THE COMMITMENT AND REALISM OF

JEAN MALONGA

by

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TO

little Obinna IKWUKA, my eldest son, who was born four months after my commencing postgraduate studies.

P R E F A C E

Most European and African critics have directed their attention to the study of well-known poets and novelists. These writers are essentially from Senegal and the Cameroons. The names of Leopold Sédar Senghor, Mongo Béti, Ferdinand Oyono, Birago Diop, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, have sort of become household words. The tendency for anybody interested in African Literature is to think of some of these writers. Curiously enough it is forgotten that there are writers from other African countries who treat themes such as those elaborated by well-established writers. One of such writers is Jean Malonga from Congo Brazzaville. I read about him through the criticism of A.C. Brench, and the outright condemnation of this writer by the learned critic who described one of the Congolese's novels as "bad" stimulated my curiousity. As a result I decided to carry out a research on the Congolese. Not much has been written about him, and I was faced with the problem of insufficient documentation.

In this regard I owe my debt of gratitude to the Ahmadu Bello University Library from where I was able to get an appreciably good number of materials to start my research. I also got useful documentation from the Bayero University Library in Kano and the University of Ife Library. My gratitude goes also to my industrious and ever-loving wife, Rose, who, in spite of her preoccupation with her own postgraduate degree programme, still found time to take care of our domestic chores, as well as occasionally whisper into my ear soothing words of encouragement. Above all if I made any progress

during the course of my research and writing it was because I was priviledged to have as Director, Dr Y.M. Maiangwa, Head of the Department of French, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. In spite of his academic and administrative engagements he found time and patience to give me useful guidelines. Through his advice I probably have made some useful contribution to the understanding of Jean Malonga's works. I do not pretend that there could be no weak points here and there. I only hope that any shortcomings could be improved upon by future critics of the author.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Once mention is made of African Literature in French the countries that ring a bell in one's ears are Senegal and the Cameroons. It is only in the course of further literary work does the student become aware of the existence of other countries like the Ivory Coast and the Republic of Benin. But even at this stage the Republic of the Congo still remains a "terra incognita" to him.

Initially the arguments for the belated surfacing of Congolese literature on the African literary picture have as their "fons et fundamentum" the distance of the Congolese writers from the traditional themes of negritude. But to dislodge such a line of reasoning is the fact that the Cameroon is no nearer than Malonga's Congo to the negritude movement. Yet the names of Mongo Béti and Ferdinand Oyono were passing from the mouth of one African literary student to another. The problem, therefore, cannot be entirely thematic, if at all.

Up till my moment of deciding to work on Jean Malonga the Republic of the Congo remained almost a blind alley in literary circles, with the names of Tchikaya U'Tamsi and Jean Malonga sounding out occasionally, albeit indistinctly.[1] U'Tamsi eventually managed to be

1. See Josué Ndamba, 'L'oeuvre de J. -P. Makouta Mboukou, écrivain congolais ou La conspiration du silence', Présence Francophone, Printemps 1976, p. 37, where he affirms that though many literary prizes had been won by Congolese writers, nevertheless theirs is 'une littérature très mal connue tant au Congo qu'à l'étranger.'

admitted in scholars' critical opinion into the family of outstanding Franco-African poets. His poetic qualities are so glaring that they transcend whatever minor reasons his critics could weave to cast a slur on the image of his works and force him into a perpetual oblivion. But Malonga is not as lucky. He should be content with his name being mentioned as one of the precursors of novel writing in Francophone Africa.

Hitherto a good deal of criticisms on African writers are sociological, with the belief that an African writing reflects the author's milieu, his historical situation. D'Almeida states the position clearly when he asserts that

> "Parce que les Africains ont eu une expérience unique et traumatisante, née de l'esclavage et de la colonisation.... les écrivains africains se penchent de plus en plus sur les questions socio-politiques".[2]

In my study, this type of criticism, which is Marxist, is stretched further to include a close focussing on the author as a human being. As such he not only mirrors his society, but has in addition his own whims and caprices, his ambitions, his own way of doing things.

(2) Irène d'Almeida, 'L'engagement et le problème du public dans la littérature africaine', Le Francais au Nigéria, vol. 9, no. 2, sept. 1974, p. 3.

My view is that these peculiarities can be commented upon freely by any critic without condemning the author outright as incompetent. In this regard Mezu rightly warns that "La critique doit reconnaître l'individualité de son (the author's) art"[3]

It follows that in this thesis the personality of the writer is fully in the picture. He is first and foremost a Bantu before becoming a politician and a writer. The interaction and a hitch in the process of the mingling of the three sides to the same man are given a no small prominence. It is to be mentioned here in passing that the ideas being interpreted are not mine but the author's. The condemnations and supports of one social or political concept or the other are his as can be seen readily from the novels themselves. It only happens that at times his ideas are reconstructed in order to fit into a certain pattern.

My language may seem bitter in places. I am aware of this possibility. Mine is an attempt to interprete at a pitch that might be considered high an idea that the writer expresses at a pitch that is surely higher. There is no doubt that the author's tone throughout the two novels is often high. This is the type of tone he chooses to adopt. Beating it down will be detracting from the peculiar nature of his writings, and will amount to emasculating the message which such a tone is meant to convey to the reade .

(3) S. Okechukwu Mezu, Léopold Sédar Senghor et la défense et illustration de la civilisation noire, (Paris: Didier, 1968), p. 7.

Two factors helped to make my study of Malonga's novels easy. I am an African like Malonga. It is generally believed that an African is better positioned than anyone else to understand a fellow African. We in Africa have a way of thinking which is our own. No amount of interpretation can make a non-African understand it to its roots. Translations have their limitations. A lot goes into the framing of a sentence than is discernable from the appearance of the words.

Secondly, I underwent a training similar to that of Jean Malonga. I was brought up in a little bush village manned by Holy Ghost Fathers. Like him I attended a Holy Ghost Fathers' Seminary, in my case, at Ihiala in Anambra State where I had all my secondary school education. My experience shows me that Reverend Father Hux of Mossaka can well be Reverend Father Chamberlain of the Holy Ghost Fathers' Seminary at Ihiala. And the two priests belong to the same religious order, that of the Holy Ghost Fathers. So I easily feel along with the writer as he narrates the activities of the missionaries in the Congo.

In spite of all these grounds of common interest I have nevertheless endeavoured to steer a middle course, to maintain a certain standard of intellectual detachment to make room for objectivity in my comments. Nigeria and the Congo were once colonial territories but there are minor differences in the colonial politics of the two countries. Nigeria, for example, did not taste the assimilation politics that was the order of the day in the former French colonies, which made some of their elites "métis culturels", to use Senghor's language.

The title of this thesis "The Commitment and Realism of Jean Malonga" is a fitting caption for a study of this

nature. The term "commitment" in its relationship to "questions socio-politiques" constitutes, at least for the purposes of this thesis, the "problématique congolaise". It is split further into its social and political aspects to conform with the author's own schedule which makes each aspect the principal theme of each novel.

There are four chapters in this work. They are all geared towards giving Jean Malonga his proper place in Africa's literary movement as more than a mere precursor, for such is the aim and objective of this study. In the first chapter an attempt will be made to identify the "problématique congolaise", (to borrow the terminology of his compatriot, Josué Ndamba), with which the author is very much obsessed. In the course of this identification the background to the "problématique" is delineated. The second chapter analyses the author's handling of the "problématique" from an optique that is social, and appraises the solutions that the author advanced. In the third chapter the same question is aborded but from the political angle. An assessment of the writer as a realist and artist engages the reader in the fourth chapter.

Finally, I shall endeavour throughout my discussions to stress what aspects of the novels may have been misunderstood or may have been misinterpreted inadvertently. It is my ardent wish that by the time I have ploughed through the novels, the motivating factor behind the author's writings, his aim and objective, his method of approach to his themes, his language, style, and other writing techniques of his will be in the position to be better appreciated.

Chapter One

BACKGROUND TO THE NOVELS

Indispensable to the understanding of the novels of Jean Malonga is acquaintance with the background to the issues which he discussed in them in a story form. An Igbo proverb says that "he who does not know how a corpse is buried when asked to exhume it starts from the legs". A situation like this, occasioned by ignorance of the relevant facts, should be avoided if an objective appraisal of Malonga's writings is to be achieved, and the depth of his commitment properly fathomed. In La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono he showed concern for his country's past, just like Chinua Achebe in his Things Fall Apart published only four years after. The reader needs to know what this past was. In Coeur d'Aryenne he talked about the present, especially in terms of the political situation of the time. The situation should be traced from its origins and grounds of discontent and apathy laid out. Unless this spade work is done before actually

reading the books, the tendency is for the reader to dismiss the two novels of Jean Malonga outright as "bad".[1]

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to trace the sociological and the political background of the novels and place Jean Malonga in his proper place in the scheme of things under the colonial administration. The Congo of the time existed within the framework of Afrique Equatoriale Française which, on the tribal level, is a conglomeration of Bantu ethnic groupings with a lot in common among themselves. Whatever is true of any one of them is, mutatis mutandis, the same of the others. As we progress we shall, therefore, have a global view of life in the territory before dwelling finally on Brazzaville and its environs where the setting is.

A. Sociological background

About the customs and traditions prevailing in the Congo around the time Jean Malonga was born, grew up, and wrote his novels, we have accounts both in literary and historical works. Congo is one of the four colonies[2] in Central Africa administered by the "Gouvernement Général" of French Equatorial Africa, all of which belonging to the same Bantu tribe had almost identical customs and traditions.

(1) A.C.Brench is already associated with this type of comment as regards Coeur d'Aryenne in his Writing in French from Senegal to Cameroon, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 64.
(2) The others are Gabon, Oubangi-Chari, Chad.

About twenty years before Malonga even dreamed of putting his pen to paper, René Maran, the Afro-Carribean novelist, had already worked for about six years in one of them - Ubangui-Chari (the present day Central African Empire) - as a French Government official, and made a faithful recording of the life and habits of the people among whom he lived and worked in his controversial novel, Batouala,[3] which he published in 1921, and which won the most-coveted Prix Concourt. We have no doubts as to the veracity of his facts for he himself affirmed in the Preface to his novel:

> "So this novel is completely objective. It doesn't even try to explain: it states facts. It does not show indignation: it records. It couldn't be otherwise."[4]

For our purpose, therefore, Batouala is an authentic source of information. At the same time as Maran was in Ubangui-Chari, other missionaries, explorers, and officials like him were busy having their experiences in other parts of Equatorial Africa, and were recording almost identical impressions. There are in addition accounts in novels written much later than those of Malonga which are revealing enough. They will be used too. For reasons of objectivity, our discussions are going to be studded with references to the works in question, which are in the main eye-witness accounts.

The people of Equatorial Africa led a life that was

(3) René Maran, Batouala, transl. Barbara Beck and Alexandre Mboukou, (Washington: Black Orpheus, 1972).
(4) Maran, pp. 7 - 8.

close to nature, with animals and human beings sharing the same habitat. Like every forest people,

> "Ce sont d'excellents agriculteurs et de bons pêcheurs. Certaines tribus se livrent particulièrement à la chasse."[5]

This, however, does not mean that they were an enterprising and industrious people. Mossaka, for example, was producing a lot of coffee and palm oil. But these crops do not need much personal attention in order to flourish. More often than not, theirs were plantations inherited from their ancestors. It is mainly during the harvesting season that physical labour is expended. So, as regards the average Equatorial African, he is

> "nonchalant, lazy ..... Thrift and ambition are unknown words to him. The threat of starvation ..... makes no impression on him".[6]

They were good in fishing, but they simply caught as much fish as would suffice for the day's meal. The same was applicable to hunting. These engagements aside, idleness reigned supreme. They believed that hard work cut short one's life span, and that it was those who did not understand what life was that exercised themselves in labour. But "to live from day to day, without remembering yesterday,

(5) Afrique Equatoriale Française: L'Encyclopédie coloniale et maritime, éd. Eugène Guernier, (Paris: Lang, Blanchong & cie, 1950), p. 16.
(6) Gabrielle M. Vassal, Life in French Congo, (London: Adelphi Terrace, 1925), p. 65.

without worrying about tomorrow, not anticipating; that is excellence, that is perfection."[7]

Like every forest people,too, the "equatorians" were superstitious. They lived in constant fear - "fear of fate, fear of omens, fear of their fetish priest".[8] It is true that the chiefs ruled the villages but the fetish priests were more dreaded than them. The people believed that no one dies a natural death, but from a spell cast on him by an evil one. So in any case of death, the fetish priest was consulted, and any one whose name he mentioned as responsible for it, was himself tortured to death.

The chiefs regarded themselves as custodians of the people's customs and traditions. They were meticulously preserved and nobody dared querry any one of them. About Batouala, for example, we are told that

> "As a guardian of obsolete customs, he remained faithful to the traditions which his ancestors had passed on to him, but didn't go deeply into anything outside of that. If anything were in opposition to custom, all reasoning was useless."[9]

Some of them may seem curious - like the one that stipulated that a corpse should remain exposed for eight days before burial in order to make room for a possibility of the dead man coming to life once more or, if he did not, so that his relations living far away would be able to come and see his remains for the last time before burial - but the fact remains that they were sacrosanct and should be

(7) Maran, p. 17.
(8) Vassal, p. 185.
(9) Maran, p. 23.

applied in all circumstances.

The older generation was respected by the younger one for her wisdom. Wealthy in experience, the older people had recourse to past events to give to the younger ones cherished advice. For the Bantu elders as well as for the Igbo "inu bu mmanu e ji eli okwu".[10] They had the habit of expressing themselves in proverbs. "When Bamara the lion roared, no antelope in the area dared to make a sound",[11] Batouala's old father told the young men who were regretting having feared the whites a little too much.

The powers of the old men can be far-reaching in some social issues like marriage. The Cameroonian novelist-cum-musician, Francis Bebey, in his Le Fils d'Agatha Moudio, spoke of an age-long custom according to which it was the duty of the elders to decide which girl a young man should marry.[12] It was the duty of the elders too to negotiate with the father of the girl or his "middleman" how much the dowry should be. All this was done according to tradition, the key to which they held. How much the dowry should be, what it should consist of, varied from clan to clan.

The alliance of the bridegroom and the family of his bride did not end with the dowry paid. He had to go to his father-in-law's house from time to time and cultivate his lands. In a case of war involving his father-in-law, the son-in-law had to defend him even at the risk of his own life. He in his turn could ask his father-in-law for help in trade, or in a palaver.

Contrary to the old men, the women had limited respect.

(10) meaning "proverb is the oil with which words are eaten".
(11) Maran, p. 77.
(12) Francis Bebey, Le Fils d'Agatha Moudio, (Yaounde: Editions Clé, 1967), p. 61.

