, and they assumed that their own values were universally valid. This assumption emerges clearly in Glissant's depiction of the slave master, for to exist according to the image he has forged of himself, the slave master needs to posit the existence of an inferior "Other". This inferior other is the slave with his supposedly primitive or barbaric origins.

This sort of Euro-centric discourse is articulated mainly by the white békés Senglis and La Roche. The latter handles the slaves when they are unloaded from the slave ships and sold like animals in the market. In Antillean society today the white "béké" still seeks to maintain his position at the center of the
universe by denying the validity of any discourse other than his own. By revalorizing the image of the maroon, Glissant reinforces the counter-discourse that calls into question the Euro-centric discourse that reduces black Antilleans to a less-than-human status.

Obviously, neither the slave master nor the race (or class) he represents have any interest in acknowledging the maroon's revolt as a rejection of the false image that had been imposed on him by his European masters. In their eyes, the slave was a bandit with a taste for "savage" things, and they extended the assumptions behind this image to their depictions of maroon revolts.

In order to justify the sado-masochist system of slavery, Europeans sought to inculcate in the black Antillean a sense of hatred for his own color, his own origins, which, in the minds of the whites, made him an inferior human being. The negative image of the maroon was maintained by inculcating in children the idea that he was the incarnation of the devil:

C'était la coutume de menacer les enfants de les faire enlever par un marron. Car le marron était pour les populations la personnification du diable: celui qui refuse (129).

Glissant alludes to this situation in his novel because he thinks Antilleans need to understand how contemporary society is still being controlled by
false perceptions of the historical phenomenon of slavery.

The impression one gets from the above passage is that, in European discourse, the maroon is a "diable" because he refuses the image that has been forged for him from the moment he is captured in his ancestral African homeland. But the phrase "celui qui refuse" suggests that, for Glissant, the maroon was a hero precisely because he had been painted as a devil—that is, because he demonstrated the ability to subvert the image of the society which had reduced him to a sub-human state. He is a "personnification du diable" because he subverts the image of himself as the member of a subject race; however, in the eyes of Antillean writers such as Sainville and Glissant, he becomes a hero for this very reason. Thus, Glissant's discourse is built on a challenge to the Euro-centric discourse in which he, as the descendant of slaves, has been stripped of his human dignity, deprived of his rightful place in the human race.

Mathieu is the symbolic link between the younger generation and the past, which is represented by Papa Longoué. From the perspective of oral tradition, Mathieu's knowledge is inadequate. The books in the school library cannot supply the information Mathieu needs in order to forge a meaningful link between the
past and the present. Yet for Glissant, it is not merely a matter of comprehending the past. According to him, Mathieu needs to build the future as well. He is like a child going through an initiation that will enable him to be admitted into adulthood. Mathieu had been seeking to understand how his ancestors came to be a subject race, and Papa Longoué provides him with an account of the history that he needs to know if he hopes to establish a meaningful link with the past.

Mathieu is in some ways like Glissant or the Antillean writer in general. Glissant himself acknowledged that he, like Mathieu had been inspired by a "quinboiseur". Mathieu too experiences a conscientization as he listens to Papa Longoué narrate the story of his ancestors. He too fills in the gaps left by the Euro-centric history he had learned at school. Before he can reject the false image that has been imposed on him by Europeans, Mathieu needs to understand his own predicament. Papa Longoué enables him to learn about the history of his people from the vantage point of an insider. In a sense, Mathieu plays the role of audience, of reader. His reaction to Longoué's narrative typifies the way in which many Antilleans found their history difficult to comprehend. The knowledge they had acquired in French schools was inadequate because it contained their own
history only as it was perceived from a European point of view.

At one point in the novel, the young Anne plays the role of the French while the young Liberté plays the role of the English. Their children’s game becomes a symbolic role-playing scene that recalls the antagonisms between the colonial powers in the Caribbean. More significantly, it recalls how the slave was the ultimate victim in these conflicts. According to the dominant image, he was only an insignificant other—an economic object—whose destiny was shaped by those who had the monopoly of discourse.

Glissant underscores the misery of the slaves, describing how children start working in the sugar plantations as early as four years of age:

Leur bande de fantômes hagards de faim, blêmes sous la peau noire d’avoir mangé la terre, les fruits verts ou pourris, tous les débris de l’existence animale et végétale, enfants-vieillards, qui savaient déjà qu’ils leur faudrait se soumettre au double pouvoir, l’un officiel et l’autre obscur, qui les maintiendrait toute leur vie sous le joug (70).

Like Sainville, Glissant graphically paints the sub-human state to which the slave was reduced. By starving the slaves, the white béké hoped to impose his power more effectively upon them. But Glissant, like Sainville, suggests that the slave was a hero who
survived such inhuman conditions. By persistently revolting and marooning at the risk of losing a leg or a hand, or of being flogged to death, they showed how wrong the myth of the dependent slave actually was.

The dehumanizing process started the moment that slaves were captured in Africa. During the long journey across the Atlantic, however, they already began to revolt against this process. In Le Quatrième Siècle, Papa Longoué describes a typical scene on a slave ship:

Mais tout avait été laissé sous la pluie: les fouets à plombs, les lanières roidies, la potence aux pendus (en vérité plus impressionnante qu'un gros mât), et le bâton crochu qu'on enfonçait dans la gorge de ceux qui tentaient d'avaler leur langue, et le grand baquet d'eau de mer où les marins plongeaient la tête quand ils remontaient suffoqués des profondeurs de la cale, et le fer à rougir, fourchette implacable pour ceux qui refusaient le pain moisi ou les biscuits arrosés de saumure, et le filet par lequel on descendait les esclaves, chaque mois, dans le grand bain de la mer: filet pour les protéger des requins ou de la tentation de mourir (21).

What emerges clearly in this passage is the dehumanization of the slaves. Glissant demonstrates how they were perceived as economic objects. If the slave traders wanted to protect the slaves from being eaten by sharks, they were merely protecting their economic interest. Committing suicide by refusing to eat or by swallowing one's tongue was a form of revolt against "chosification". In fact, the slaves' revolt
was not a passive one; on the contrary, it was the concrete articulation of a discourse to counter the Euro-centric discourse of the Other. It was articulated under the most inhuman conditions and often by individuals who had been members of royal families in their African homelands. Antilleans can be proud of this revolutionary impulse in their own past; in fact, Glissant implies that they must become proud of it if they ever hope to recognize the truth about their own situation.

René Dépestre has argued that the Antillean writer is faced with the problem of decolonization, of breaking with the obsessive conflicts inherited from the slavery era. According to him, the Antillean writer's quest for identity must confront the ambiguous situation of the "subject" Other in European discourse. The capitalist West, says Dépestre, did everything possible to assure that the subjugated labor force lost not only its freedom but also the collective memory and the imagination that might have allowed them to pass the truth and experiences of their social and cultural vitality from one generation to the next (98). Glissant's novel is a testimony to Dépestre's assertion, for it is his attempt to reconcile the Antillean present with this past.
As André Ntonfo observes, Glissant's narrative also underscores the slave master's persistent ridicule of the slave. Even on the day of emancipation, when officials call out the names of the slaves, they consciously undermine everything that might give relevance to emancipation as they seek to preserve everything associated with the world of the béké. For example, even the names of the slaves Zéphir, Alizé, Sapin, Maisance, Capotte are treated with contempt and the ceremony itself is calculated to demean the newly emancipated former slaves:

Famille Tousseul, un, répétait le second commis. Il tendait le certificat d'existence, sinon d'identité (176).