They were a source of pleasure for the men who had the right to use them as they liked at any time, at any place. They were offered to strangers for their relaxation and comfort. Chaillu, writing in 1892, told of how a king offered him on his arrival at his palace his wife, and when he declined the king remonstrated with him: "Oh well, she can at any rate wait on you and cook for you".[13] In Batouala we are told that Yassigui'ndja was already accustomed to the "daily liberties" of her husband who would simply jump on her and start having sex with her without allowing her to wake up from sleep. Women were an indispensable instrument to the success of any festive occasion:

> "We'll dance."
> "We'll sing."
> "Afterwards we'll show the women that we know how to use them."[14]

Because of this unique role of theirs in the society, tradition was very lenient with them when they took the initiative in the game of love. A woman was free, if one is to believe du Chaillu, to have sex with any man her instinct attracted her to. Instinct was the key word. A woman was not supposed to control her sexual appetite. "female chastity is little value", writes du Chaillu.[15] She should give full vent to her passion any time she was aroused sexually. That she was married or not had no significance. The cuckolded husband could claim, if he liked, a compensation from his wife's lover if he felt that there some damage "caused in using his goods". The compensation

(13) Paul du Chaillu, Adventures in the Great Forest of Equatorial Africa and the Country of the Dwarfs, (London: John Murray, 1892), p. 28.
(14) Maran, p. 34.
(15) Chaillu, p. 182.

consisted in "a few chickens, two or three goats, some brood eggs or a pair of slightly used loincloths".[16] But there is also another side to the coin. Among certain tribes, though chastity was not valued for itself, it was a serious offence to commit adultery. Punishment was by fines, graduated according to the material worth of the culprit. An offender who was penniless was sold into slavery. For committing adultery with a man's "chief" wife,[17] however, there was no option of fine for the offender: he was sold straightaway into slavery, which was the least punishment reserved for such an offence. The usual punishment was death. And in some tribes the woman was put to death too.

The fact that women were significant only from the sexual angle explains why polygamy was much practised among the Equatorial Africans. After ten months of marriage, a young man was supposed to have long stopped having sex with his wife who should be heavily expecting his baby under normal circumstances. In fact, custom had it that upon the first signs of pregnancy she should retire to a special part of the village called Nzo Ngudi Nkento.[18] There she should remain, far from the male population until the baby was born. After its birth the mother was given two to three years for breastfeeding and nurturing it up before returning to her husband's. During this period, her husband was not supposed to do without sex. What has been said earlier about

(16) Maran, p. 36.
(17) i.e. the woman he married first.
(18) i.e. "the house of the bearing women" - a custom among the Ba-Kongo: (translation mine).

the non-control of sexual urge for the women is also applicable to the men. The man was not expected to starve from sex during the wife's confinement. Naturally he took advantage of the tradition which permitted him plurality of wives to marry a second wife. And during the second's maternity period, he married the third. He would continue in this progression until either his pocket or sexual prowess could afford no more wives. We have an example of this sexual liberty in Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba. In the Catholic Mission of Bomba Zacharie was having sex regularly with a Sixa girl, Catherine, because his wife, Clémentine was having "un tout jeune bébé sur les bras".[19] This was their custom and the people found it wise. When, for example, Zacharie was told that, after her scuffle with Clémentine, Catherine was thrashed by the R.P.S., he went wild with anger. When the old woman in the house where he was condemned outright the priest's unwarranted behaviour, pointing out that since Catherine was not yet married nothing prevented her from marrying Zacharie, Zacharie exploded in appreciation:

> "Voilà mère[20]..... voilà la bonne sagesse de nos ancêtres!"

Polygamy was so commonly practised that it was rare to find a married man who had only one wife. In fact Hustaert points out that "a Nkundo[21] man with only one wife is an object of ridicule".[22] One could however find a handful of

(19) Mongo Beti, Pauvre Christ de Bomba, (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1956), p. 222.
(20) Beti, p. 227.
(21) a man from the South-Eastern part of the Belgian Congo
(22) G. Hustaert, Le Mariage des Nkundo, (Brussels, 1938), p. 360.

Congolese people who married more than one wife not principally for sexual reasons but to have enough farm hands, or at times to have a wife present in the house to take charge of household duties while the other wife was on a routine visit to her family. But there are cases where the above reasons are not explanatory enough: for example in the case where Boone met a man "who had forty wives".[23]

In many countries of the world, the child is identified in relationship to his father's kin. But in the Congo it is to the mother's. Bonds of kinship were traced through women. People who were related traced their origin to a common ancestress and her daughters. In some clans it was necessary that a suitor approached his future bride's maternal uncle first of all before starting any discussions whatsoever about marriage. And even after marriage the wife remained very closely linked to her kinsmen. Hence, from time to time, she would leave her matrimonial home to stay with them for days.

Betrothal often took place before puberty, between the ages of nine and ten. Du Chaillu put the age at "five, and sometimes still younger".[24] The initiation rites which followed as closely as possible the first menstruation, were a prelude to marriage. But all betrothals did not always take place at the above-mentioned ages. In fact, we have instances of betrothal even before the girl's birth, as was narrated in Le Fils d'Agatha Moudio:

> "mon père, avant de pousser le dernier soupir, avait eu la force de me trouver une épouse pour

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(23) C.C. Boone, Congo as I saw it, (New York: J.J. Little & Ives Company, 1927), p. 35.
(24) Chaillu, p. 264.

> plus tard lorsque je serais grand: 'Ecoute, Tanga, si jamais l'une quelconque de tes femmes a une fille un jour, je t'en supplie, donne-la pour épouse à mon fils, tu m'entends, Tanga?' Et Tanga avait répondu oui en pleurant, voyant que son ami fermait les yeux pour de bon. C'est ainsi qu'à l'âge de six ans, je me trouvais déjà fiancé, bien que ma future femme ne fut même pas encore conçue dans le ventre de sa mère".[25]

It was not rare to find two pregnant women striking a bargain thus:

> "If my child is a boy and yours a girl, I want my boy to marry your girl".[26]

But where this was not the case, especially where the girl had already been circumcised, the interval between betrothal and marriage was not long. For the Congo of 1920's Van Wing put this interval at a few weeks.[27] It often happened, as is naturally expected in such situations, that at times the young man grew up and did not like the girl to whom he was betrothed or her family set up. Sohier records that where that was the case, the presents made to the girl's family were returned.[28]

Life in a polygamous Congolese family of the early 20's, in the opinion of du Chaillu, was one without love. The man never caressed his wife nor the woman her child. To express an emotion was considered a sign of weakness for both man and woman. Parents never played with their children.

(25) Bebey, pp. 26 - 27.
(26) Boone, p. 34.
(27) Van Wing, Etudes Bakongo: Histoire et Sociologie, Brussels, 1921), p. 199.
(28) A. Sohier, Le mariage en droit coutumier congolais, (Brussels, 1943), p. 93.

When a Congolese talked about his wife loving him he meant feeding him well for the two terms "love" and "feed" always went together in the ancient Congolese family lexique. And the greatest commandment in a polygamist's family code was "Feed thy man well!", as can be seen from Damagondai's lecture to his wives:

> "The old fellow began to lecture his wives telling them to love him and to feed him well, for he had given a great deal of money and goods to their parents for them and they were a constant expense and uneasiness to him; to all which the poor women listened with great respect; and no doubt made up their grateful hearts to give their lord and master a good breakfast next morning."[29]

Sohier goes further to reveal that no matter how rich a suitor was, it was a custom among the Congolese that his relatives should supply the greater proportion of the presents to be made to the girl's parents. This custom came into existence to enable the poorer elements in a family group to get married, for, just as in most African societies, it was regarded among the Bantu as shameful for a man of marriageable age to die a bachelor.

As was said earlier, for a Congolese his "marriage could be arranged over his head".[30] Under the matrilineal structure a lineage was empowered by custom and tradition to claim wives for its sons from another lineage to which marriage payments had been made. That means that a man could marry his daughter's daughter. In principle he had the right to. But in practice, more often than not, he claimed

(29) Chaillu, p. 171.
(30) Lucy Mair, African Marriage and Social Change, (London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd., 1969), p. 81.

his daughter's daughter for a younger kinsman of his.

In a betrothal ceremony the girl signified her acceptance of the marriage offer by accepting the presents from her suitor. Rejecting them showed total refusal. The offer of gifts was highly significant as a request for marriage. Whichever party felt fascination for the other offered them first. In 1920 it was common too to find a young Congolese girl taking presents to a young colonialist whom she fancied. If the young man accepted them the presentation would be more regular and more frequent, culminating with the girl packing her belongings into the young man's house. It was also fequent for two Congolese sisters to love the same colonialist, marry him,live with him, and make babies for him. Vassal records an incident where this happened. The settler, after some time, went back to France. To his brother who was coming to the Congo he gave a message for the two sisters. One of them was already nursing his baby, while the other was "very anxious to know when my /his/brother will be back, for she wants a baby too."[31]

From the above citation one could deduce that the typical Congolese woman had a good time with a white settler. But this was not so back at home. She was hardly ever well-treated by her indigenous husband. Merciless beating was the order of the day. In Batouala the cruel beating Ouorro gave one of his "yassis" is presented to us as a matter of great satisfaction and admiration for his comrades:

> "He has thrashed her well, I guarantee it. She was just sores and bruises all over. No doubt it was a beautiful job. Blame him if you want. Who among us has never beaten one of his wives?"[32]

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(31) Vassal, p. 79. (32) Maran, p. 73.

Men married women at every opportunity, and at all ages up to the age of seventy or eighty. Absolute obedience was enforced on the wife by her husband without mecy, at times with the help of a whip made from hipopotamus skin, accompanied by the following upbraiding:

> "Rascal, do you think I paid my slaves for you for nothing."[33]

Wives were treated like beasts of burden. It was not uncommon to find the man walking ahead on the road and the woman trailing behind him bearing the load. Du Chaillu records an incident where he found a woman being tortured to death by her husband -

> "I heard a woman crying out as if in great pain. On my asking what was the matter, a man told me the king was punishing one of his wives; and some others hinted that I had better go and try to save her life. I hurried over to the king's house, and there in front of the verandah, a spectacle met my eyes which froze my blood with horror. A woman, naked, was tied by the middle to a stout stake driven into the ground. Her legs were stretched out and fastened to other smaller stakes, and stout cords were bound round her neck, waist, ankles and wrists. These cords were being twisted with sticks, and when I arrived the skin was already bursting from the terrible compression .... Then I asked what she had done to deserve such a punishment. He said she had stolen the bead belt which he usually wore around his waist and given it to her lover ....." [34]

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(33) Chaillu, p. 265.
(34) Chaillu, pp. 118 - 119.

The woman's hardest time was on the occasion of death either of her husband or of her father-in-law. As has been said earlier, the Congolese did not believe in natural death. French medical doctors working in that country around the 1920's did everything possible to explain to the "autochtones" that someone could die of sickness, but to no avail. For them a man always died of one evil influence or the other. They believed too that someone could send a wild animal to go and molest another. Boone witnessed the trial of a Congolese accused of having been instrumental to the death of his neighbour by sending a snake to bite him, just because he had had a misunderstanding with the deceased a few days before the biting incident.[35] But where no foul play was suspected from the outside the wife of the house whose movements might have been causing some concern in the past was normally picked up as responsible for her husband's malaise. On his death such a wife was buried alive with him. But where all his wives' conduct throughout had been adjuged exemplary and beyond reproach, they were on their husband's death "transferred like merchandise or household chattels to the eldest son or brother of the deceased".[36]

The principal item of the Congolese social life was the dance. As Thomas Melone rightly pointed out about the Bantu (whether of the Cameroons or of the Congo):

> "on danse pratiquement à tout propos, pour oublier les soucis de la vie, pour fêter une hôte, pour célébrer un mariage, pour égayer une bande, pour

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(35) Boone, p. 32.
(36) Vassal, p. 185.

> le simple plaisir de s'amuser et de s'évader de ce monde par la magie de l'excitation individuelle et de l'émotion collective."[37]

And in Batouala the same situation is echoed:

> "We dance for everything, for nothing, for pleasure. Nothing is done or happens, but we dance about it forthwith. And our dances are innumerable. We dance the dance of the water of the land and of the water of the sky, the dance of the fire, the dance of the wind, the dance of the ant, the dance of the elephant, the dance of the trees, the dance of the leaves, the dance of the stars, the dance of the earth and of that which is within it, all the dances, all the dances".[38]

Their dance was full of life and vigour. Men, women and children participated, striking the ground with their feet, shouting, twisting their waists, according to René Maran, in sexual excitement and voluptuous abandon. The rhythm and the movement varied from tribe to tribe, but all had one goal: they led to delights of love. In Batouala we have an example of how such a "dance and love" scene could be sparked off. Beautiful Yassigui'ndja, wearing a male sex organ, danced her female partner, yet a virgin, into sexual excitement. When the latter was seen to be filled with urge, a male partner came out and took possession of her. At the sight of the two copulating the crowd went wild with libidinous frenzy: the sexual carnival became total -

> "A strange madness suddenly seized the confused

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(37) Thomas Melone, Mongo Beti: l'homme et le destin, (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971), p. 102.
(38) Maran, p. 73.

> human throng surrounding the dancers. The men tore off the pieces of fabric which served as loincloths; the women also removed the rest of their clothes.
>
> The breasts of the women bounced. A heavy odor of genitals, urine, sweat, and alcohol pervaded the air, more acrid than the smoke. Couples paired off. They danced as Yassigui'ndja and the girl had danced. There were fights and raucous cries. Bodies spread out at random on the ground ....
>
> Sexual drunkenness, increased by alcoholic drunkenness. Immense natural joy, released from all control. Blood flowed freely from splendid abuses. Desire was the only master .....
>
> One more couple had just fallen to the ground".[39]

Such was the licence and the free-for-all love that was usually associated with dance. Among some tribes,like the Boubou for example, the dance was also an opportunity for certain gifted women to display their talents. Pretending to be overwhelmed by the attentions of their partners, they took to flight screaming and climbed on to the roofs of houses.

The Congolese of Jean Malonga's era had a curious knowledge of time. Time was reckoned by the moon. He did not know when he was born or married. A month or a year made no difference to him. If he were told to wait a day, a week or a year for an event, the difference in time would not strike him in any special way. Running to catch a steamer that would take him to Stanley Pool and missing it, and being told to wait till the next day, he would accept it as if it were the same to him. According to

(39) Haran, p. 87.
(40) Vassal, p. 168.

Vassal's records "A journey of three days or three weeks does not give him any definite impression, and he will prepare for it no more than for a journey of three hours".[40] The hour of the day was signified by measuring off portions of the left thumb the middle joint signifying noon.