In this scene, the slave master and the officials still determine the discourse, for they still hold the power. They are the ones who give an identity to the former slaves. The connotation of the word "give" is that the slaves themselves did not win a new identity for themselves, and of course this impression is precisely the one that the Europeans desire to perpetuate. The idea that the new identity of the former slaves should be authenticated by the ones from whom they have just won their freedom is ironic.

In describing the predicament of the ancestors, Glissant employs a liberating language, a language
that is not static but dynamic. In fact, he sees hope for a better future in their proud acceptance of their "certificat d’existence". This pride in the role the maroons played in their own emancipation is a counter-discourse to that of Europeans who themselves claim credit for having abolished slavery. According to Glissant, the pride exhibited by the maroons at the time of emancipation provides the basis for a rewriting of Euro-centric histories of slavery.

During the emancipation ceremony, the evocation of the Longoué family name has a revealing impact on the census officials. The Longoués clearly represent a challenge to the status quo because they symbolize the maroon’s rejection of the identity that had been imposed on all black slaves:

Ils [les commis] furent vite au bout de leur science. Ce fut à ce moment-là qu’ils entendaient une voix qui les fit sursauter disant: Famille Longoué. Ils se redressèrent vivement - Comment, comment, glapit le premier commis? - Famille Longoué, dit Melchior. Un homme Melchior Longoué; un garçon; Apostrophe Longoué; une fille: Liberté Longoué; une femme: Adémie Longoué (177-178).

Like the first Longoué who marooned soon after debarking from the ship that had brought him and other slaves from Africa, the Longoué family continues to challenge the dominant discourse of the white béké. The present generation of Longoués represents, in a sense, the collective memory of Antilleans. For
Glissant, the discourse embodied in the attitudes of the Longoué family lives on. It has survived centuries of persistent European attempts to create an imaginary otherness in all black people.

The Euro-centric discourse that justified the practice of slavery deprived transported Africans of a knowledge of their past, their history, their legends, and their systems of belief. By rehabilitating this past, Antillean writers such as Glissant destroyed the myth of the subject Other and became the voice of collective memory for the descendants of slaves who had sought to re-assert their concepts of selfhood in the contemporary world.

To destroy the myths created around the Antillean "being" and to assert the Antillean's right to control the discourse about his own identity, Glissant places considerable emphasis on oral tradition, particularly in terms of its relation to the role played by Papa Longoué. This emphasis reflects Glissant's rejection of Euro-centric discourse and his definition of an authentically Antillean discourse with which to replace it.

As Peter Hulme suggests, the basic motivation behind colonial discourse was the need to produce something for Europe, to articulate procedures, modes of analysis, kinds of writing, and clusters of imagery
that reinforced the European view of the Other. There is no reason why the biased written accounts of history by slave owners should be more reliable than the oral history handed down by the slaves themselves, and Glissant's portrayal of Papa Longoué obliges readers to recognize the validity of this observation.

Because oral tradition is an important part of Antillean history, the fusion of it with literate European traditions in the writing of authors such as Sainville and Glissant has helped to produce an authentic Antillean discourse. For Glissant, Antillean history would not be complete without an acknowledgment of the essential role played by the 'quinboiseur' in recapturing the unrecorded elements of Antillean History. As Papa Longoué says to Mathieu: "Tu ne peux pas, je te dis, tu ne peux rien si tu ne remontes pas la source". Mathieu cannot comprehend the complexity of the history of his people without going back to the roots. The first Longoué symbolizes the past which Mathieu needs in order to come to terms with his own quest for a viable identity.

Establishing the link between oral and written literature, Glissant explains in *Le Discours Antillais* that the contemporary Antillean text can be situated between the spoken and the written as well as at the confluence of several languages, of which creole is
one (265). According to him, the synthesis of these various elements requires the creation of new genres in conjunction with the reconsideration of ethical and political principles. The attempt to create these new genres produced the complexity of his own writing.

Frederic Case reproaches Glissant for having written fiction in a language that is impenetrable to the "uninitiated" reader. According to him, the intricate structure and verbal complexity of *Le Quatrième Siècle* obscure the novel’s message (1985). How can the writer’s ideology be effectively communicated, he asks, if the text is so difficult to comprehend? How "good" a novel is *Le Quatrième Siècle* if it can only be understood by a small elite class of readers? The answers to such questions are not simple, but one needs first to recognize that Glissant’s use of symbolism reflects Antillean reality. The complexity of this reality is parodied in Glissant’s employment of symbols drawn from Guadeloupean and Martinican landscapes. For example, the discourse of the revolted maroon—his rejection of the image imposed on him by the slave master—is reflected in his ability to survive the harsh life he is obliged to live in the mountains. His willingness to accept such conditions is a concrete demonstration of how much freedom means to him.
As opposed to the slaves of the plantations, the maroons took the initiative to free themselves. For this reason, the maroons in Le Quatrième Siècle descend from the mountains at the moment of emancipation with a certain amount of pride. Unlike the plantation slaves, who are still known by the names given them by the masters, the maroons have given themselves their own names:

Les anciens esclaves des Plantations étaient là, y compris les femmes. Mais aussi, majestueux dans leurs haillons, traînant comme une parure de dignité leur boue et leur dénuement, et les seuls d'ailleurs à être armés de coutelas, les marrons [...]. Leur particularité (en plus du coutelas) était qu'une fois arrivés près de la table, ils annonçaient d'eux-mêmes leur nom et celui de leurs proches, au contraire de la masse qui eût été généralement bien en peine de proclamer des noms ou d'exciper d'une vie familiale (176-177).

As we see in this passage, the cutlass of the maroon becomes a symbol of his freedom from oppression. Ironically, it is also one of the tools with which the slaves worked on the plantations and a symbol of oppression in the sense that it was the instrument used by the slave masters to mutilate the bodies of re-captured maroons. When brandished by the maroons, however, the cutlass was clearly a symbol of the quest for freedom. Apart from the guns that they sometimes captured from their former masters, the maroons fought with cutlasses when they raided the plantations or
defended themselves against surprise attacks organized by the plantation owners. Their cutlasses also helped them to survive in the jungles of the mountains. Thus, the instrument that symbolizes oppression for the slave comes to symbolize freedom for the maroon.

The cutlass also symbolizes their hope to repossess the land, and possessing the land signifies the assumption of control over their own destiny. As slaves, they had been deprived of their human dignity, their identity, but just as the maroons had asserted their control over the mountains in their perpetual quest for freedom, their descendants need to repossess the lands they had worked for the benefit of the white béké if freedom from slavery is to be meaningful to them. This aspect of Antillean discourse had generally been ignored or distorted by Euro-centric historians, and Glissant's emphasis on it serves to correct their biased accounts of the past.

In addition to the mountains and the cutlass, the rivers and the sea perform a symbolic function in Le Quatrième Siècle. Because the rivers were sometimes used by the slaves to escape, they, like the mountains, symbolize freedom and the slave's yearning to affirm his own authentic identity. Glissant's La Lézarde was published before Le Quatrième Siècle, and the central metaphor in it is the river which lends
its name to the title of the novel. This river symbolizes the source to which Antilleans must return, according to Glissant, if they ever hope to achieve a viable sense of identity. In *Le Quatrième Siècle*, the rivers are part of the landscape the Antillean is striving to repossess and, together with the sea, they remind the Antillean of the place from which the ancestors came.

The sea can be a positive image for Glissant because it suggests the origins of present-day black Antilleans whose ancestors came across the sea from their motherland in Africa. The sea reminds them who they are and where they came from. At the same time, the sea is a negative symbol in the sense that their ancestors were driven across it and precipitated into slavery. It reminds them that their ancestors arrived on the islands not as free people but as slaves who had been deprived of their human dignity and identity.

The wind has positive and negative connotations for them, for the wind helped the slave ships sail to the West Indies with their captives from Africa and often annihilated them in unpredictable storms. But the wind also symbolizes the freedom that the slaves achieved in 1848. In *Le Quatrième Siècle*, the wind is associated with Mathieu's hope for the future of his people. It suggests the changes that Mathieu sees
blowing through the land, and it brings him the knowledge he acquires from Papa Longoué. During Mathieu's meetings with Papa Longoué, he repeatedly tries to control the rate at which Papa Longoué recounts his story, as if he wants to control the wind that is blowing.

Symbolically, this wind is a wind of hope that will help him create his own authentic discourse—a discourse that rejects the Euro-centric myths and prejudices that had been perpetuated by the inhuman system of slavery. As Wilbert Roget argues, Glissant's discourse is a calling into question of the stereotyped identity concepts of Euro-centric discourse (1989). For Glissant, the present generation of Antilleans must undergo a transformation in order to break away from the complacency that has all too often characterized their society. In this sense, Glissant can be considered a progressive Negritudist who uses symbolic representation to create a new image of the Antilean.

How does the narrative form of *Le Quatrième Siècle* reflect the writer's ideology? As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, the ideology of authors who write historical novels always lies behind their choice of historical happenings within which they locate the fictional events of their narratives.
Their choice of stylistic techniques is also a function of their ideological position, a fact that is particularly evident in *Le Quatrième Siècle*.

One striking feature of Glissant’s writing is the poetic nature of his prose. At times, his language is impenetrable to the “uninitiated”, and the narrative structure of *Le Quatrième Siècle* is extremely complex. The problem posed by Glissant’s technique in the novel is the one identified by Case, for if the novelist’s language is so impenetrable that it limits his readership to a small elite group, how can his work be regarded as relevant to the larger mass of Antilleans?

In *Le Quatrième siècle*, there are several narrative voices and the difficulty created by the complexity of the language makes its meaning undecipherable to the “uninitiated” reader. There is the omniscient narrator. There is Papa Longoué, who narrates the history of his people to the young Mathieu. And there are the direct interventions of Mathieu, who often complains about the complex nature of Papa Longoué’s narrative. When Papa Longoué is narrating his story, Mathieu is the audience/reader. The omniscient narrator (who can be equated with the author) manipulates the other voices in the different levels of narrative. Before writing his novel, Glissant already knows what he is going to narrate and
how he is going to manipulate the narrative to suit
the ideological stance he desires to communicate.
Similarly, Papa Longoué knows what he is going to
narrate to Mathieu, and he too manipulates his own
narrative to emphasize the historical details that he
deems crucial to Mathieu's understanding of the past.
On another level, the omniscient narrator manipulates
Papa Longoué's narrative just as the latter
manipulates the narrative he is recounting to Mathieu.
Thus, if Mathieu (the audience) complains of Longoué's
overly complex narrative, he is merely echoing the
anticipated response of actual readers of the text.

The different levels of narrative (or narrative
voices) are married together by Glissant's use of
"style indirect libre". In realist writing, sentences
are organized in such a way that the narrator(s) in
the story can be easily identified. However, in Le
Quatrième Siècle, readers must scrutinize the text
closely to identify the source of the discourse. For
example, when Papa Longoué is explaining to Mathieu
how the slaves landed on the islands, there are lines
that could be either Papa Longoué's direct speech or
the direct intervention of the extradiegetic narrator:

Car aujourd'hui dans leur petit coin de terre,
ils se traînent, et ils ne voient pas! Où
Because the absence of direct speech signs makes it difficult to attribute these lines to Papa Longoué, one could assume that they represent the direct intervention of the extradiegetic narrator. However, the same lines could be attributed to Papa Longoué because they might be a continuation of the dialogue between him and Mathieu.

Similarly, the following paragraph contains questions and answers that could be attributed to Papa Longoué; however, there is no punctuation to indicate that it is a direct speech. Thus a problem arises about whether it should be attributed to the diegetic narrator or to the extradiegetic narrator, who would, in this case, be entering the psyche of Longoué, the diegetic narrator. There is a punctuation mark after the first sentence, and it reinforces the idea that the whole paragraph could be attributed to Papa Longoué:


The following paragraph, some of which are in parenthesis, could also be attributed either to Longoué, the diegetic narrator, or to the
extradiegetic narrator.

The narrative at this point is about the slave ship at sea and about its arrival at the islands. It is chronologically consistent, but why is part of it placed in parenthesis? Does this punctuation indicate a direct intervention by the extradiegetic narrator, whereas the rest of the paragraph is in the voice of the diegetic narrator Papa Longoué? The paragraph in question reads as follows:

(Le Rose Marie. Elle était attendue avec impatience; on manquait de bras dans le pays. Il avait fallu toute la science du maître de bord pour que parviennent à bon port les deux tiers des esclaves embarqués. La maladie, la vermine, le suicide, les révoltes et les exécutions avaient ponctué la traversée de cadavres. Mais les deux tiers, ça faisait une excellente moyenne. Et le capitaine avait échappé aux navires anglais. Un marin remarquable) (p. 20).

This paragraph contains a significant commentary on the condition of the slave "other" and the status of the slave as an economic object. Whether this discourse is attributed to the diegetic narrator or to the extradiegetic narrator, we know that both fictive characters have been invented by the author. Nonetheless, identifying the originator of this discourse would enable readers to gauge its importance for the overall ideological message of the novel.

What is at stake in this question of attribution becomes evident in a direct speech by Mathieu, who
serves as Papa Longoué's audience. The sentence appears in quotation marks: "Plus vite, papa, plus vite, ça c'est connu, j'ai lu les livres!" (21). Because of Mathieu's direct interruption of the narrative, the narrative in question can be attributed to Papa Longoué; however, there is no punctuation mark to indicate that Longoué is speaking in these paragraphs. It would be logical to assume that Longoué is delivering this long discourse, especially since it might be Mathieu who interrupts by warning: "Tu vas te perdre...!" (22). However, this comment could also be a reflection, an internal monologue of the extradiegetic narrator. This confusion of narrative voices is significant because the reader is frustrated in an effort to comprehend the ideological importance of the history that is being recounted.

The complexity created by the use of "style indirect libre" is reinforced by Glissant's use of italics. Claude Duchet argues that italics in a realist discourse serve to emphasize the point being made and to emphasize the fact that the characters are products of a given society. The behavior of the characters has obviously been fashioned by the norms of the society in which they live. Duchet demonstrates how italics in a realist novel can actually devalorize the discourse in question. For example, italics
underscore the irony of the fact that particular importance is attached to some characters in the narrative (143-163).