* *
*

The natives of the Congo of the 19th and early 20th centuries were a very unforgiving people. Their unforgiving nature at times hurls them into a rash pursuit of vengeance, stemming more often than not from an illogical appraisal of a vague and non-suggestive situation. A column entitled "Ngouabi's relatives murder Congolese Roman Archbishop" of an issue of the New Nigerian states

> "The Roman Catholic Archbishop of the Congo, Cardinal Biyayanga has been murdered. An official communique said he was kidnapped and killed during the night by three relatives of President Ngouabi, who was himself, assassinated last Friday. The three men have been arrested.
>
> Cardinal Biyayanga had an audience with President Ngouabi shortly before the assassination. One report said he was the last official to see the President alive.
>
> The communique said the killings of both men would receive appropriate punishments and warned against further acts of 'repression and banditry'."[41]

These recent developments in the Congo are a pointer to what the past had been. The unforgiving attitude of the

(40) Vassal, p. 168.
(41) New Nigerian, 24 March 1977, p. 14, col. 4

Congolese people had become for them a way of life. Differences were never settled in the true sense of the word. An opportunity for revenge was always awaited. And the waiting could last from generation to generation. The type of clash that takes place while a family still waits to revenge on the other because of a "palaver" inherited by the two families from their ancestors is this one witnessed by Vassal herself and which she thus describes:

> "The first one I listened to was between two chiefs who brought their grievances to a French settler with whom we were staying. Their eloquence was remarkable, their voices rose and fell, they stood up and sat down again, they gesticulated with their arms, and their expressions changed from contempt to anger, their discuss /sic/ from threats to abuse and curses ..... For the first few minutes their agitated movement, fierce glances, and angry words led one to expect that they would soon come to blows, but after a time one doubted their sincerity ..... When they were tired and had exhausted all arguments, they appeared quite satisfied at being dismissed with a drink, they had achieved no result. I was surprised at this ending when told that it was the continuation of a palaver begun with their fathers! They were probably keeping it going that it might remain fresh to hand down as a legacy to their offspring".[42]

Now, we know that African families grow by leaps and bounds, thanks to polygamy which is commonly practised. In the Congo the "palaver" can be passed on until the families that were directly involved become tribes. And even at the tribal level hostilities continue. Hence it is that the tribes of the Congo were constantly in rivalry and at war with

(42) Vassal, p. 171.

themselves. With the birth of politics the same situation was translated into the political life of the people. The result was violence, wanton destruction of property, brutal killings. This macabre incident was recorded in 1959:

> "Des troubles ont éclaté le 17 février dans les faubourgs de Brazzaville, capitale de l'Etat du Congo associé à la France. Cette rébellion n'est pas dirigé contre l'autorité française, mais ce conflit oppose sur le plan social et politique deux tribus rivales du Congo ..... Le bilan de ceux-ci /troubles/[43] est au minimum de 120 tués et de 200 blessés, 300 arrestations ont été opérées."[44]

As a result of the bad blood that was always flowing in their veins the Congolese fought almost as often as they danced. There were skirmishes here and there, between towns, between villages. They fought for everything: to retaliate for past injuries, to recapture an abducted slave-girl, to procure new ones for repleting the chiefs' "women's courtyard", to dispossess a better provided village of her stores of victuals, to demonstrate superiority of strength to neighbours, to expand existing village boundaries. But according to du Chaillu unlawful intercourse with the women of a neighbouring tribe or village was one of the two main causes of many a palaver in Africa. If a tribe wanted to fight, they made this the cause by getting one of their women to intrigue with a man of the other tribe or village; and even if the tribe or village did not want to fight they were often forced into it. The second was the case of women who "desert their husbands for abuse or other causes, and run off to other villages; and as it is a point of honour to return no fugitives of this kind, here is another

(43) Brackets mine. "troubles" inserted for sake of clarity.
(44) Revue Congolaise, 3(Mars 1959), p. 10.

fertile source of palaver and war."[45] Palavers became such a way of life among the people that a Congolese writer made it in 1968 a title to one of his novels.[46] Most of them ended up in physical confrontations between the natives who, to enhance their fighting skills took often to hunting -

> "No giraffes, no rhinoceros, what matter! One hunts what one finds. The hunt is the game of the strong, the fight of man against beast, of skill against brute strength. It prepares for war. Prove who can his ability, his courage, his vigor, his endurance. When chasing the beast one has wounded, it is necessary to be able to run a long time without tiring or getting winded /sic/, and to be sure of eye, agile of foot, and lithe".[47]

Their reasons for hunting cannot be better put. Hunting was the word. The outcome of it in terms of how much game or what type was killed was both irrelevant and beside the point.

The abundance of slaves in the Congolese society of Jean Malonga was the natural consequence of frequent wars. During the slave trade era they were first and foremost a source of wealth to their masters who sold them each time the slave dealers were around in exchange for cotton materials from Portugal, gun powder from Angola, or tobacco from the West Indies. In the 1920's, however, that was no longer the case. What Suret-Canale calls "patriarchal or domestic slavery"[48] became the order of the day. Slaves were no longer sold out of the tribe. They had "a large portion of liberty, and a certain voice and influence in the village

(45) Chaillu, p. 162.
(46) c.f. Guy Menga, Palabre Stérile, (Yaoundé: éd. CLE, 1968).
(47) Maran, p. 129.
(48) See Jean Suret-Canale, French Colonialism in Tropical Africa: 1900 - 1945, (London: Hurst & Cie, 1971), p. 28.

where they were owned."[49] Their masters had so much confidence in them that they sent them on trading trips taking along with them a lot of goods. The slaves on their part proved worthy of such trusts by discharging their assignments faithfully. They enjoyed the protection of their masters whom they in turn provided with food procured from hunting and from farming the soil. They often had their own property. Their masters were hardly ever unkind to them because "they fear that the slave will in revenge bewitch them".[50] But unfortunately like their companions in suffering (i.e. the women) all the slaves occupied a very inferior position in the society and could be put to death by their masters at any time and with impunity. In wars they were positioned where the action was hottest. As regards the lot of the female ones among them the writer Paulme says:

> "There were three possible destinies for these women:[51]
> (1) Some were sold to the slave trade.
> (2) Others stayed in the chief's house and were servant girls, known as dimbi, to nobly born wives. They were allowed as unofficial husband a slave from the farm village /sic/. Their children belonged to the chief, their sons becoming soldiers or farm slaves, thus supplying the manpower for the requirements of the economy .....
> (3) A slave-girl could be given, as a slave, to another chief. These gifts were made according to the law of exchange."[52]

To sum up, a slave was regarded simply as a commodity and was treated like all other commodities. Batouala, in order

(49) Chaillu, p. 264.
(50) Chaillu, p. 264.
(51) i.e. during the days of the slave trade.
(52) Denise Paulme ed., Women of Tropical Africa, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 128.

to marry Yassigui'ndja, paid as a bride price "seven loin-cloths, a case of salt, three copper collars, a female dog, four cooking pots, thirty chickens, ten female goats, twenty-four large baskets full of millet, and a young slave!"[53]

B. Political background

The political situation of the Congo during Jean Malonga's era revolved around three main pillars, namely the administrators, the missionaries, and the traders. The three groups operated together and were complementary to one another. Armed with the cross and the cassock, the missionaries quickly penetrated all the nooks and corners of the country singing the praises of God and France as they went, and preaching to the "autochtones" doctrines of total subservience and absolute obedience towards their white overlords. The tax gathered from the companies enabled the mother country to provide the necessary purse for the administrators. The administrators had as their primary assignment to protect the missionaries and the commercialists against the natives. The unfortunate natives found themselves helplessly in the hands of the three giants, each exploiting them at will. Such was the tragedy of the colonial polity.

a) Administrators

The Kongo people were one of the main offshoots of the early Bantu invasion of the Southern half of Africa.

(53) Maran, p. 88.

The invading Bantu forces, in order to avoid the thick forests of the Central Congo Basin, pushed towards the North-West as far as the Lower Congo and its cataract region. They stretched north of the Congo mouth towards the Kabinda and Loango coasts and settled, spreading little by little to the other parts of the Kongo.

The Portuguese explorer Dom Diego Cam was the first European to set foot on Kongo soil. That was in 1482. The natives immediately informed him of the existence in the hinterland of the powerful King Mani. To him the Portuguese despatched a formal embassy led by Roderigo de Souza and some Catholic missionaries in 1490. The Portuguese suzerainty was accepted by the Kingdom of Kongo, but was gradually weakened as the Portuguese power dwindled under the usurpation of her throne by the Spanish. They were eventually compelled to transfer their forces out of Kongo in 1608 to coastal regions of Angola.

France became interested in the Kongo only towards the end of the reign of Louis XIV, that is, at the beginning of the 18th century. Full of tact, she did not want to send a team of administrators immediately because of a possible open confrontation, but a group of missionaries. To that effect, in 1760, she induced the Pope to sanction a French Roman Catholic mission to the Kongo. The Abbé Belgarde was appointed and he arrived in the company of Abbé Prayart and others at the Loango coast in 1766. The French missionary effort, however, did not last for over eight years.

The Italian born Pierre Savorgan de Brazza, a junior officer in the French Navy, began his first exploration in 1875. The other two expeditions that followed concluded the establishment of a French colony on the Congo. Brazza's

success was attributable to his charming personality, his humaneness, his show of concern for the Africans' lot, his deep-seated love for them, his pathetic approach to their problems. In this, he differed entirely from the bloody career of Stanley[54] on the other side of the great river who left "no other memory of his passage than 52 battles."[55] Brazza is famous throughout history for having won the Congo for France and for having governed the territory till his recall and subsequent death without a single shot from his gun at the natives. But his colleagues did not follow his footstep. Among the 33 officials who came with him to the Congo in 1883 some flogged the natives on the slightest pretext. Some, like Albert Dolisie, often engaged in scuffles, and Chevannes, Brazza's right hand man, was reported to have once opened fire on "marauders" near the Congo River. And even so, Brazza never relaxed his efforts to appease the natives. By the end of his third expedition, they came out to sing his praises openly, starting with an outright condemnation of Stanley:

(54) Henry Morton Stanley was a British freelance journalist who explored and won the Congo Free State (now Zaïre) for King Leopold II of Belgium. He was in the French Congo before the arrival of Brazza, and because of the destruction and havoc he caused there the first meeting of Brazza with the natives was unfriendly. However, Brazza played him out of the French Congo and took over his interim base at Stanleyville. He remained Brazza's bitterest enemy and rival till Brazza's death in 1905.

(55) Richard West, Brazza of the Congo, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), p. 96.

"SOLO: Boulamentari (Boula Matari : Stanley) loin de nous:
Lui beaucoup méchant blanc
Nous pas aimer lui.
CHORUS: Méchant blanc! Méchant blanc!
SOLO: Rocamambo[56] parmi nous
Noirs amis des blancs
Blancs amis des noirs
CHORUS: Grands blancs! Grands blancs!
SOLO: Donner bonne marchandise,
Pour manioc, bananes,
Caoutchouc, dents d'éléphants.
CHORUS: Grands blancs! Grands blancs!
SOLO: Donner bon Alougou (eau-de-vie)
Pour bien jouer tam-tam.
Donner sel et tabac.
CHORUS: Grands blancs! Grands blancs!
FINAL CHORUS: Rocamambo parmi nous
Noirs amis des blancs
Blancs amis des noirs
Jolis blancs! Jolis blancs!"[57]

Not long after, his administration came under bitter criticisms by the French and Belgian "unscrupulous and rapacious businessmen". He was recalled to France in 1897, and dismissed from office in 1898.

With the removal of Brazza from office dawned a new era in the colonial history of the Congo. King Leopold had succeeded in convincing France to give Brazza the boot so that the new administrators in the Congo could adopt the repressive measures, the plunder and brutality of his team on the other side of the Congo, for which reasons public opinion had been much against him in Europe. The king also worked up the media men in France and mounted a vicious propaganda against the good name of Brazza. Many newspapers came out unfortunately with an outright condemnation of Brazza's gentleness to the Congolese.

(56) Nickname which they gave Brazza.
(57) West, pp. 135 - 136.

Jeanselme,[58] in an interview with Le Matin, criticised Brazza for "practising philanthropy, not colonization". Le XIX Siècle, writing under the caption "Gentleness .... or Violence" emphasized that the aim of colonisation was "the development of the material wealth of the colonized countries and of the colonizers" which "will only very occasionally be achieved by 'talking nicely' to the natives, and above all respecting their habits and their customs, which for most of the time are based on fecklessness and laziness ....."[59] He was also accused of being unfair to the traders and colonists for not allowing them to continue exploiting the natives to death.

The result of such an open encouragement to put the agricultural wealth of the Congo under pillage was the "rubber rush" at the tail end of the 19th. century, a rush that could only be rivalled by the race for gold in Alaska or for mineral deposits in Australia. The price of rubber had gone up in world market due to the invention of the automobile. Those traders dealing on the commodity in the Congo Free State had already started counting their money in millions. In 1898 the companies came into existence in France's Equatorial colony, with all their attention focussed on rubber. They often clashed with the natives who could not cope with their ever increasing quest for the commodity. During each incident the government, at the request of the companies, drafted in Senegalese troops "who burned down the villages and pursued recalcitrants into the bush."[60] Usually the natives did not resist but fled in thousands to the Congo Free State, if they inhabited near the river, or into the bush or caves from which they were flushed out by hand-grenades.

(58) A colonist well-known for growing rubber in Gabon.
(59) Quoted by West, p. 163. (60) West, p. 170.

In collusion with the concessionary companies the government introduced one repressive measure after the other. "Punitive tax" was imposed on local producers of salt, thus dissuading them from furthering production. Native salt became unavailable in the market, and Africans had no option but to buy salt from the companies. Playing drums was put on the index, until after the payment of a yet "most blatantly cruel" tax. The result was that after a hard day's labour the people had no native music to relax with - a great punishment indeed, for, as we have seen earlier, music and dance were to the Congolese social life what salt is to food. A "head tax" was also levied. Made payable only in cash, it was greatly abused by collectors in military outfit who forced the villagers to pay the same tax two or three times, or in default forfeit their wives to the officials for rape and maltreatment.

Tax collection aside, repression was assuming enormous proportions. The natives were recruited to make long journeys, sometimes as far as Chad, with heavy loads on their heads, without food, nourishment, medical attention. Many of them never reached their destinations. The Inquisition set up in 1905 to probe the atrocities saw on their way to Dékoa "the skeleton of a Yakoma who had died the previous year while serving as a porter".[61] And the method of recruitment of porters: "a straight military regime ... chicotte, court martial, repression, prison and the rest".[62] Those on recruitment drive were taught how to set up temporary make-shift prison huts for the left-overs (normally women and children). Reports emanating from Fort Crampel alone in

(61) West, p. 182.
(62) West, p. 184.