However, italics serve a different function in Glissant’s *Le Quatrième Siècle*. They do not have a devalorizing purpose. On the contrary, they add emphasis and complexity to the poetic register of Glissant’s narrative. Glissant uses such devices to manipulate the readers’ perplexity in the face of this poetic language in order to provoke them into thinking about the history of his people, about the nature of the dominant discourse, and about the counter-discourse he has created in his novel. The last sentence of *Le Quatrième Siècle* is a typical example of this strategy:

*Il entendait le bruit des chaînes qu’on manœuvrait, les oué en cadence, les cannes qui craquaient sous l’hélice, dans le soleil, oui, dans la grande saison chaude—c’est la fièvre c’est un monde le monde et la parole enfonce la voix gravit la voix brûle dans le feu fixe et il tourne dans la tête emportant balayant mûrissant—et qui n’a ni fin ho, ni commencement (287).*

This passage reads like poetry. It defies the rules of punctuation that are usually adopted in literary prose. The difficulty of interpreting this text is accentuated by the author’s use of metaphoric language, which recurs throughout the novel.
How can the "uninitiated" reader decipher such passages? Yet these passages touch upon the nature of Antillean history, thus making them significant for understanding Glissant's concept of Antilleanity. Glissant has mastered the language of the dominator—the white bèké—and can use it to create his own counter-discourse. The metaphors he uses help to recreate the history of his people. At the end of the novel, he makes a summary of dates and historical events that the reader would otherwise find difficult to identify chronologically. The various items in this kind of list can also function like footnotes to create the impression of verisimilitude in the text.

Glissant's text also demonstrates his control over the language used by the dominant class to impose its power in the Caribbean. By transforming this language into a poetic idiom, Glissant is proving that Antilleans can manipulate the same language that the French originally used to impose a false image of otherness on them. Daniel Racine suggests this possibility when he argues that Glissant's intention was to deconstruct the French language in order to develop an engaged language capable of shocking his readers into awareness (620). In this sense, Glissant's power over the language of the former colonizer transforms it into an effective weapon.
In his historical fiction, Glissant manipulates history to create an authentic Antillean discourse. Like Sainville, he uses true historical names, places, and events, but whereas Sainville uses a preface to emphasize the historical authenticity of his fictional creation, Glissant does not situate his narrative in relation to specific historical events.

The story of the rival Longoué and Beluse families was inspired by a whole spectrum of historical persons and events. Because Glissant does not focus on a particular historical incident or period, his historical fiction differs from that of Sainville, Hazoumé, and Boni. Nonetheless, he and Sainville have the same ideological concern—the revalorization of the image of the maroon in Antillean history. As Jack Corzani has observed, the classical scenes of Antillean history are portrayed in *Le Quatrième Siècle*: slave trade and slavery, the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer, slave revolt and emancipation. Although Corzani believes that the novel is not a historical novel (1978, 221-222), his argument is not convincing because it fails to take into consideration the fact that the entire novel was inspired by Glissant’s knowledge of the history of slavery and that his fictional creation does not
deviate from actual historical events.

The lesson the Antillean needs to learn from the past is that the European created an inferior "other" in him by fostering a complex that he himself has interiorized over the centuries. The Antillean needs to understand this past in order to come to terms with the present and to build the future—to create a new Antillean with a new but authentic discourse of his own.

Although Glissant and Sainville differ greatly in their opinions about Ngritude and its relevance to the development of a progressive approach to the solution of the black world's problems, they actually express similar concerns in their historical novels, for both desire to subvert the dominant Euro-centric discourse that had previously been taken for granted. *Le Quatrième Siècle* deals not only with the past, but with the present and with the future as well. Glissant was inspired by history, but he believes that a pride in the past can be coupled with concrete attempts to understand the present and to advance progressive approaches to the problems that arose during the course of history. Within this context, his revalorization of the image of the maroon serves an important ideological function in the sense that it negates the dominant discourse that has been used in
the past to perpetuate the image of the colonized other.
Critics have tended to define the historical novel in terms of the classical historical novel of nineteenth-century Europe. Such definitions do not provide an adequate basis for understanding the historical fictions of African or Caribbean writers. For example, Jack Corzani believes that Glissant's _Le Quatrième Siècle_ is not a historical novel because he thinks it does not follow the pattern of what has, in Europe, been considered to be a historical novel. My reading of _Le Quatrième Siècle_, however, shows that, although it does not strictly follow the norms of the European historical novel, it does focus upon an historical phenomenon—slavery—in a way that links it with the African-Caribbean historical novels of writers such as Hazoumé, Boni, and Sainville. For a novel to be classified as a historical novel, it does not have to recount only specific events from the past; it can synthesize a global perspective upon the nature of such events, and that is precisely what Glissant does in his novel.

Although African and Caribbean historical novels share many traits with the "classical" European historical novel, they also differ from it in...
significant ways. These differences derive from the peculiar predicament of the African-Caribbean writer as a colonized or formerly colonized individual. The African-Caribbean historical novel performs an ideological function that its European counterpart does not necessarily serve. For these writers, writing becomes an act of engagement by means of which they can critique colonialism and the power it represents. The fact that they experienced the imposition of colonialism upon them makes it imperative for them to re-write history in order to question the control of discourse that had been maintained through the control of political and economic power by the colonial (or former colonial) forces. In other words, African and Caribbean historical novelists are representative of "the empire writing back" in response to the way that hegemonic discourses function in the world order, whereas European writers never experienced the situation of colonized or former colonized people. They do not have to write in the language of a colonizer or former colonizer and they are not necessarily confronted with the felt necessity of asserting pride in the cultural identity of an
oppressed people. These ideological factors help
determine the type of history that attracts the
attention of writers who are obliged to confront the
discourse of the "other" that evolved in response to
the colonialists' need to justify their enterprise.

Some critics have defined the historical novel as
a novel in which true events from the past inspire the
fictional creation—events to which the writer was not
a witness. However, the cases of Hazoumé and Boni
demonstrate that the historical novelist can be
inspired as well by events they have themselves
witnessed. History does not exclude the recent past.
Because the same observation can be made about some
recent European historical novelists, perhaps the
historical novel should be redefined to include
fiction inspired by contemporary events.

The African-Caribbean historical novel is
characterized by a set of shared literary and
ideological functions, and they largely determine the
author's choice of historical materials and narrative
techniques. Like the European historical novel as
defined by Alfred Sheppard, the African-Caribbean
historical novel has been inspired by a past that is
recreated in the writer's imagination. Hazoumé, Boni,
Sainville, and Glissant all employ the facts of
history as their essential raw material, but like
European historical novelists, they use these events selectively. The choice of what to include and what to exclude is dictated primarily by the ideology that inspired their historical writing in the first place. For example, Hazoumé was inspired to a certain extent by a resentment against the role played by the Dahomeyans in nineteenth-century West Africa. At the same time, he was concerned with making the culture of these people comprehensible to the outside world, while testifying to his own respect for French culture and for what he considered to be the "civilizing role" of the French colonial enterprise in Africa. Boni's historical fiction was an expression of resistance to colonial rule and resentment against the French destruction of the Bwa kingdom and its culture.

Glissant and Sainville were concerned with a revalorization of the image of the maroon in Antillean history because the maroon represented, for them, the articulation in concrete form of a counter-discourse in opposition to the hegemonic power of European discourse at the time of slavery.

According to Jonathan Nield, a novel is rendered historical by the introduction of dates, personnages, and events that can be readily identified as historical. This characteristic of European historical fiction can also be found in African and Caribbean
historical novels, for identifiable dates and events are often used to enhance the verisimilitude of novels such as *Doquicimi*, *Crépuscule des temps anciens*, *Dominique nègre esclave* and *Le Quatrième Siècle*. However, the ideological factors that determined the selective use of such materials in these novels were governed by ideological factors far different from those that were operative in the work of nineteenth-century European historical novelists such as Scott and Alfred Vigny. These European writers of course sought to influence readers' perceptions of history, but the task of African-Caribbean historical novelists was more complex. Desiring to re-assert pride in their cultural heritage, the latter were using the language of the (ex-)colonial master in order to reorient their readers' perception of a history that had, in the past, always been written by representatives of the colonial order.

The use of historically verifiable minor characters is common in the European historical novel. Scott used them in his novels, and so did many African-Caribbean historical novelists. For example, Hazoumé introduced important historical figures like Guézo in *Doquicimi*, but he also introduced minor characters such as the king's wives, the Vidaho, and Toffa. Boni also introduced minor characters like
Teché and Hadounfi to enhance the real-seemingness of his fictional creation. In the case of Sainville’s Dominique nègre esclave, the names of most of the slaves were actually minor characters in history, and Glissant employed identifiable minor characters such as Senglis and Mathieu. All these historical writers placed at the center of their narratives characters who had been ignored by history as written by the colonialists. For example, the maroon had never been portrayed as a hero in official European accounts of Caribbean history. Yet Sainville and Glissant persistently emphasize the role of the maroons in bringing about their own emancipation in 1848. By doing so, these writers invite their readers to re-assess the validity of the European claim that slaves themselves had nothing significant to do with the abolition of slavery, which had supposedly been brought to an end by the humanitarian activities of white people like Victor Schoelcher. In this way, African-Caribbean historical novelists rehabilitated characters who had been treated as unimportant by European historical writers.

Novelists have an advantage over historians in the sense that they can fill the gaps in documented history by inventing minor characters. African-Caribbean historical novelists took full
advantage of this opportunity in their forging of what
might well be described as an authentic
anti-colonialist discourse. However, as Paul Veynes
has argued, the choice of materials in any historical
discourse introduces an arbitrary factor. The validity
of this contention can easily be illustrated by
examining the nature of the problems created by the
ambiguity of Hazoumé's pro-colonialist discourse in
Dogúcimí. This author's arbitrary choice of
historical events and his use of a pro-colonialist
discourse have often been regarded by African critics
as a reflection of his lack of commitment to African
liberation—a commitment that these critics consider
to be a crucial ingredient in any authentic African
writing. Thus, his choice to focus upon human
sacrifices among the Dahomeyans reflects a quite
different attitude toward his subject than does
Sainville's choice of the maroon revolts as a model of
heroic resistance to colonial injustice.

As Georg Lukács has pointed out, the historical
novel is invariably linked with the great and urgent
problems of the present. If historical fiction in
Africa and the Caribbean was inspired by discursive
practices that had evolved during four centuries of
slavery and colonization, it was also influenced by
the Négritude movement, which was essentially a
response to the Euro-centric discourse of the "other". Within this context, African and Caribbean historical novelists developed a particular form of counter-discourse in their attempts to address urgent contemporary problems.

Négritude discourse was itself a re-writing of history and a rejection of ethnocentric European interpretations of the past. Post-structuralist and modernist approaches have further called these interpretations into question by revealing the indefensibility of their implicit claims to universal validity. The African-Caribbean historical novel participates in this movement of ideas. If such works differ from their nineteenth-century European predecessors because their authors were writing from the perspective of colonized or formerly colonized peoples, this perspective was further differentiated from European models of the genre by the fact that the African-Caribbean historical novel was at least partly inspired by oral traditions. For this reason, it must be understood in terms of the political and social functions that it was intended to fulfill. Like other historical novels, the historical fictions of Hazoumé, Boni, Sainville, and Glissant function as fictional works, but they also serve some of the same functions as anthropological treatises, and their ideological
function often overshadows their literary qualities.

Felix Couchoro's *L'Esclave* provides a good test case for my understanding of the African-Caribbean historical novel. One of the first novels to have been published in Francophone Africa, it shares with Hazoumé's *Doquicimi* some of the principal ideological concerns of a historical novel written during the colonial era. Although *L'Esclave* does not focus on verifiable historical events, its treatment of a specific historical era was, like that of *Doquicimi*, inspired by a profound familiarity with oral narratives about that era. Nevertheless, *L'Esclave* does not exactly fit into the category of the African-Caribbean historical novel as I have defined it.

Couchoro's novel relates the story of Mawoulawoé, a slave boy bought by the "father" Komlangan, who dies and, following the customs of his people, bequeaths his property to his legitimate son; however, Mawoulawoé uses Machiavellian tactics to kill anyone who stands in the way of his attempt to usurp the property of his adopted "father", although he eventually commits suicide when Komlangan's eldest son Daniel returns from his studies in Europe and reclaims his father's property. The story deals with the problems that arise in the traditional inheritance
system, and it evokes universal themes such as jealousy, fidelity, and the conflict between good and evil. Sabit Salami praises *L'Esclave* as a successful synthesis of orality and written form, arguing that Couchoro's treatment of the jealousy theme elevates the novel to the level of a universally valid depiction of human nature:

> Qu'il [Couchoro] ait pu fermer les yeux sur les méfaits du colonialisme est la preuve que la littérature africaine peut transcender les préoccupations du moment. L'engagement politique n'est, après tout, que transitoire, surtout par rapport à un sujet aussi fondamental à la nature humaine que la jalousie (225-226).

In reality, however, the predicament of the writer and his people as colonized subjects is far more important than the theme of jealousy. Unlike Hazoumé and Boni, Couchoro simply ignored the problem of colonization, and this lack of concern for the dominant historical phenomenon of the era about which he was writing makes it difficult to read *L'Esclave* as a convincing historical fiction.

Like Hazoumé and Boni, Couchoro uses traditional oral story-telling techniques to reinforce Negritude assumptions about African cultural authenticity, but his works also reveal how an African writer can be seduced by his exposure to a Western education. Although he claims to be propounding a progressive
type of Negritude that eschews outmoded traditions, his quest for a viable cultural identity actually revolves around the African’s relationship to a traditional value system. How can one import foreign values, he asks, without losing one’s own cultural authenticity? He attempts to answer this question but only succeeds in demonstrating the extent to which he himself has been acculturated. For example, he clearly places more faith in the tenets of Christianity than he does in the values of traditional African belief systems, implying that the white man’s religion can redeem his characters in a way that their traditional religious practices cannot. Such lines of argument do not represent a synthesis of cultures; they merely reiterate the colonialists’ image of Africans.

As Adrien Huanou has argued, Couchoro is essentially a moralist, each of whose characters has a particular function to fulfill (82). In fact, L’Esclave might well be called a "roman à moeurs". Yet, to the extent that it exploits historical events to enhance the verisimilitude of his novelistic portrayals, it is also a historical novel. Couchoro delineates the social consequences of certain customary practices and defines the impact of Christian missionary activity on them. In L’Esclave, the characters tend to be type characters with
specific moral qualities. For example, Mawoulawoé symbolizes ambition, and through him, the author moralizes about the need to respect social norms and customs. In Doquicimi and Crétapscule des temps anciens, the belief system is shown as fashioning people’s way of life, particularly in the sense that individuals are punished for transgressing against the norms of the ancestors. Couchoro seems to be suggesting the same relationship when he portrays Mawoulawoé as a Machiavelian character who is punished for having committed adultery with the wife of his "brother".