1903 told of Africans who refused to be conscripted and were shot without trial, or taken prisoners and left to die without food; of women cooked alive in ovens; of a servant who was forced "to drink soup boiled from a dead man's head"; of a prisoner blown up "with a stick of dynamite".

Then came the construction of the railway linking Brazzaville to the coast. First mooted in 1882, the idea of constructing the railway was hailed because of its likelihood of passing though a region of great mineral wealth. In 1910 the contract was given to the Société de Construction des Batignoles. But actual work on it commenced in 1921 and ended in 1930. Constant shortage of funds compelled the railway company to capitalize on local labour. The government counted on some 20,000 Africans who would be ready to take up jobs in the company. But in reality many of them were engaged in private gainful occupations. Even those who had not simply fled into the bush. The recruiting officers had to go as far as Oubangui, but even so met with armed resistance. Thousands fled their homes. Those who unfortunately fell into their nets were reported in 1929 to be dying in their hundreds during the long march to Bangui. The toll rose in the barges that conveyed them from Bangui to Brazzaville. While those inside were being choked to death those on top were falling "one or two men everyday" into the river during the 15 to 20 days journey to Brazzaville.

In Brazzaville the recruits were poorly fed. Smoked fish from Angola caused them all sorts of stomach disorders. Even the sturdiest bent under the crushing labour. Cement weighing 300 kilos was balanced on a stick carried by two of them. "Chicotte" was there to goad them on even at the verge

of total exhaustion and collapse. "One doesn't beat the niggers to kill them but to make them work", explained an Italian overseer when accosted. The years 1926 to 1929 were the blackest in the sorry tale of carnage and death of Africans labouring to facilitate the transport to the ocean port of their own wealth taken away from them by force. Thousands of them died from disease. Those who plodded on were described by Joseph Conrad as moving skeletons. At the end of the story, figures reveal a total of "14,100 deaths, excluding those who slunk away to die in the bush".[63] Pierre-Quint, however, put the death toll in 1929 at 17,000, with still 300 kilometres more of rail to construct.[64]

Forced labour was not only for men. Women were used too. They engaged in road construction just like the men. A group of them was despatched to repair the road on which Gide and his colleagues were to pass. They were forced by the militia men to labour throughout the night in order to beat the deadline. Gide records the unhappy incident:

> "Ce pauvre bétail ruisselait sous l'averse. Nombre d'entre elles allaitaient tout en travaillant. Tous les vingt mètres environ, aux côtés de la route, un vaste trou, profond de trois mètres le plus souvent; c'est de là que, sans outils appropriés, ces misérables travailleuses avaient extrait la terre sablonneuse pour les remblais. Il était arrivé plus d'une fois que le sol sans consistance s'effondrât, ensevelissant les femmes et les enfants qui travaillaient au fond du trou .... Travaillant le plus souvent trop loin de leur village pour pouvoir y retourner le soir, ces femmes se sont construit dans la forêt des huttes provisoires, perméables abris de branches et de roseaux."[65]

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(63) West, p. 203.
(64) Léon Pierre-Quint, André Gide, (Paris: Stock, 1952), p. 200.
(65) André Gide, "Voyage au Congo", Journal 1939 - 1949, (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 739.

This story looks unbelievable, but Gide, after the manner of René Maran, made it clear that his reports were not fictitious but based on truth, and that he "related nothing that was not scrupulously exact".

How much the Africans suffered on account of the porterage system did not escape Gide's notice. He uncovered, to his greatest shock, the massacre of thirty-two Africans in the Boda district.[66] Ngoto,[67] a town in this district, failed to supply her quota of porters to the colonial administration for a journey of some French officials. The villagers explained that they could not leave their farms at that time of the year. Immediately, Pasha, the French administrator of Boda, sent the African sergeant, Yemba, to punish them. Yemba left Boda with three guards, and collecting two or three men from every village they passed, arrived at Bedembéré, the villagers collected already put in chains. They tied the villagers (twelve men) to trees. The village head, Kobélé, took to his heels. Yemba and the guard, Bondjo, shot the twelve men. A great massacre followed. Yemba matcheted a large number of women to death. Then, seizing four small children, he locked them up in a hut and set it on fire.

In the neighouring Oubangui-Chari the situation was just as pathetic as in the Congo. In his characteristic limpid and conversational style, Maran wrote about how happy the Africans were before the arrival of the "boundjous": "we thought only about drinking, eating, sleeping, dancing, and mounting our women."[68] Then the whites arrived, imposed forced labour on them, compelled them to forced porterage under sun and rain, caned them each time they caught them betting at the "patara" (while the whites themselves gambled with impunity), suppressed their customs and imposed their

(66) Boda is a district in Oubangui-Chari, very close to the Congo.
(67) Samba N'Goto, head of the village, told Gide the story.
(68) Maran, p. 71.

own, forbade them to drink and to dance. Their agricultrual products were poorly paid for - 3 francs for a kilo of rubbor and 15 sous for a kilo of banga. And even the meagre sum realised was not their own for "it is just at that moment that the government chose to raise our poll tax from five to seven or even ten francs!"[69] The result was that the Africans spent all their lives paying taxes, with nothing left over for them to enable them keep their wretched lives going. Thus Batouala concludes the mournful "récit":

> "We are only taxable flesh. We are only beasts of burden. Beasts? Not even that. Dogs? They feed them, and they care for their horses. Us? We are for them less than those animals; we are lower than the lowest. They are slowly crushing us".[70]

No one is, therefore, left in doubt about the poor situation of affairs in the Congo and her environs, the hostilities and bad blood between the Africans and the colonial government.

b) Concessionary companies

The greatest atrocities perpetrated in the Congo against the Africans were by the white businessmen, operating under the umbrage of the colonial administration. The history of the Concessional Companies, which grouped all of them, dates from 1898, when a Commission was set up by France to share out her Equatorial colony among the companies, forty of them in number. They were given the right to exploit their territories for thirty years, in return for which they should pay stipulated rents to the state for the maintenance of the law enforcement agents in the territory. Thus the companies had the full backing of the government in all their operations. Furthermore, the French government, to

(69) Maran, p. 75.
(70) Maran, pp. 75 - 76.

buttress the position of the companies, decreed that all "vacant lands" belonged to her. These included the rubber-producing forests, rivers, and river banks. Nothing was left to the natives excepting their huts and the tiny pieces of land on which they were erected.

By 1900 the companies went into full-scale operation. In order to meet their financial obligations to government, they took to massive exploitation of the people. The "muchracking journalist", Morel, discovered in the course of his inquiries that the excess of imports over exports recorded every year in the Congo during that period could only mean that the natives were forced to hand over their agricultural products for nothing. In his well-known book, The British Case in the French Congo, he spelt out neatly the difference between "commerce" and "exploitation":

> "The difference between commerce and 'exploitation' - which is a polite way of describing robbery aggravated by violence - is the difference between approaching the owner of an article and offering to buy it from him, and putting a pistol to the owner's head, bidding him hand over his goods on pain of death ....."[71]

Therefore, there was no real commerce between the natives and the companies but open day robbery and exploitation.

Like the administrators, the white traders treated the Africans with unjustifiable brutality. While Brazza and his team of Inquiry[72] were in the Congo, three

(71) E.D. Morel, The British Case in the French Congo, (London: Heinemann, 1903), p. 5.

(72) They were sent by the French Government to the Congo to investigate the atrocities being perpetrated there by the whites against the natives.

labourers in a trading post went to him to complain. After listening to them, Brazza called the white trader in charge of the post and rebuked him. When he left the white man summoned the three labourers and told them that Brazza asked him to give each of them twenty-five strokes of the "chicotte". And right away he started walloping them, while they cursed Brazza for having pretended to be sympathetic towards them.

The cruelties aside, the concessionary companies did not allow the natives to sell their rubber to foreigners from whom they received more money for their products. Each time they tried to, the government despatched Senegalese troops who burnt down their villages and pursued them into the bush. The white businessmen had over-all authority over them. Arbitrarily they fixed the price of rubber at 1 fr. 50 per kilo which the natives used to sell to traders from outside the Congo at 7 frs. 50. After paying such a meagre amount, just enough for the producer not to die of hunger, the companies resold same for 20 frs, 30 frs., or even 40 frs. It is not that they were in the habit of paying poorly, but that they were discriminatory as well. While the Africans spent one month in the forest to collect ten kilos of latex which at 1 fr. 50 won for him 15 francs the least paid agent of the company received 5,000 francs for the same period.

Gide, after only a few weeks stay in Africa, had correctly observed that "moins le blanc est intelligent et plus le noir lui paraît bête."[73] The most barbarous atrocities uncovered through the dark colonial history of the Congo were recorded against the name of the half-baked company

(73) Gide, p. 21.

agents, or of the administration but at their instance. Near Boda, in July 1924, Pasha (the French administrator of Boda) organised a repression among the Bayas at the request of the Compagnie Forestière. The dead were estimated at 1,000 "de tout âge et des deux sexes". The guards, in obeissance to the Commandant's orders, brought to him the "oreilles et parties génitales" of the victims. Also at Bambio, on September 8, 1925, Goundi's group of rubber-tappers working for the same Compagnie was tortured for failing to supply the usual quantity of latex the previous month. Although they supplied a double quantity the month after (40 to 50 kilos), they were forced to pay for their inconsistency by "dancing" around the "factorerie" under the scorching heat of the sun with heavy planks on their heads. As they collapsed, the guards forced them back to their heels by "coups de chicotte". The "bal" started at 8.00 a.m. presided over by Pasha and Mandurier (agent of the Compagnie Forestière). At 11.00 p.m. one of the "dancers", Maligué, collapsed never to get up again. Pasha, when told, simply said "Je m'en f....."[74] and ordered the "dance" to continue. Those natives who supplied regularly but who, due to one unforseen circumstance or the other, were unable to provide a sufficient quantity did not go without punishment. At times they paid fines to the tune of 40 francs (which amounts to giving up all that they hoped to realise in one month). Those who had not enough money to pay the fine borrowed from a richer neighbour, or went to prison in default. There were pathetic cases of some natives who, after borrowing and paying the fine, were still incarcerated.

(74) Gide, p. 94.

c) Missionaries

> " ..... Mgr. Augouard ..... affirmait à sa mère, dans une de ses nombreuses lettres, qu' il était vraiment certain maintenant qu'il vivait avec les Noirs, qu'il s'agissait bel et bien des descendants de Cham ..... "[75]

Above is a new dimension to the sufferings of Africans under the colonial rule. Up till this moment they were regarded as "uncivilised people" who must be shown the light of development and economic progress by all sorts of brutalities. Now the Catholic Bishop Augouard tells us that, spiritually also, they are the "lowest of the lowest", being descendants of Cham, who, cursed, fled into the bush to lead the life of a beast. Such were the biblical stories. Slavery which was practised in Africa by the time the colonisers arrived in the 15th. century was seen to be the consequence of this curse. The Black American writer, James Baldwin, who saw in the Bible itself some elements of racism must be sympathised with as he thus writes about the "Holy Book":

> "Je compris ..... que la Bible avait été écrite par des Blancs. Je savais que, pour beaucoup de chrétiens, j'étais un descendant de Cham qui avait été maudit, et que j'étais par conséquent prédestiné à l'esclavage ....."[76]

Thus, before the European terrestial power the African was a slave and born so. Before its spiritual authorities he

(75) A footnote comment by a critic who wished to be known simply as A.B. in the article captioned "Afrique noire, littérature rose" in Présence Africaine, I - II, p. 133.

(76) James Baldwin, La prochaine fois, le feu, (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 36.

was a slave too. This concord in approach is the common denominator to the duo of the French government and the French clergy in their self-assigned task of "civilizing" the Congolese.

The Catholic missionaries were first heard of in the Congo with the arrival of the Portuguese there in 1490. Their stay was as short-lived and ill-fated as that of the Portuguese colonial government. In 1766 France, with a formal permission from the Vatican, sent a team of missionaries to the Congo. But it was not until 1880 that they really established themselves with the arrival at Stanley Pool of the Rev. Father Augouard who styled himself "Father of the Cannibals". Consecrated Bishop in 1887, he founded the St. Louis Catholic Mission on the Oubangui. Later he built a brick cathedral at Brazzaville, "with a bell-tower twenty metres high, topped by a crucifix and the French flag".[77]

The declaration of the 5th Pan-African Congress which met in Manchester in 1945 confirming the identification of the Church in West Africa with the political and economic exploitation of the masses of that region by foreign powers,[78] is applicable, too, to the Congo situation. The highly placed ecclesiastic functionary, Bishop Augouard, was as grabbing as the administrators and commercialists. He pretended to love Africans and boasted that as soon as he fixed an engine to his "Well Boat", he would call it "Diata-Diata, a nickname given to him by Africans, and use it for facilitating his evangelical task. But after fitting the engine into the boat, he called it Leo XIII, and hired it to the colonial administration at an exorbitant rate. He

(77) West, p. 149.
(78) See the Appendix to Nkrumah's Towards colonial Freedom, (London: Heinemann, 1962), pp. 44 - 45.

knew fully well the exploitation and the attendant tortures that were going on, but instead of mounting the pulpit to preach against them "ad majorem Dei gloriam" he aided and abetted them both clandestinely and overtly. His own share of the booty was his source of motivation. Thus he misused his unique position to influence things to the contrary, which baffled a critic like Seck: "Mais comment légitimer cet acte de barbarie que l'Eglise encore toute-puissante, ne pouvait pas ne pas condamner au moins dans son principe?".[79] The Bishop felt that without those tortures the "savages" could not get out of their stupor to accept the new civilisation. "Les missionnaires ont donc suivi les conquérants", concludes Seck. Thus evangelisation became synonymous with colonisation.

C. Reactions

Surely the Congolese did not like the situation in which they found themselves. But they did not react in their totality because of the mass ignorance still prevailing among the majority of the tribes. It was only the Bakongo[80] who by early 1900 had been enough educated to knit a web of organised resistance. Firsty, they demanded that education at all levels be the equivalent of that existing in the metropolis. Secondly, they pressed for an increase in the number of Africans holding certificates and degrees but at the same time

(79) Assane Seck, "Géographie, Colonisation et Culture", Présence Africaine, XIV - XVI, 1957, p. 47.

(80) A tribe of the Lower Congo River whose main concentration was in Brazzaville and the environs. It was amidst the Bakongo that Jean Malonga was born and bred.

would not allow the government take the necessary measures to see their demand met. If the government stood firm on such matters, the result was old wounds being reopened and France being accused of continuing to keep Africans in a state of ignorance.