In the novel, good eventually triumphs over evil, as it does in the historical novels of Bazoumé and Boni, for Mawoulawoé is thrown out of the house by Daniel. However, in the sense that Daniel was educated in Europe, this ending identifies Western values with goodness and traditional African ones with evil. The triumph of Western values is justified, he implies, because they represent a higher level of "civilization". Such ideologically tinged messages obviously reinforce self-serving European pronouncements about their own so-called "mission civilisatrice" in Africa.

Nonetheless, Couchoro’s novel must be seen in its historical context. He himself could not have been
overly critical of French colonialism at the time when he was writing. His use of traditional story-telling techniques and moralizing digressions indicate that he had not completely lost touch with his own people. Furthermore, he develops universal themes such as love, hatred, and ambition in a peculiarly African way by adopting the history, legends, and myths of his own people to a narrative that was written in the French language. In this sense *L'Esclave* is an African historical novel, but unlike other African-Caribbean historical novels, it does not undercut the colonial discourse of the West.

Senghor has been criticized for having fostered the impression that Western culture is superior to the African heritage that serves as the backdrop for his anti-colonial discourse, but his definition of the situation is illuminating in the sense that it helps explain the ambiguous position of "évolué" writers such as Couchoro. According to Senghor, the world is like a musical group in which the African is the "batteur de tam tam" and the European the "chef d'orchestre". A "civilisation de l'universel" based on such assumptions implies that Africans are morally obliged to abide by the overall direction of Europeans. However, colonization is not based on an equitable exchange of cultures, for the colonizers
refuse to recognize the culture of the colonized as the equivalent of their own. In L’Esclave, the Western-educated Daniel saves his family from the evil machinations of Mawoulawoé, and the Christian god saves the community from the chaos caused by the former slave. Under these circumstances, there is no synthesis of cultures, but merely the triumph of one over the other.

The situation is somewhat different in Roland Brival’s La Montagne d’Élène, which has much in common with Sainville’s Dominique nègre esclave, for it was inspired by the same historical events. An account of the nineteenth-century maroon revolts, it focuses on a main character with picaresque-like characteristics. In his search for an authentic Antillean identity, Brival, like Sainville and Glissant, finds it crucial to revalorize the image of the maroon. Writing after the publication of Sainville’s Dominique nègre esclave and Glissant’s Le Quatrième Siècle, he revives the Négritude discourse in the context of which historical fiction often serves as a means of discrediting Euro-centric discourse and the power it represents.

A maroon of the first order like Dominique, Macouba, the hero of Brival’s novel, rejects the image of the other imposed on him through the institution of slavery. His revolt is not a passive one; on the
contrary, it is the engaged articulation of his own concrete discourse. Through Macouba, Brival revalorizes the image of the revolted maroon, thereby subverting the image of the maroon disseminated by the discourse of the slave master. Like Dominique, Macouba persistently maroons in search of a permanent freedom, and he refuses to be cowed by the inhuman treatment inflicted upon him.

In his search for a viable cultural identity, Brival believes in a return to Africa. For this reason, he makes his hero a pure-blooded African in contrast to Sainville’s creole hero and the creole descendants of the original Longoué in Glissant’s Le Quatrième Siècle. Antillean writers might have different approaches to the elaboration of a counter-discourse in the Caribbean context, but they all have the same ultimate ideological goal.

In Sainville’s novel, the critical viewpoint is that of the author himself. In Brival’s novel, the critical perspective is provided by the subjective consciousness of the novel’s black hero. As part of his depersonalization, dehumanization, and creolization, Macouba is obliged to accept his name, which, although it sounds African, actually symbolizes the beginning of the creation of "otherness" in him. Significantly, Brival underscores the importance of
Macouba’s reaction to this process of creolization, for he himself realizes that his renaming is the beginning of his "chosification", the beginning of his transformation into an economic object. His whole life becomes shaped by this loss of identity, and his "prise de conscience" is significant because it symbolizes the need for Antilleans to go back to their roots in order to discover who they truly are. In this sense, *La Montagne d’Ébène* represents Brival’s attempt to come to terms with the past by asserting his pride in Macouba, who rejected the image that had been imposed on him.

Whereas Sainville’s Dominique was born into slavery, Brival’s Macouba is an adult who remains conscious of his ancestors in Africa, conscious of his own attachment to the land and to his people. Africa was part of his psyche. In contrast, Dominique must learn at second hand about the ancestors in Africa, and as a slave, his access to this knowledge is limited to what he hears recounted by the older people and by the newly arrived slaves from the continent. For Macouba, the Caribbean land and its people are strange, and he must adapt to them. If Dominique is taught from childhood to believe in the inferiority of his race, Macouba had acquired a strong sense of pride in his heritage before he was captured and enslaved.
The different backgrounds of these two characters influence the nature of the subversive discourse they articulate in response to their respective situations.

In a significant interior monologue, Macouba reflects on Africa, the motherland, and on the destiny of Black people in general.

Quel imprévisible motif eussent pu invoquer les dieux pour avoir infligé pareil châtiment aux peuples de l'Afrique? se demandait-il. Et, à supposer qu'une faute eût été commise, pourquoi ne les punissait-il pas sur les lieux mêmes de leur forfait, comme il en était d'usage? (48).

He is asking what theory could possibly be adduced to justify the suffering of black people under slavery. No religious justification is plausible, and Brival is clearly using Macouba’s monologue as a means of confronting the destiny of his entire race. Through Macouba, he calls into question the absurd Western religious assumptions according to which the plight of black people was the result of a curse, as is supposedly suggested by the Bible.

When Macouba introduces himself to the maroons, he uses his original African name, Djakoulo N'Dyaye (48), and throughout the novel, his native Massambi serves him as a source of inspiration. In his constant struggle to subvert the discourse of his masters, he draws inspiration from the ancestors in Africa. For Brival, therefore, an authentic anticolonial discourse
in the Caribbean originates with a recognition of the motherland.

Julien's cowardly attack on Macouba takes place after Julien discovers the place where his sister is living with the black man. Believing his victim to be dead, Julien fails to ward off the fatal bite that Macouba, as if suddenly invoking the powers of his African ancestors, inflicts on him. Macouba dies like the brave warrior he had been trained to be in his native land. For Brival, this episode signifies his hero's link with the past—a past in which Antilleans can take pride because it represents the spiritual link that is their history. In spite of the systematic deculturization imposed on the slaves in the Antilles, they did not lose a sense of belonging to the motherland in Africa. Brival thus implies that the re-writing of his people's history means going back to their ancestral roots in Africa and not starting his account of their history with the beginning of slavery.

Throughout the novel, Macouba's struggle resembles that of Dominique, whose life also reflects the systematic dehumanization and "chosification" of the slave. Taught to hate their own race, slaves were inculcated with a sense of inferiority for their whole race, but as Brival emphasizes, the slave was not a
Passive "other". The revolt of the slaves, their attack on the plantation (which they burn down), and their killing of the slave master St. Julien reveal the concrete fashion in which they subvert the dominant discourse.

As in Dominique nègre esclave, the Christian religion is a prominent element of this discourse in La Montagne d'Ébène. In particular, the Christian message of humility is used to maintain the slaves in a perpetually subservient state. Yet the "prise de conscience" of the maroons counters the physical and psychological manipulations of the white békés. In his work on the myth of the Black in French society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Léon Siefer mentions how the Bible was used to support the European argument that the Black race descended from Ham, the cursed son of Abraham. Sainville's Dominique nègre esclave depicts how such myths inculcated black people with a sense of inferiority and transformed them into economic tools. They themselves often accept their inherent inferiority on the basis of these myths, as the case of one of Brival's characters illustrates:

Yêyètte, elle-même, professait que sa race était perdue à jamais, victime de la malédiction de Cham dont leur parlait le père Jacob toutes les fois qu'il montait de St. Pierre pour catéchiser les esclaves des plantations avoisinantes (11).
Brival's hero is the opposite of Yêtêté in this respect, for he successfully counters this attempt to deprive him of a sense of pride in his ancestors.

Siefer also points out how the physical descriptions of black people in colonial literature emphasized their apparent ugliness in the eyes of Europeans. Constantly inculcated in the slave and in his descendants, the supposed physical ugliness of the black race is part of the process by means of which an inferior "other" is created in the consciousness of black people in the Caribbean. As we see in the case of Yêtêtê, the attempt to engender this inferiority complex among black slaves was often successful:

[..] L'extrême laideur de ceux-ci (leur front proéminent à la manière des singes, leur nez écrasé aux narines béantes, leurs lèvres épaisses, leur crâne sec d'où levait une maigre tignasse hirsute et rugueuse, sans parler de l'affligeante couleur de leur peau!) ne suffisait-elle pas à les bannir de la race humaine? (11).

Yêtêtê has interiorized her inferiority to such an extent that she sincerely believes in the inherent ugliness of her own people. For her and other black slaves like her, the articulation of a concrete counter-discourse will only become possible after they have rejected the false myths that have been foisted upon them by the white béké.
The problem that Fanon analyzes in his *Peau Noire Masques Blancs* is a contemporary one, but it has its roots in the history that inspired Sainville's and Brival's historical fiction. Yet why is Brival, writing in 1984, interested in producing the kind of historical fiction that Sainville was writing in 1948.

To answer this question, one needs to recognize that the development of discursive processes in the era of slavery does not belong exclusively to the past. On the contrary, it continues to have a powerful impact on contemporary Antillean society. Brival is interested in historical fiction in the 1980s because he recognizes the need for Antilleans to constantly go back to their roots as they seek a viable sense of identity in a contemporary world where they are still living under French political, economic, and social domination. According to him, young Antilleans must be continually reminded of their history in a society where French control of the media and of the educational system accords a privileged status to the colonizer's false version of the past.

In *La Montagne d'Ébène*, the dehumanization of black people takes place in various ways. One of them is the intolerance of inter-racial marriage by the white hêvè. For example, Robert d'Antincoûrt, a Bordeaux lawyer who married a black lady from
St. Dominique, was punished by being stripped of his license to practice law (10-11). Forbidding inter-racial marriage in itself inculcates a sense of inferiority among black people, ultimately serving the same purpose as the promulgation of the Ham myth.

Another way of dehumanizing slaves was to treat them as breeding animals to be used at the will of the master to produce more labor for the sugar cane plantations. As Glissant noted, depriving slaves of their freedom to choose their own sexual partners was part of the pattern of "chosification". In _La Montagne d'ébène_, this process is described in the following terms:

> Ces 'réunions' d'esclaves se déroulaient dans un hangar retiré, empestant, aux dires des femmes, l'odeur du pétun que l'on y faisait sécher d'ordinaire. Une fois les hommes et les femmes dévêtus et rassemblés par paires, le maître désignait lui-même les partenaires, sommés alors de s'accoupler—sous les yeux du maître, et parfois même de ceux de ses amis qu'il conviait à goûter ce spectacle peu ordinaire (201).

This passage speaks for itself. Brival's account is not gratuitous. Reduced to the level of animals, the black slaves are exploited as a source of voyeuristic amusement for the white béké. Brival's ideological stance emerges clearly in this passage, which underscores the inhuman nature of the institution of slavery and suggests the physical as well as the
psychological consequences that such treatment was bound to have on the slaves.

To complete his image of the colonizer-colonized relationship, Brival also evokes the mentality of the white béké vis-à-vis his "inferior other". For the béké, the black slave has no rights. The slave owner St. Aubin even expresses disgust at seeing mulattoes fighting for their rights (40-41). In his eyes, even the products of white békés' lecherous philanderings are regarded as incapable of human dignity.

As in Sainville's *Dominiqque nègre esclave*, the inhuman treatment of slaves pervades *La Montagne d'Ébène*. For example, when Barthélemy visits his wife in another plantation without the permission of his master, he is punished by having his toes cut off. For the white béké, Barthélemy is no more than an economic implement, and he has no right to claim that the woman he has visited is his "wife" (59-60). Although Mathilde is a mulatress, she too is considered a member of the inferior black race. She is however, quite conscious of her ambiguous predicament:

> Mais elle tenait de sa mère l'essentiel: la pratique du culte de l'obi, la science des femmes, la connaissance des plantes et des racines, le goût de l'amour, et, surtout, la patience (105).

Mathilde has kept the African elements of her identity—her religion and her knowledge of medicinal
herbs. The only thing she inherited from her white father was her light skin. Ironically, despite her blood relationship with white people, Mathilde identifies with the African origins that form her character and symbolize her recognition of the source of her being. By refusing to denounce her African origins, even though she has been exposed to her father’s values, she is subverting the Euro-centric discourse of "otherness".

Like the slaves in Sainville’s *Dominique nègre esclave*, the maroons in Brival’s *La Montagne d’Èbène* also subvert the Euro-centric discourse in other ways. Like Dominique, Macouba has love affairs that symbolically assert his identity as a revolted slave. He too makes love with the white master’s daughter as a means of gaining revenge against the whites who have dehumanized his race. Initially, he had refused to lower his eyes in the presence of Mara, the master’s daughter, and she is upset that the newly arrived slave from Africa stares at her with defiance. For this reason, she attempts to make him more subservient by inflicting physical pain on him. However, Macouba eventually breaks down the racial barriers and turns her hatred into genuine love. She is initiated to the male-female relationship for the first time when he makes love to her, and her letter to him reveals the
extent to which she has fallen in love with him. The relationship between the two of them clearly reveals that he is more than an economic tool in the hands of the white bébé. Capable of loving and evoking love in others, he is just as human as those who have persistently denied his humanity.

Julien, Mara's brother, epitomizes the white superiority complex. He cannot accept the fact that his sister has run away with Macouba, a maroon; however, her relationship with a black slave transformed her to the extent that she can call him "un des nôtres". She now rejects the myths created by her own race and dreams of seeing her own son, Stephenson, grow up to participate in the movement for the abolition of slavery. In this context, he becomes a symbol of the Antilleans' hope that their history can be rewritten in a way that does not exclude their black heritage.

Although Macouba dies at the hands of Julien, his spirit lives on, for it has been incarnated in his son. But Stephenson is a mulatto. In symbolic terms, his mixed-race physical identity suggests the "métissage culturel" that is a dominant reality of Antillean history. In Brival's quest for a viable cultural identity, he is not only interested in re-writing the role of the maroons in Antillean
history, but also in underscoring the multidimensional racial element in that culture.

A significant difference between Brival's La Montagne d'Ébène and Glissant's historical fiction derives from Brival's refusal to ignore the Carib aspect of Antillean culture. In La Montagne d'Ébène, Mara visits the old Carib lady Moina to ask for medical help:

Elle [Moina] était libre-courresse, comme les quelques rares survivants de sa race encore présents dans l'île, à qui la défaite et le massacre de leur peuple n'avaient pu imposer de subir les rigueurs de l'esclavage [...]. On disait la Caraïbe dotée de pouvoirs terrifiants, tel celui de faire revenir les morts pour les interroger à l'aide d'une calebasse creuse qu'elle s'appliquait contre l'oreille, ou celui, à distance, de faire passer la vie à trépas n'importe quelle créature humaine (27).