Proud as the Fang of Gabon, always glorying in their historical past, the Bakongo believed that they were destined to lead the other tribes of the Congo to greatness. They adopted the European life-style, and in order to find the necessary wherewithal, did contraband business with their brothers in the Belgian Congo.[81] Even so, they still experienced moments of economic hardship, the consequence of which was a tension, each time, between them and the European Community. From 1914 to 1930 they resisted all government's attempts to regroup their villages and impose tighter administrative controls. They refused to plant the crops that the colonial government gave them free of charge in order to boost agriculture in their country. Full of suspicion for all that the whites did, they kicked against the taking of a population census, and frustrated the government efforts to recruit labourers for the Congo-Ocean railway. "We are tired of obeying"[82] one of their leaders said.

It did not escape the minds of the determined Bakongo that frontal attacks could be buttressed only by a strong internal unity. In their efforts to achieve this, however, they encountered a stiff opposition from the colonial administration endeared to the Machiavellian "divide et regna" policy. Their hope of forming political

(81) The Bakongo tribe dwelt on the two sides of the river.
(82) Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, The Emerging States of French Equatorial Africa, (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 481.

organisations thus dashed to the ground, they decided to replace their open direct opposition to the citadels of power by more indirect methods. Hdnceforth, they absorbed from the Europeans only what they deemed useful and offered a passive resistance to any measure that did not correspond with their aspirations.

The struggle for freedom, however, continued but this time "behind an outwardly christian facade". From as early as the 15th century, through the educational decree of April 9, 1883, to the circular letter of May 8, 1925, education was wholly and entirely in the hands of the missionaries. Statistics show that in 1929 the mission schools had almost twice as may pupils as there were to be in government schools ten years later.[83] The majority of the enlightened Bakongo were, therefore, brought up in mission schools. A good many later taught in them.

But during the passive resistance period the Bakongo fell out of grace with their religious masters, treated them with as much suspicion and contempt as they did the colonial administrators. Some writers misinterpreted their action to mean a total breakaway from the missions and all that they stood for. For example, Johnston wrote that "the Bakongo fell away from Christianity, ... relapsed into Heathenism, and expelled all the priests",[84] which was not exactly the case. The Bakongo continued to

(83) In 1929, there were 12,605 pupils in mission schools, while ten years after in 1939 the government schools still trailed far behind with 7,000 pupils.

(84) Sir Harry H. Johnston, Colonization of Africa, (Cambridge: University Press, 1899), p. 147.

avail themselves of the educational facilities which the missionaries provided, but refused to succomb to any further control or influence. Because of their role as "benedictors" of the almighty conquering sword of colonialism the Bakongo hated them. When the Swedish evangelists and the Salvation Army Church officials arrived in the Congo, the Bakongo, seeing that they were not of the same nationality with their colonial oppressors, were quickly attracted to them. But having reached the point of no return in their apathy for religions from Europe, they adopted those facets of the new religions that fascinated them in their quest for spiritual autonomy.

Christianity adapted to the local conditions[85] gave rise to the syncretist Messianic sects which burgeoned in Brazzaville between the two wars. Masked under these religious associations the Bakongo carried on their underground resistance to the colonial authority which found it difficult to clamp down upon what seemed to be spiritual organisations but were truly political formations. Between 1928 and 1929 the Bakongo Matsoua, the leader of the Matsouanist movement wrote from Paris where he was working as an accountant to the colonial government protesting against, inter alia, the "indigénat" in French Black Africa, the practices of some Brazzaville commercial firms, and the general stagnation of A E F's economy ...[86] In 1930, he was arrested, tried, exiled to Chad, but escaped five years later.

Since his trial, Matsoua became "the symbol of all protests against colonial society".[87] His movement created unity among the Congolese, and was most dynamic in the

(85) Johnston's term Heathenism is constipating.
(86) Thompson and Adloff, p. 480.
(87) Thompson and Adloff, p. 481.

area closest to the Belgian Congo, where simultaneously Kimbangism, founded by Simon Kimbangou, formerly a Catechist in the British Protestant Mission at Thysville, thrived, having identical objectives.[88]

The colonial administration misunderstood the situation as a ressentiment against the economic depression of the time. In vain in 1931 did she endeavour "to improve local agricultural methods, water supply, and medical facilities ....." [89] for the Bakongo malcontent had taken a psychological turn. Feeling that it was education that opened the eyes of the Bakongo to the evils inherent in the colonial system, and dispelled all fear from them of the colonial authority, the administration took one more wrong step - that of attempting in 1934 to curtail the educational opportunities available to the Bakongo. The result was "passive resistance at all levels of Bakongo society ..... through the whole prewar decade."[90] Matsouanism quickly became an ideology "capable of ensuring the rapid mobilization of the majority of the Kongo communities".[91] The Senator Jean Malonga, in a lightening

(88) Kimbangou saw in the Bible a record of an oppressed people's struggles to revolt. By stressing relentlessly during Church services the relevant passages, the Belgian authorities felt that he was inciting the masses to revolt. They arrested him in September 1921 and imprisoned him at Elisabethville. He died in prison some years later.

(89) Thompson and Adloff, p. 481.

(90) Thompson and Adloff, p. 481.

(91) George Balandier, The Sociology of Black Africa: Social Dynamics in Central Africa, transl. Douglas Garman, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1970), p. 403.

reaction to French government hostilities towards the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (R.D.A.), a party in which he was a leading member, quickly called it quits, and joined the band-wagon of the passive militants. Only three years after the end of the War Coeur d'Aryenne was ready for publication, to be followed later by La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono.

Chapter Two

SOCIAL COMMITMENT

- Commitment to improved social conditions
- Appraisal of theplace of tradition, culture, and magic in the African social concept
- "Politique Humanitaire"

Having paved in the preceding chapter the way to a clear understanding of Jean Malonga's novels, this chapter dwells on that novel which gives the author a unique place in African Literature as a socially committed writer. He is the only African writer, at least of the period of militantism in African Literature, to see that it was not only the colonial administration that was hostile to the Africans but that Africans were also not very friendly to one another, as a result of the crude social system existing at the time. And as a typical Mukongo, he believes that he has the sacred duty of putting the Congolese on

the path of truth and progress,[1] steering them by his writings through the malaises inherent in the two systems. He treated each system in a seperate novel. In this chapter the one entitled La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono will be examined.

From the following words of Mia Mazeno:

"Le Passé sera maintenu, mais amendé dans tout ce qu'il y a de cruel et de despote"[2]

the reader is initiated into the stance of the author vis-à-vis the goings-on in the society in which he was born. The theme of the novel is thus laid out. Here the author praises what he considers encouraging in the social context of his people's daily lives and must therefore be preserved; there he condemns in most severe terms what he feels unacceptable, at least to the new social 'Idéal' which he is envisaging and, therefore must be

(1) A senior colonial official, writing in a report dated March 1945, said that the enlightened Bakongo tended to regard themselves 'as being called upon to play an outstanding role in the development of the native spirit, and having a mission to fulfil with regard to the other ethnic groups'. (Quoted by Georges Balandier, p. 355). That the official made this remark in 1945 is significant because Jean Malonga must have been working on his novels around the same time.

(2) Jean Malonga, La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono, (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1954), p. 92.

discontinued. He sets about it regardless of whether the reader agrees with him or not: his sole preoccupation being the social revolution which he is launching, a cause to which he feels so brutally committed. Taking off with a legend he ends up shyly in historicity: the betrayal and subsequent death of Boueta-M'Bongo in the hands of the first white colonizers to arrive at Pointe-Noire is a historical fact. Thus he creates the impression that there are elements of truth in every legend and would like the reader to see his narrative from that perspective.

In Africa magic is as closely associated to culture as the "primitive" is to nature. In the Bantu society, as Rev. Placide Tempels rightly pointed out in his book La Philosophie bantoue, the "muntu" is the "être-force', occupying the third place after 'Vidye' and the ancestral clan heads, a "cause active" in himself and occupying the priviledged position of being able to wield the natural phenomena around him at will, themselves considered too as "forces", though inferior. These natural phenomena - animals, plants, land, sea, minerals - are created by 'Vidye' to enable "muntu" reach the plenitude of his powers. The height of regard in which a "muntu" is held in his society depends on how much he is capable of manipulating these forces in a magical situation. Malonga in his 'récit' therefore conscientiously goes to ascribe to magic the proper place it deserves in the social and cultural life of not only his but also of many other traditional African societies.

In the novel there are three main magical displays. The first is by Hakoula just before crossing the Madzia, the second by the N'Ganga Mountsombo in the course of which he foretold to Ma Mazono that he (Ma Mazono) would build the city of N'Tsangou on the bank of the M'Boté, and the third by Ma Mazono himself in a spectacle calculated to demonstrate his superiority to Mapouata and to Bitouala in the "hiérarchie des forces".

Magic had for Malonga what charm it has today for the average African. It is widely believed that the African, whatever his social status, religious adherence, philosophical or ideological leaning, believes right inside himself, sometimes unconsciously too, in the supernatural. Did we not watch spell-bound with admiration a performer roasting his leg on the stage during the last FESTAC "77"? Describing the three magic scenes in a way to demonstrate his total credence and what pride an African can derive from this part of his cultural heritage, Malonga puts into display all his qualities as a clever story teller. He added such a touch of creativity to his narrative that drew this admiration from his compatriot-critic:

> "maniant la parole selon son art personnel, il récrée, il insouffle aux mêmes faits une autre vie".[3]

In a fashion that echoes Virgil's dismal narration of Aeneas' visit to the underworld[4] the first scene is prepared

(3) Mathieu Mounikou, "Jean Malonga, écrivain congolais', Présence Africaine, 73(1970), p. 176.

(4) c.f. T. Virgil, Aeneid, Book VI, 11. 235 - 273.

in a sombre atmosphere with the clear intent to strike awe into the hearts of even the most unbelieving, and to cast some initial abracadabra spells on the incredulous European reader:

> "Maintenant l'ombre envelope la cime des montagnes, l'eau de la rivière devient plus sombre que d'ordinaire. On entend déjà le cri de la chouette qui s'impatiente de voir venir l'obscurité pour sortir de sa cachette et prendre place dans l'armée des sorciers ..... Les alentours du camp de Bidounga sont plongée dans un silence angoissant et religieux. Les ceseaux eux-mêmes tremblent d'anxiété ....."[5]

For the Bantu increase in vital force is occasioned by the dual ceremony of Initiation and Investiture, normally performed by the grand patriarch who, according to Bantu beliefs, is "susceptible de renforcer et de maintenir tout ce qui tombe ontologiquement sous sa hiérarch[illegible] Hakoula is ontologically under the influence of her father, Bidounga. Because of the blood relationship between father and daughter, the two ceremonies were made replaceable by mere symbols. For Hakoula's initiation it suffices, therefore, that she receive her father's embrace, and for the investiture that she be covered with red cloth by her father, followed by her passing under his legs. She is now fully equipped to command to obeisance all the lower forces at her disposal. At the utterance of the magic formulae which her father whispered silently into her ears at the beginning of the ceremony, elephants surfaced from the river and lining themselves up formed a type of bridge with their backs for the passage of [illegible]

uninformed reader, the author rightly pointed out, may not lend credence to this prodigy while still believing the Bible story that Moses struck the Red Sea with his rod, the sea divided itself into two and provided Moses and the Israelites a dry passage. Have we not here the same smashing display of those supernatural capabilities indispensable to a leader immersed in a venture where he must prove his mettle?

The reference made above to the Bible is significant. Jean Malonga had all his education in the mission school at Brazzaville. The early catechism classes he attended were centred on the Bible. Just like Yambo Ouologuem who adapted all the striking scenes he found in Schwarz Barth's Le Dernier des Justes to an African situation in his book entitled Le Devoir de Violence, (so, at least, many critics believe), it is possible that Jean Malonga did recast in African setting the wonderful Bible scene of the crossing of the Red Sea which must have appealed so much to his early childhood fancy. Or else, pushed by the reactionary spirit already seen in Chapter One he may have wanted to show by Hakoula's magic that the Christian religion from Europe was in no way superior to the African traditional religion which it strove relentlessly to supersede because the mysteries which were the very foundation of that religion had their parallels in the African traditional genre.

In African magic, fire has the paradoxical effect of heightening the magician's supernatural powers. This happens through a process of purification. Fire burns out of the magician whatever impurities there are in him and transforms

him from a normal into an anormal being. This is the case in the second magic display which features Mountsombo, the N'Ganga. An N'Ganga is a healer, "L'homme aux remèdes', a fortune-teller, a magician. His role in the society is to intervene between man and God, to unravel the mysterious, to discover what future has in store for man. Mountsombo has just left the house of Initiation, has been admitted into the N'Ganga cult and is, therefore, full of "force". Fire reinvigorates this force. Feeling in form for action he underwent the preliminary test of ten gun shots which made no mark on him. Asking for more fire, amidst more songs from the women folk, he attained the plenitude of his "force", and gradually rose until he reached this other world which is Truth itself, where all secrets coupled with future events are lurking. He read from this world as from a book that Ma Mazono should proceed forthwith and found on the bank of M'Boté river a village which shall be the greatest the country has. The author thus uses him to develop his plot.

The two scenes discussed above have certain qualities in common which help to heighten the credibility of the stories. Hakoula and Mountsombo are first and foremost natural beings. To attain the supernatural heights the transformation cannot but be gradual. For the ceremonies of the initiation and investiture of Hakoula, Bidounga, the officiating prelate, had to put himself into the proper form - otherwise he cannot give out what he has not. This does not mean that he does not possess in great abundance this "force" out of which he will give some to his daughter

whose respect in her new society will depend on the amount of "force" she can display. But he has to excite this "force", and gear it into action. Hence we are told that

> "Depuis son arrivée ici, le Chef, qui est un peu fatigué ne s'est nourri que de noix de kola et n'a pris comme boisson que la sève d'une certaine racine sacrée, ceci pour communier avec les esprits',[7]

About Mountsombo, we read:

> "le Magicien asperge le brasier de jets de salive noircie par la mastication d'ingrédients inconnus du profane',[8]

With this absorption of "inferior" but stimulating "forces" Hakoula in first scene and Mountsombo in the second are ready for action.

"Force", thus gathered, does not leave the possessor automatically. The process is also gradual and can last for some time. After Mountsombo's display the author tells us:

> "Le voyant est descendu de la colonne vaporeuse. Il s'est étendu à même le sol, extenué. Ses aides lui passent des stimulants, lui font prendre un verre de liqueur de goyave. Encore quelques instants de lassitude.....'[9]

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(7) La Légende, p. 33.
(8) La Légende, p.114.
(9) La Légende, p.119.