Such beliefs did enter into the contemporary Antillean consciousness, and Brival's depiction of the old Carib woman draws attention to the historic genocide that was perpetuated on her people by Europeans. Indeed, the presence of such scenes in Brival's novel reveal that one cannot re-write the history of the Antilles without including the Carib element. In this sense, he goes further than other Antillean historical novelists like Glissant by adding an important dimension to the contemporary Antillean consciousness of and pride in an extraordinarily complex history.
In Brival’s novel, the association between the maroons and the Caribs symbolizes the symbiotic nature of Antillean culture that evolved in a society dominated by colonial hegemonic discourse. However, although Mara solicits medical help from Moina, she does not regard the Carib woman as an equal and even kills her to protect her own status in society because Moina is the only one who knows about Mara’s liaison with Macouba.

As in the historical novels of Sainville and Glissant, the authenticity of the historical background in *La Montagne d’Ébène* is reinforced by the use of real place names such as Martinique, Guadeloupe, Antigua, the Rue Cases-Nègres, the Côte de l’Or, and Bordeaux. He also uses the names of actual historical personalities such as Louis-Philippe. Thus, Brival creates an “illusion du réel” in the same way that Sainville and Glissant had done. Like them, he employs myths and true historical events to create a fictional universe that is structured around a desire to revalorize the image of the maroon in Antillean history.

*La Montagne d’Ébène* also has the same narrative structure as Sainville’s *Dominique nègre esclave*. The omniscient narrator is diegetic, and Macouba the maroon (like Dominique) is the main character around
whom all the action is centered. Brival uses interior monologue and letters to reveal the subjective consciousness of his characters; in one of these monologues Macouba reflects upon the plight of black people, victims of European colonial hegemony. At this point, he becomes Brival’s spokesman for an ideologically committed anticolonialist position.

Brival’s use of letters heightens the impression of historical verisimilitude in the novel, but it also raises questions about the “realism” of the narrative itself. For example, why does Mara write a letter to Macouba when she knows that Macouba is unlikely to ever read her letter? Within the context of Brival’s fictional world, Mara’s discourse is thus actually directed toward the reader, but if this is so, is the context of her letter dictated by the fact that she knows it will probably never reach its intended receiver, Macouba?

Mon homme, écrivait Mara, comment te dire cette lettre que tu ne liras probablement jamais, sinon en m’imaginant que je le fais pour moi-même, pour cette autre partie de moi que tu es devenu (103).

As the contents of the letter show, Brival is using the letter as a device to reveal the inner feelings of Mara and to emphasize the psychological impact that her relationship with the black slave has had on her.
Another difficulty with Brival’s use of letters occurs when Père Jacob writes to Bénédicte. The reader knows the contents of this letter before it reaches the person to whom it is addressed. Having witnessed the sealing of the letter when it was entrusted to a slave, readers realize that the slave (called a "négrillon") is the intermediary between the originator of the discourse and its intended audience. The slave therefore becomes the link that establishes the psychological realism of the historical events being narrated in the letter. The use of a technique borrowed from the epistolary novel enables readers to gain insight into the psyche of the characters involved in the panorama of Antillean history.

In seeking an authentic Antillean cultural identity, Brival, like Sainville and Glissant, revalorized the image of the maroon and attributed to him an important role in the abolition of slavery. Like the Negritude writers of the pre-independence period in Africa, Brival uses historical fiction to revive the debate over the question of cultural identity. He also adopts it to cast light upon the illusory freedom that Antilleans supposedly gained when their islands became "départements" of France. This juridical status implies that, politically and culturally, Antilleans are still under the control of
metropolitan France. Yet emancipation from slavery will always be incomplete as long as the white béké continues to exercise the considerable economic, political, and discursive power that he inherited from the era of slavery.

In a way, Négritude discourse ignored the cultural differences that exist between Africans and their descendants in the diaspora. Senghor at least tended to do so. He has been criticized for having developed a philosophical position modeled on European philosophy of universalism. However, the critics of Negritude have often, consciously or unconsciously, ignored the historical context within which this movement was born. During the late colonial period, it was necessary for colonized peoples to present a common front against European colonialist discourse. Irrespective of their countries of origin, colonized writers found themselves in the same predicament. In colonialist discourse, Africans were not regarded as different from their descendants in the diaspora. As Homi Bhabha has pointed out, however, the overall purpose of colonialist discourse was to reinforce the image of otherness in the colonial subject. Négritudist discourse was therefore a reaction to Europe’s own concept of the Other—of the colonial subject. This point is crucial for an understanding of
the historical novels examined in the present study, for they constitute a challenge to the notions of black people promulgated by Europeans throughout the colonial era. In essence, Negritude writers were reacting against the notions of history that had been manipulated by Europeans in defense of their own illusory sense of superiority. Within this context, Negritude writers were particularly concerned with rehabilitating the image of black people, who had been consistently marginalized in European accounts of history.

An appeal to history is the crucial common denominator of all historical novels. In the African-Caribbean historical novel, the history associated with the dominant European discourse is undercut as a means of revalorizing the cultures and historical identities of colonized peoples. There are of course differences between the historical experiences of the Caribbean writers and their African counterparts. Africans were never physically removed from their motherland, whereas Antilleans had to grapple with a culture that had been forged from a variety of influences in a complex hegemonic situation. As committed writers, African and Caribbean historical novelists have similar ideological concerns, despite the fact that colonialist discourse
persistently attempted to inculcate Antilleans with a sense of disdain for their African origins. In reality, the culture of these islands has been subjected to systematic creolization and acculturation. Historical novelists from this part of the world have attempted to create an awareness of precisely this fact among their readers.

In my opinion, the African-Caribbean historical novel can best be understood within the context of an Afro-centric approach. As Molefi Asante has argued, people engaged in theorizing about African peoples have often assumed their own "objectivity", which, in reality, is no more than the collective subjectivity of European culture (1987, 3). The same tendency can be observed in theories about people of African descent in the diaspora, and it can only be remedied by what Chinweizu has called a "decolonization of the mind". As Homi Bhabha has pointed out, there was not just the discourse of the colonizer; in addition, there has always been the discourse of the colonized—the dominated. This discourse constitutes a counter-discourse that has been recuperated in the African-Caribbean historical novel. In Boni's Crépuscule des temps anciens, the Bwa met French hegemonic discourse with a strong resistance against the invasion of their land. In Hazoumé's Doquicimi,
Toffa and others resist French colonialist discourse with a discourse grounded in their own Dahomeyan (African) concept of the world. Toffa even points out that Europeans do not have the same belief systems and customs as the Dahomeyans. In Glissant's *Le Quatrième siècle*, Sainville's *Dominique nègre esclave*, and Brival's *La Montagne d'Ébène*, the revolting slave becomes a culture hero—the symbol of revolt against European hegemonic discourse.

The image of the African as a hero in historical fiction emerged in response to a felt need to re-write history from the perspective of the African. Written history as controlled by Europeans failed to accord black people their rightful place in their own history. African and Caribbean historical novelists sought to correct this anomaly. In the clash of discourses and counter-discourses that constitute the struggle for power in the contemporary world, it represents a powerful assertion of pride in a cultural identity that had previously been ignored and denigrated within the dominant Euro-centric discourse.
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PRIMARY WORKS


GENERAL WORKS