Even long after the miraculous crossing of the Madzia, Hakoula, the author of the portent, remained in form to perform yet another supernatural feat, this time in her new home, amidst the ceremonies for her arrival in her new home:

> "Que faut-il de plus pour convaincre les autres de la puissance de Bidounga et de sa fille? S'étonneront-ils après ce qu'ils viennent de voir, quand le soir, à la danse commune, ils verront Hakoula, assise sur la natte en fibres de fromager qui recouvrira le lit nuptial, sans que personne l'y aide, planer sur la case de Bitouala et survoler tout le village en jouant de sa corne d'antilope?",[10]

The third magic scene is less convincing than others. Despite the colourfulness of his descriptions, the shrewd manner in which he described every detail, the reader perceives that the author is torn between his fidelity to his Bantu origins and his novel commitment to reforming his society by the intermediary of the young revolutionary who, he would like to assert, is more capable than his fathers of establishing his utopian city where no man is oppressed. The clumsy[11] intervention in this scene of the author's novel ideological penchant is responsible for the apparent contradiction associated with this scene. This contradiction will be treated at a greater length later in the pages that follow.

(10) La Légende, p. 35

(11) The issue at stake here is not the author's pioneering interest in the Marxist creed, for it is generally believed to be the most suitable ideology for any developing country like the Congo, but the illogicality in this part of the legend which emanates from his unartistically blending the Marxist theory of social equality with the uncompromising Bantu hierarchial structures. Malonga, striving to create a personality that is truly African in Ma Mazono, should have allowed him to grow the African way first before being equal to the patriarchs as Marxism wants it.

After doing the jump, vividly described by the author, a leap that is the same as flying because a long distance is covered, the patriarchs - Mapouata and Bitouala - did the ritual dance. After that each showed

> "ce dont il est capable en tant que patriarche, représentant moral d'un clan. Au talent artistique, il doit lier la valeur psychique".[12]

For their show they have recourse to fire which reassumes here its natural role as a destroyer - to destroy in order to give a new lease of life to. Mapouata threw a cat skin into the fire and allowed it to be consumed. Then he drew from the fire "un splendide chat-tigre". Bitouala burnt the head of a snake in the fire, blew his horn and pulled "une monstreuse vipère" out of the fire. The crowd hailed the two performances, and rightly so for the two magicians are great patriarchs, fully initiated, fully invested.

However, the display by Mapouata and Bitouala is by far less complicated than that of Ma Mazono. Theirs, especially through the instrumentality of fire, has no depth. It looks more like the game of "the more you look the less you see", a brand of magic calculated simply to deceive the eye. That by Ma Mazono, on the contrary, is highly specialised, almost a miracle. It is difficult to understand how he came about being the author of such a wonder. Even his mother did not expect such a display from him. She is aware that he has not been

(12) La Légende, p. 135.

initiated nor invested:

> "Ce qui est plus étonnant à Hakoula elle-même qui ignorait le talent caché de son fils, c'est que ce dernier, qui n'a jamais été initié à la confrerie, fait preuve d'une maîtrise parfaite".[13]

By what mystery Ma Mazono found himself in possession of this "talent caché" constitutes the contradiction mentioned earlier. It is unbelievable to see him fly to the shoulders of his father, Batouala, sway himself left and right without falling, bring out four panthers from nowhere, send to the crowd of onlookers a swarm of bees by sounding a parrot bone, draw on the city a crowd of black vultures, and make all these portents vanish by "un seul cri rauque". He is not in the position to be in possession of all these hidden "forces" before his initiation into the Lemba confraternity. Up to that moment he is not supposed to have more than the normal "force vitale" like every other "muntu". Before being installed "M'Pfoumou" he has no right to a "force supérieure" which will enable him to perform magic. The Rev. Father Placide Tempels made this point clear when he said:

> "Ce n'est pas par une nomination ni par une désignation, que l'on ajoute au simple humain la qualité de "mfumu". Par l'investiture on devient et on est "mfumu", on est force vitale nouvelle, supérieure ..... "[14]

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(13) La Légende, p. 137.
(14) Philosophie, p. 69.

The only explanation one can advance to this inconsistency is that the school master, Jean Malonga, is an évolué. Essentially Bantu but also belonging to the world he discovers in his books from Europe, he tries in the third magic scene to adapt Bantuism to Marxism. He is as a stout adherent to the theory of "forces" as he is to the doctrine of Marx regarding equality of human beings, be they slaves or free-born. In fact, applying the simple arithmetic theory that one plus one makes two, he asserts that because of the reserve of "force" which he carries with him from his mother's clan, added to the new one he finds as "acquis" in his master's clan, the slave has "deux molécules ontologiques" which give him "supériorité ontologique" over the free-born who, according to him, is more or less rendered a bastard by "mariage entre parents". Hence he concludes:

> "Le Grand-Maître de la Vie, qui veille à l'harmonie de toutes les 'Forces' du monde, en rétablit toujours l'équilibre menacé, grâce à nos patriarches les plus qualifiés".[15]

Without involving oneself in a socio-religious dialectics, one would liken Malonga's position to an Imam praying in the name of "Jesus Christ Our Lord, Amen". His theory of "deux molécules ontologiques" has not much of Bantu coloration, coming from one born in a society that is hierarchial. Feeling he can easily be picked up on this purposeful contrariety, the only one in the novel, he lays out in his defence protracted arguments and

(15) La Légende, p. 109

intriguing explanations that are quite unprecedented throughout the narrative. One appreciates his artistic ingenuity in blending two contradictory visions of the society. However, one is not to take him seriously when he attempts to push down the throats of his public that his new move was founded on tradition:

> "Crédule ou sceptique, nous lui (au lecteur) décrivons intégralement ce que nous a confié la Tradition".[16]

It may be worthwhile to discuss here the functional aspect of magic in the African society as described by the author. As earlier said, during the Initiation and Investiture ceremonies the incumbent acquires supernatural powers. These "forces" are within him, there for him to use but he cannot, per se, influence any situation. He acts through the intermediary of the "Mânes". These "mânes" are spirits of the dead, and they are still members of the society as much as the living themselves. The living cannot take decisions in isolation on a tribal level without first of all making sure that the "Mânes" are in support. Bidounga, for example, becomes the father-in-law of Bitouala only when he has seen from the smooth way things went that the union of his daughter and Bitouala is acceptable "devant la société et les 'Mânes'".

A man is a human being. He can only communicate naturally with other human beings. In the Bantu language, he is a "force simple", while the "Mânes" are"forces supérieures", existing on a level higher

(16) La Légende, p. 31. Brackets mine.

than his. To be translated to this level and be in the position to communicate with them, he must undergo some transformation. Like Christians who believe that fasting transforms them and brings them nearer to the Almighty, the Bantu are no less of the opinion that fasting was a sine qua non in order to come into contact with the "Mânes":

> "Depuis son arrivée ici, le Chef (Bidounga) ... ne s'est nourri que de noix de kola et n'a pris comme boisson que la sève d'une certaine racine sacrée, ceci pour communier avec les esprits."17

Since they are souls of the departed, having shed off their mortal flesh, the "Mânes" exist on the same plain with "vidye" and partake of some of His "force vitale", His Essence. They, therefore, become superior to all the living whose attitude to them is that of deference and total submission. Hence Bidounga talks of "nous acquitter de nos devoirs de civilité envers les Mânes du Pays". Once they are conciliated and happy, their cooperation is assured and total. They make their presence felt by the living, showing them that, although hidden from their naked eyes, they are in full participation of their joy. In an account full of imagery Jean Malonga describes one of such scenes:

> "Pendant que les vivants s'amusent, on voit les sommets des montagnes se couvrir d'une lueur phosphorescente. De temps en temps, des ombres rougeâtres sortent du cours d'eau et, après

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(17) La Légende, p. 33.

> avoir donné la réplique aux chants et aux cris des hommes de Bidounga, vont se perdre dans la lueur que nous venons de signaler. Une pluie opaque de perles se met à tomber pour former un pont vaporeux et flottant sur le paisible cours d'eau .... "[18]

They can then be put on the alert by a simple prayer, like that of Hakoula:

> "Mânes de N'Tsoundi, provez aujourd'hui que je suis fille de votre Maison. Obéissez à ma voix, executez mes ordres".[19]

They are summoned into action not with an ordinary voice but by a sound produced either from an antelope's horn (as in the case of Hakoula) or from both an antelope's horn and a parrot's bone (as Ma Mazono did). The prodigy they perform depends on the wish of the magician which may not necessarily be expressed in words. Such is the mystical aspect of the Congolese culture which fascinates the author as he paints every detail in a story form.

Apart from magic which is the aspect of his peole's culture he finds very fascinating, Malonga goes out of his way to expose to open condemnation the two canker-worms that daily plague his society: tribal rivalries and oppression of woman. These constitute the principal theme of "La Rançon d'une alliance" which is the title of Part I of his novel. Here his social commitment assumes a didactic dimension, and this explains why the novel is the first work by a Congolese to be turned into a major film in the Pople's Republic of the Congo.

(18) La Légende, p. 30.
(19) La Légende, p. 33.

The film was presented by the Congo at the 5th, session of the "Journée Cinématographiques" in Carthage in 1974. Explaining why the novel was turned into a film the adapter, Sebastian Kamba, declared in the film's manifesto published during the meeting of film producers at Algiers in December 1973:

> "Notre propos de cinéastes congolais est de permettre à notre peuple de se voir sur l'écran afin qu'il soit en mesure d'analyser son passé et son présent pour trouver des solutions à son avenir. Dans une première phase, nous pensons tourner des films sur l'histoire de notre peuple, non pas sous la forme de récits épiques et de chansons de geste, mais en nous efforçant de trouver à chaque étape de notre évolution politique, économique et culturelle, les éléments qui expliquent notre situation actuelle. C'est de la sorte que nous pourrons cerner l'impact de l'influence coloniale sur notre mode de vie".[21]

Malonga now dramatises one of the popular causes of inter-tribal wars among his peole. According to custom, a daughter of M'Polo has to replace M'Polo's mother, Mazonga, who had since died. The choice fell on her eldest daughter, Makoula. In her new home, she excelled the rest of women-folk in her charm of person, dedication to hard work, and industry. But she had one flaw - that of a young lady "en éveil". Her morals were loose, attaining puberty far from her mother's watchful eyes. One of the amorous escapades of hers, this time

(21) Quoted by Monique Hennebelle in her article entitled "Carthage: un festival ouvert à tous les cinémas" published in L'Afrique Littéraire et Artistique, No. 34, Dec. 1974

with a slave, brought the "drame"to its apogée. The slave was gunned down by the jilted husband, and in the course of the confusion she bolted into the bush and from there to the neighbouring village where she hid in a grotto. Because of her disappearance, war ensued between the N'Tsembo and the N'Tsoundi clans: the former thinking that the latter were sheltering their daughter from the impending punishment[22] that awaited her adulterous act, while the latter felt that the former killed their daughter with the same shot that sent the slave to his grave and were hiding the fact from them. The imprisonment of the N'Tsoundi envoys by Mi N'Tsembo followed, then the insult of the N'Tsoundi clan by an envoy of Mi N'Tsembo, and finally the war.

Jean Malonga thus instructs: the Congolese must be war mongers to have fought for such a slight malentendu. The Trojan war was fought for a cause almost similar to this, the abduction of the Greek Helen by the Trojan Paris, but the seduction and the subsequent eloping were established before the Greeks resorted to an armed struggle to bring back their queen. The N'Tsembos should not have taken the rash decision of "impounding" the N'Tsoundi envoys. They should have taken pains to find out whether the N'Tsoundi were saying the truth or lying by despatching to the N'Tsoundi clan an investigation team just as they sent out a search group to comb their village and the neighbouring ones in quest of the fugitive. It is because of their failure to adopt this

(22) The magnitude of this punishment has already been discussed in the preceding chapter.

line of approach that the N'Tsoundi, feeling wronged on all counts, went to fight to defend their lives and property and to liberate their imprisoned tribesmen. With all that is just on their side, they won. For Mi N'Tsembo and his people it was a catastrophe: Mi N'Tsembo paid a heavy indemnity and died soon after. What a lesson for all of us, the author would like to conclude.

The condemnation of war here should not be misconstrued as an acceptance of adultery in the society which was the cause of it. Even the late Mazonga, Hakoula's grand mother, felt that by her act of matrimonial infidelity Hakoula has cast a slur on her (Mazonga's) memory. She asserts the different stuff that she was made off:

> "Je suis Celle qui n'a jamais trahi son époux et son maître. Je suis Celle qui est restée pure et fidèle aux lois de ses ancêtres. Je suis Celle dont n'a pas eu à rougir sa fille M'Polo, la vertueuse, la pure des pures, la femme exemplaire, la mère d'une pécheresse ....."[23]

She welcomed joyously Hakoula's repentance, promised to help her rejoin her husband eventually, but added that that would be after she had undergone her purgatory in the grotto where she took her. Adultery therefore has no place in his new society where it is proscribed alongside other social crimes by the young M'Pfoumou:

> "L'honnêteté est rigoureusement exigée des sujets, disons plutôt des amis du grand Chef qui ne peut pourtant pardonner le vol, l'adultère et l'homicide".[24]

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(23) La Légende, p. 70.
(24) La Légende, p. 140.

What Malonga is arguing is simply that that deep-rooted tendency in his people to go to war over minor social issues is in no way commendable and, therefore should be curbed. As has been said earlier, he upholds the theory that war is an "ill-wind" that blows no one good. He therefore preaches mutual love and forgiveness. Immediately after defeating Mia M'Bama, N'Goma-Biyelo, and their troops, the legend's hero, Ma Mazono, pardoned them, released all the prisoners he took and established a long-lasting peace with the defeated war captains by marrying their daughters to his own lieutenants, Boumpoutou and Bileko. It is not by stroke of chance that Malonga entitled the second part of his legend "Le Rachat ou le pardon d'une erreur". Where there are love and forgiveness there is peace. Like his prototype, Manuel, in the Gouverneurs de la Rosée who prefers to die in silence than reveal the name of his murderer in the interest of peace among his kinsmen, Ma Mazono sees no sacrifice or self-denial as too great for the cause of peace. Mi N'Tsembo's plea, which highlights his naivety and ignorance, that his move to find his daughter-in-law after her adultery was what brought about the crisis, is an example of the remorse that can constitute the spill-over of an expensive gamble. Peace is the word. It engenders economic progress. One is little surprised, therefore, that not long fter the founding of N'Tsangou "la richesse" has already become "la renommée du nouveau centre".

The natural consequence of the frequent wars in Malonga's society is the abundance of slaves. The question of slaves almost occasioned another war in the

novel which fortunately did not take place due to the eventual maturity and timely intervention of Bitouala who, refusing to witness another blood bath, quickly opted for discussions and negotiations as means of settling their grevances agaist Ma Mazono. Such a peaceful measure rewards a hundred fold, the author advises. Bitouala did not tarry to discover that he, who could have been his enemy if he had acted as rashly as his late father was wont, was actually his loving son, who has been destined to be his only source of pride. Malonga has again scored another point: there is everything to gain from a peaceful approach to social disagreements.

But when war tantamounts to a crusade, people must fight. Most unfortunately it is in such cases that his people will develop cold feet. A shining example in the novel of this unexpected inactivity is Boumpoutou whose wife had been abducted by the emissaries from Mindouli and N'Boula-N'Tangou who were sent by their local chiefs N'Goma-Biyelo and Mia M'Bama respectively to postulate the immediate return of their slaves now living happily in the new city of N'Tsangou. For M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono, as for the Greeks already mentioned, such an act meant war and the blood to be spilt will be on the head of the irresponsibles. But the reaction of Boumpoutou, the one directly concerned was to lie flat on his stomack in front of his door, "la figure inondée de larmes, perdue dans ses mains". The M'Pfoumou had to talk him into action:

> "Avant tout, nous devons nous rappeler que nous sommes des hommes. Ce n'est pas en pleurant que nous rattraperons les ravisseurs de

> Louvouandou pour la venger. Tu sais que tout le monde aime ta femme comme une soeur dans toute la Cité. Personne ne te refusera le concours dont tu as besoin pour la retrouver ..... Il y a aussi notre honneur qui est en jeu. Il nous faut donc du courage et de l'audace ..... Ma décision est que nous frappions les premiers".[25]

Such a cowardly disposition when action is called for must be discouraged, thinks Malonga. Ma Mazono, the hero himself, "n'a pas peur d'une guerre pour défendre son Idéal".[26] If war is necessary for peace and progress no one should back out. Ma Mazono has to fight to put N'Tsangou on a sound footing and to carve out an image of respect and admiration for her among the neighbouring cities. His countrymen should be disposed to do the same for the Congo. In the novel

> "N'Tsangou est peuplé actuellement de plus de dix mille habitants, parmi lesquels on peut facilement prélever trois à quatre mille hommes prêts à se faire tuer pour défendre leurs libertés".[27]

In such cases, Malonga, the erstwhile lover of peace and concord would not only advocate positivity, but also going on the offensive.

Here in Africa women are generally believed to have little place of honour or respect in the African society. Such was glaringly the case in Malonga's Congo as depicted in La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono. Right from the start it is the image of the helpless woman that is presented to us, a woman required by custom established by men to replace her dead mother with her own daughter

(25) La Légende, pp. 144 - 145.
(26) La Légende, p.122.
(27) La Légende, p. 143.

In her father's clan, a woman "fidèle, travailleuse, épouse soumise et prévenante" - all in order to please her husband, for whom, notwithstanding, she still remains his "thing". Her place is in the kitchen and she should not participate in discussions with the men nor even eavesdrop:

> "M'Polo rappelle enfin ses filles près d'elle, pour laisser aux hommes le temps de se dire ce que les femmes ne pouvent que deviner, parce qu'on les tient jalousement à l'écart de tous les problèmes sociaux, même quand il s'agit de leur sort, de leur avenir, de leur vie".[28]

In a betrothal ceremony the mother of the girl cannot allow herself to be seen by her son-in-law. Negligence on her part to this effect is capable of marring the ceremony.

Malonga could not find reasons to justify a position such as the above. Using the voice of Hakoula he tries to prove that it was baseless. On the metaphysical plain women, however, wield as much power as the men. Hakoula put up one of the most fascinating magic displays in the novel in order to lead her people (a duty always reserved for men) across the bridgeless Madzia, thus establishing herself as a "force" to be reckoned with among her husband's kinsmen. In this vein, the author points out that given similar opportunities, what a man can do a woman can. She cannot therefore be justifiably regarded as "force inférieure".

But in words that recall one of the most beautiful lines that Shakespeare ever wrote: "Frailty, thy name is

(28) La Légende, p. 17.

woman"[29] Ma Mazono, playing the devil's advocate for the first time vis-à-vis the author, warns his mother that although women should be given a fitting place in the society, they should nevertheless remember that, essentially, they are the weaker sex:

> "Car, 'Force' si considérable que tu paraisses être, tu n'es, en définitive, qu'une femme ..."[30]

Whereupon, Malonga, as we saw earlier in the case of his "deux molécules ontologiques" theory, pushes his postulation for equality of men and women higher to give women the edge over men. Hakoula cooly and humbly informs Ma Mazono about some supernatural powers inherent in the woman, according to Bantu beliefs, and which are outside the man's scope:

> "Elle peut annihiler la puissance de toute la Magie millénaire. Rien qu'avec une imposition de sa petite main - je ne peux t'en dire davantage - elle fait disparaître les effets nocifs du venin et du Totem les plus redoutables"[31]

And as regards her role in the natural scheme of things, the woman is next to God, placing between "La Force Suprême" and creation. Her role here is divine. What happens to her between the nine months she takes in and puts to bed is an experience no man will ever have. Even after birth, the new born still depends entirely on her tender cares to be nurtured and brought up. Thus Hakoula concluded:

(29) William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act I, Scene II, line 146.
(30) La Légende, p. 96
(31) La Légende, p. 96.

"La femme a un rôle de premier plan, presque égal à la 'Force Suprême'."[32]

Even at the social level the woman beats the man to his own game. She irritates excites, and calms him, consoles him in his difficult moments. By her beauty, apparent weakness, she rules him, rules the world. Just a smile, a show of dissatisfaction, a simple facial expression from her, and the society is turned topsy-turvy, decisions taken and retaken, murders and war stopped, or greatest acts of heroism provoked. Hakoula, or Jean Malonga as it were, cannot therefore understand why the man who obeys all the woman's whims and caprices, who is born and nourished by her, who owes everything to her, who has only "un rôle secondaire de soutien dans la famille, dans le clan", should contine to treat the woman as inferior.

Slaves next engage the author's attention. They are not less powerful than their owners. Bileko and Boumpoutou are great war generals. During the battle of Kadi-Kadi the reserve of Bidounga's troops was under the command of the ex-slave, Loubayi. Bidounga won the war, it must be remembered. Intellectually too, they are not inferior to the free-born. All the lessons that Ma Mazono received about the different aspects of life in the society when he was still in the grotto, the social stratifications and their attendant shortcomings, were taught him by his mother and the pair of Boumpoutou and Bileko. These slaves were free-born in their own clan before they were taken captives in war due to no

(32) La Légende, p. 97.

personal fault of their own. They should, therefore, Malonga argues, have as much rights in the society as everyone else. He feels that the society will make more progress if, like the women, they are allowed to become members of the society like every one else.

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Malonga in his novel extols the mystic side of the African traditional religion. As has been discussed in the preceding chapter, the spirit of anticlericalism has already dawned in the Congo around the 20's and the 30's. The Congolese had got dissatisfied with christianism because of its tacit and overt support for the colonial administration. Like the Haitians of exactly the same time, they started to look upon the christian religion as a stepping stone to their own spiritual self-sufficiency, and no longer marvelled at the mysteries associated with it. This was Malonga's spiritual disposition at the time he wrote his novels. The anti-clerical aspect of Coeur d'Aryenne will be discussed in the next chapter. In La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono the author made nonsense of the christian conception of God as "Supreme Being". HE is matched with the magician Mountsombo who sings in the course of his feat:

> "Donnez de la poudre; faites du feu, le N'Ganga va se brûler. Il a sacrifié ses parents pour percer le voile du mystère, rivaliser avec Dieu".[33]

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(33) La Légende, p. 116.

Mountsombo's rising by the help of fire to the height where "un autre monde" is unveiled to him is for the author similar to Moses' climbing to the top of the mountain Sinai where he communicated directly with Yahweh. The Bible also propagates the idea that the Holy Ghost inspires people. The possessed, for example, according to it, spoke in diverse tongues, saw visions, and foretold the future. Malonga knows the Bible in and out. For him the Holy Spirit hypothesis is applicable too to Mountsombo:

> "Ah! s'eno m'baou, mé N'Ganga na ya. Me mouana mou Kouyou na ghana tat'ani. Ah! s'eno n'sala tat'ani ka zonza".[34]

According to biblical stories the only people who could attain this level of spiritual perfection are only those who are poised on the road to Heaven by having no attachments to the things of this world in terms of persons and property. Therefore Mountsombo's "na ghana tat'ani" (I have done away with all that I have) is important, for his spiritual attainments, Malonga would want us to believe, stem also from sources that are in keeping with the biblical stipulations. All that is charming, inspiring and mystical in the European religion can be found in the native genre, he would like to conclude. We as Africans do not therefore need the christian religion, for ours is as good as any.

(34) La Légende, p. 118.
Translation: "Ah! More fire! I, an N'Ganga, am going to burn myself. I am the son of the Holy Spirit; I have done away with all that have. Clap your hands! Father is speaking.
(Translation mine.)

But Malonga does not stop at equating the African religion to christianism. He goes further to feel that if there is a God at all, at best he is like the Greek god Ζευς[35] who lives at mount Olympus and enjoys himself all the time with νεκταρ[36] and ἀμβροσια[37] without caring a hoot about what human beings on earth below are doing.[38] He feels that society should adopt a similar attitude towards HIM. He frowns at the fact that Africans believe a little too much in God, hence their tendency to accept everything as being dictated by HIS will. It is because of this over inflated belief that his people are full of "ignorance" and "doutes négatifs". The passivity which caracterizes his society - a situation well-echoed by Tempels in his Philosophie bantoue[39] is also the child of this belief. Malonga, therefore, enjoins his people to think less about God and more about themselves,

(35) Zeus - the Greek equivalent for the christian "God the Father".
(36) nectar - Homer's term for the drink of the gods, drink remarkable for its sweetness.
(37) ambrosia - a heavenly food meant for the immortals, according to Greek mythology.
(38) Zeus is so much aloof from the problems of mortals that while the christian God can bring peace in the case of war, (at least, so believe christians), Zeus' attitude is that of nonchalance: if human beings want to fight, let them go on until, satiated with blood, they can stop of their own volition; they are the creators of their own troubles.
(39) Rev. Tempels remarks that a Bantu unjustly condemned will not try to complain but will will simply say: "Vous faites ce que vous voulez; vous avez la force de me tuer; mais moi je suis le 'muntu' de Dieu". "Ne muntu wa Vidye ..... C'est lui qui nous jugera tous les deux". c.f. Philosophie, p. 77.

about what to do to be a progressive and prosperous nation. The type of God he wants them to believe in is the God who "helps those that help themselves".

Ma Mazono banned laziness in his new kingdom. Laziness is the enemy of progress. Believing that action speaks louder than words we are told that "s'offrant en exemple, Ma Mazono, le premier, s'est montré infatigable au labeur".[40] The Congolese have to learn to work hard. There is no doubt that his people's tendency to cannibalism is rooted in their laziness. Instead of looking for meat from games they see it readily provided in their fellow human beings. Basing his arguments on the Bantu theory of "forces" the author preaches at length in his legend against this obnoxious habit. Because of laziness too the Congolese are inclined to adultery. Adultery, according to the author, breeds infertility.[41] If the Congolese could stop being lazy and apply themselves to hard work and industry these social evils would be extirpated.

Malonga in La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono shows full support for monogamy. It is not that he is accepting this characteristically European social norm at its surface value but that in the African social context it is the best arrangement for achieving economic and social progress. The woman will contribute her quota fully to nation building if she is given her due place in the society and "reste la compagne d'un seul homme". Where the situation warrants, like in the case of the M'Pfoumou who took six wives in order to be able to

(40) La Légende, p. 119.
(41) We are not told how Malonga arrived at this axiom. It is a subject for future research. But one thing is clear: he frowns at the wantom love-making that was the order of the day in his society.

discharge effectively his social obligations as an m'pfoumou, one can marry more than one.

Like Oyono and Beti, Malonga spurns the myth which his society associates with old age. But surpassing the others in his inveighing sarcasm and unbridled bitterness towards the old, Malonga points out brutally that they are in no way entitled to any superiority over the young. Their claim of having the key to the metaphysical world is for the author groundless. The young m'pfoumou, as has been see earlier, proves superior to the aged and more experienced Bitouala his father,and Mapouata, a renowned N'Ganga in a practical demonstration of magic to the extent that the two "Mages" could not help admiring his talent. Their much vaunted wisdom becomes in the novel a thing of the past. The order of Mi N'Tsembo that Hakoula should be flushed out from her hiding and punished adequately for her infidelity was flouted by Bitouala. The logic of the eight-year old Loumoni cannot but baffle the patriarchs and the jurists who assembled in the house of Mi N'Tsembo to unravel the mystery surrounding Hakoula's disappearance - a logic the climax of which is a scathing attack on Mi N'Tsembo's personal integrity:

> "Le grand Chef est un vieillard qui sait très bien mentir et tromper les grandes personnes comme papa et vous. Mais, moi, il ne peut pas me tromper; cela ne lui sera pas aussi facile qu'il le croit. Demandez-lui donc, â ce chef fourbe, de vous dire qui, avec lui, a vu partir d'ici ma pauvre tante."[42]

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(42) La Légende, p. 58.

Now the old order changes. The old men are liars and impostors. It is the young generation that must rule and give the Congo the new shape that is synonymous with progress.

There is no doubt that Malonga is not favourably disposed to the practice of child marriage in his society. Judith who thinks that "Malonga feels no need to apologise for or to justify the practice, nor on the other hand would he be ready to marry his daughter at the age of eight"[43] is only one of those literary critics who make incursions into African Literature without the slightest knowledge of how an African thinks and commits his thoughts to paper. La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono is in the main a treatise on the ugly consequences of this practice. Hakoula's moral depravity springs from the fact that she left home at the age of eleven for a life of pseudo-independence and unripe housewifeship. It is true that her mother was married "à l'âge de dix saisons sèches", but in the words of Malonga himself, in one of those rhetorical questions for which he is well-known - "n'était-elle pas elle-même un sujet d'expérience?"[44] - the idea is considered no longer tenable. He brilliantly points out, always in a story form, that the tendency is for the husband and his relations to regard the immature girl as an adult and to condone, in the interest of love and peace, whatever deficiencies in the girl's formation that accrue from an inadequate and incomplete home training:

> "Si l'âge ingrat est inquiétant chez l'adolescent, il est surement plus terrible chez la pubère

(43) Gleason Judith, This Africa, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 70.
(44) La Légende, p. 13.

> qui donne libre cours à l'irruption de sa sève en fusion, au réveil de tous les sens fouettés par le désir, et dont la négligence de ceux qui ont le devoir de les endiguer stimule, par son inertie, l'épanchement".[45]

The author repeatedly suggests that it is worthwhile for the girl to remain at home until she passes the delicate stage of a "femme en éveil", after which she can claim responsibility for all her actions.

Wherever else in the legend Malonga passes over some aspects of his people's social life without adverse comments or alternative suggestions to the status quo one feels that he is fully in support. These items feature in the story in such a manner as to portray his admiration for them and his commitment to their continued existence. In his narrative there are dancing scenes remarkable by their usual vivacity but despoiled of their sexual characteristics. The betrothal and marriage of Makoula are filled with pomp and pageantry. The matrilineal kinship system comes under his pen as an item of custom acceptable to all and sundry: the author considers it illogical that a society that traces its lineage through women should come round and maltreat same. He goes out of his way to capitalize on the provision in tradition for a man to marry his daughter's daughter if he so wishes and wields it usefully to develop his plot. Such a marriage, in his view, makes for unity through family ties and is the only effective instrument against the unwholesome inclination of his society to break and disperse. Markets are made to flourish in the novel as

(45) La Légende, p. 40

an indispensable weapon to economic progress. Their role as sanctuaries in times of trouble and social disquietude is appreciated by the author. His commitment to improvement pushes him further to conceive one, Boukondzo boua Ma Mazono, where "rien n'y a manqué".

Tradition

It is with marriage that is associated all that is beautiful in tradition. Whether in Russia, America or Africa, it is a big social occasion. Betrothal, (known elsewhere as "engagement"), which constitutes the first step into the conjugal union is treated in some countries with no less pomp. In these countries it is known to have such a social significance that it is published on the pages of newspapers. Here in Africa it is a memorable occasion, one that is marked by all that is beautiful and gay. It is a topic that not only thrills the young unmarried spinsters but also sends them dreaming and hoping, for in the African society of at least the colonial era, a girl of marriageable age who has no husband is looked down upon as a social misfit. In Congo Brazzaville she is bitingly daubed "N'Doumba", and is spurned by all other married ladies. It therefore becomes, as in N.T.V. Play House, Kaduna, the popular theme of all the folk-tales told in small groups gathered under moonlight immediately after supper. La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono, being the bridge between oral literature and the written, became thematically involved with one of such traditional marriages, its

commendable aspects, its shortcomings and attendant consequences. Thus, knowingly or unknowingly, Malonga consecrates about a fifth of his novel (18.5,per cent of it to be precise) to the inter-tribal marriage between the scions of the two ruling families - the N'Tsoundis and the N'Tsembo - an action to be vindicated by the fact that the new refined society which he is launching in the novel is going to owe its existence to this union.

If one is to judge tradition, of which Malonga is essentially a product himself, by the way it is portrayed in the marriage of Hakoula and Bitouala, one would tend to agree with Mathieu Mounikou that:

> "le conte n'est qu'apparemment révolutionnaire ou, en tous cas, n'est pas aussi radicalement révolutionnaire qu'il semble au premier abord".[46]

In describing each aspect of the ceremony the author shows what a deep knowledge he has of his people's tradition. Agreeing with the words of Jacques Nantet,

> "Jean Malonga sait décrire la nature, la vie rurale, les coutumes mystérieuses".[47]

it seems from the convincing nature of his narrative that he finds all well with tradition marriage-wise, although Gerard Moore, after the manner of Gleason Judith, wonders whether, after all his eulogy for Tradition, the author would be ready to give out his daughter in marriage at the age of ten.

(46) Mounikou, p. 175.
(47) Jacques Nantet, Panorama de la littérature noire d'expression française, (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1972), p. 164.

Here and there, after the manner of the Nigerian Chinua Achebe and the Congolese Guy Menga, Malonga finds himself at loss for the proper word to express one item of tradition or the other in the foreign language in which he is writing in such a way as to give to the item the beauty, the force, and the significance it has traditionally. The problem is further aggravated by the fact that the author, like the majority of his counterparts of the pre-independence era, has his audience in Europe, and has to put his ideas across to them in a way they could understand, and at the same time maintain some faithfulness to his social values.

Each time the author finds himself confronted by the linguistic problems stated above, he uses his native Kikongo, and explains either in the same paragraph or in a subsequent footnote. The Europeans have a week of seven days. In traditional African week there are four days. The week is either "small" or "big". The two make up together the "lari" calender. The days of the "small" week are M'Pika, N'Koyi, Boukondzo and Tsaba, which are in themselves names of markets. Each meets once every four days. The author makes sure he misses no detail. Mandzakala, Boumoungou, Kadi-Kadi, and Tsaba-dia-Manko, themselves also markets, are the days of the "big" week. Each of the four big markets meets once every eight days. It lends its name to all the vicinity in which it is located. And on page 11 of the novel we read: "En effet Mi N'Tsembo a fait annoncer sa visite il y a déjà trois Mandzakala" because he could not have said "il y a trois semaines" so that his European audience may understand, for as we have seen above, they are not

the same. He could not have said either "il y a vingt-quatre jours" for Africans do not generally count days that way. He could have been picked up for exoticism as A.C.Brench rightly pointed out in his The Novelists' Inheritance in Africa, or, whatever be the case, his "récit" would have lost its traditional tinge. What is more Malonga feels that there are some aspects of tradition that are strictly characteristic of a people and these must be preserved, otherwise the society will be one without identity. The manner in which days are counted in his novel in "Mandzakala" and "saisons sèches" is an eloquent testimony to that. Thus the author grapples with translation problems whenever the development of his story takes him deep into tradition.

Of enormous significance in traditional marriage is the offer of the Mouanga-Loumbou, a piece of cloth patched with white spots symbolising eggs. Offering it to a girl means offering her the rights of maternity. Her accepting it means accepting to be the mother to the children of the donor. The man and the woman will thereafter be regarded as betrothed. If the man, later on in marriage, takes this cloth away from the woman, he takes away from her the right to contine bearing him children, thus divorcing her. Malonga is very much in love with this aspect, too, of tradition and narrates every peripety with a keen sense of devotion and precision.

But it is not always that the woman accepts the offer of the Mouanga-Loumbou from her woer. And this part of tradition does not escape the author. If she does not like the man or his family she can say no to his proposal by refusing the cloth. This explains why

Bitouala was filled with anxiety and behaved the timid way he did in a scene vividly and meticulously painted by the author in which he presented the ceremonial cloth to Hakoula. Any one, be he European or African, who reads the novel readily admits that this traditional and ceremonial offer of the Mouanga-Loumbou is weightier and more binding on the incumbent than the modern offer of the engagement ring. At least, so feels Malonga.

Closely associated with the gift of the Mouanga-Loumbou is the shooting of the gun. During burial ceremonies and on festive occasions, gun shots are always heard. The number of shots depends on the pocket of the celebrant. If he is wealthy, shooting can last for days. But in a betrothal ceremony the situation is different and more significant. Asking formally for the hand of a daughter of Bidounga in marriage to his nephew, Mi N'Tsembo, according to tradition, did not state which of Bidounga's daughters. He simply went outside and shot once into the air. Bidounga's kith and kin, once they heard the shot, did not need to be present at the ceremony to understand that it concerned Bidounga's first daughter. This is one of those traditional peripety which every "son of the soil" is used to. In Une Vie de Boy it is, for example, "les roulements sinistres d'un tam-tam" that informed the people of Spanish Guinea that

> "un Francés est au plus mal et qu'on n'est pas sûr qu'il passera la nuit".[48]

However, for the benefit of the uninformed reader, the

(48) Ferdinand Oyono, Une Vie de Boy, (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1956), p. 9.

author explains further:

> "Si deux coups avaient été tirés, cela aurait signifié que la demande concernait la deuxième fille de M'Polo, et trois coups auraient désigné la plus jeune".[49]

After Mi N'Tsembo's official request, a reply is expected from Bidounga, who, to announce his willingness to acquiesce, beat the sacred gong. Here we are in a world of tradition - tradition at its best. The reader cannot but admire it along with Malonga.

A draught from the same cup by both the man and the woman ratifies the union already entered into. After the woman has accepted the Mouanga-Loumbou, she is given a cup which she fills with palm wine, drinks from, and passes over to her husband, who also drinks from it. Traditionally this is the first thing that the couple shares together and that in the presence of their two families. Then the bridegroom passes the cup to his father-in-law who empties it into his stomack, thus giving his benediction to the union of his daughter and his son-in-law. Malonga finds this part of tradition beautiful enough to insert in his story.

"Politique Humanitaire"

After the example of USSR of which it is written recently:

> "A country like USSR does not serve nor believe in God. Yet this has not affected their place and position in the world. Their honour and glory are as a result of hard labour and not

...

(49) La Légende, p. 20

empty promises about the Kingdom of Heaven ...."[50]

N'Tsangou became a rich and powerful state with "hard labour" emphasized to the annihilation of the "kingdom of Heaven". In this "centre de révoltés de l'ordre établi" everybody is equal, be he a slave, woman or free born. Malonga is of the firm conviction that an ideal society should be structured along these lines. Because of their proximity to the ocean, the Bakongo tribe was engaged in the "sordide négoce" of exchanging ivory and human beings for the coloured beads and cotton materials from the countries of the white men. As this trade was going on, N'Tsangou was undergoing an expansion to include areas "entre Madingou, M'Boula-N'Tangou, au nord-ouest, et ceux de la rive gauche de la Lafoulakari, au sud-est". The M'Pfoumou's father-in-law, Boueta M'Bongo adopted the N'Tsangou code of laws in his own kingdom among the Bakongo. The king of Boko, capital of the Bakongo tribe, who was earning a lot from the trade in human beings, protested.

At this point Malonga's commitment to the welfare of his society was stretched further to become a campaign for humanity. Slave trade must be abolished both in Congo Brazzaville and elsewhere in Africa, and that by putting a stop to the white slave dealers' incursions into the territory. His hero, M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono, as invincible as ever, led an army of then thousand men to help his father-in-law Boueta-M'Bongo crush the Kinviri of Boko. He was assisted in this feat by Mia M'Bama,

(50) Maurice Obhahinmejie, "Mercenary Priests, Spear, (January/February, 1977), p. 28.

N'Goma Biyelo, Bitouala and Bidounga. The campaign lasted four months. But hostilities remained. When the first European colonizers arrived, Boueta-M'Bongo, thinking they were slave dealers, refused them entry. But he was betrayed into their hands by the Bakongo and they had him executed.

This last part of the novel is likey to be a later addition for, as has been earlier said, the story shifts from being a legend to assume a historical character. Something must have constrained the author to make this interpolation. The betrayal of Boueta-M'Bongo and his subsequent annihilation for the concern he has for humanity can be the fate of any committed writer. Malonga is crusading for the same cause. Like his champion of the last pages, Boueta-M'Bongo, he was ready to make the supreme sacrifice in the hands of the European colonialists too. Such was not the case however, but we can already see his finger pointing at the next novel where focussing will be on the white man.

Chapter Three

POLITICAL COMMITMENT

- Commitment to the concept of Eurafricanism
- Its impracticability
- Consequential politics of total abandon and preservation of the African identity

"..... tout être humain est nié qui ne manifeste pas sa personnalité. Au contraire, exprimer son âme singulière, c'est contribuer à infléchir l'opinion publique et le cadre des institutions dans un sens plus largement humain".[1]

This is a clarion call in Paris by Alioune Diop sometime in the 40's on African intellectuals to take up arms against colonialism. This invitation to action was particularly significant in the sense that it diverted attention from the French West Indies where a lot of war of the pen was going on between poets like Aimé Césaire and novelists like Jacques Roumain on the one hand, and

(1) Quoted by Lilyan Kesteloot, Anthologie négro-africaine, (Verviers: Gérard and Co., 1967), p. 125.

the white settlers on the other. Diop's call met the ready ears of Jean Malonga who was then living at the Palais du Luxembourg as a Senator of the Middle Congo at the French National Assembly, a post which he held from 1948 to 1955. Profitting from the publishing facilities of "Présence Africaine"[2] founded by Alioune Diop, himself a Senator too and representing Sénégal at the National Assembly but with a flare for intellectual activity, Jean Malonga released to the public in 1948 Coeur d'Aryenne, a novel which together with other works by fellow Africans made Léopold Sédar Senghor observe at the first International Congress of Negro Writers and Artists at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1956 that "African Literature is politically committed".

Coeur d'Aryenne is a story of two societies that were trying to live together amidst overwhelming odds. Malonga believes strongly in the concept of "Union Française" and actually championed its cause publicly in the early 40's. This "Union Française" equates itself to what he calls in the novel the "société eurafricaine", a political concept which to his mind promises the best to both whites and blacks alike. The natural concomitant

(2) The maiden issue of "Présence Africaine" was published jointly in Sénégal and in Paris in December 1947 with French intellectuals like André Gide, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus as some of its sponsors, including ethnologists like Michael Leiris and Georges Balandier, together with four famous black writers: Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Richard Wright and Paul Hazoumé as co-sponsors. Diop established it to serve for the Africans what the French communist review "Nouvel Age" was for the French West Indians especially between 1930 and 1931.

of such a situation is equality, a word which the settlers did not want to hear. The African, nipped in the bud by the uncondescending white in his desperate march towards this union, has no other alternative than to retreat into his africanness.

The characters that matter in the novel fall into two groups:

Group A	Group B
Roch Morax Rev. Father Hux The Police Commissioner	The Inspector General of Police Mr. and Mrs. Thillard Marie Rose Mambeké Solange

Group A represents all that is ugly in colonialism, and can be said to represent in general terms the three main pillars of the colonial administration. The characters in this group exist as individuals and also as representatives of colonial institutions. It goes without saying that they are in stiff opposition to the idea of "communion des races". The characters in Group B are the exponents and torch-bearers of the idea, the "Paul et Virginie" type of love between the last two being the axle on which the novel rotates.

Roch Morax is so thoroughly bad that throughout the story he is incapable of doing any good. His "caractère bilieux" is not the product of a day's experience. He was formerly under the Compagne Française du Haut et Bas

Congo (C.F.H.B.C.) as a worker, but was relieved of his post and repatriated for smuggling and embezzlement. A crook, he "wangled" his way back to the Congo where, with his ill-gotten money, he set up a private business concern. He hated Africans, but not to the point of not finding in them a source of cheap labour. The men tapped latex for him, manned his palm plantations, hunted to supply him with meat, ivory, and leather. Smoked fish, produced by the women fishing for him, he smuggled regularly across the river to the Belgian Congo. And the salary of these poor wretches:

> "une poignée de sel, quelque quincaillerie, des couteaux de traite rouillés, des bouilles ébréchées et un peu de cotonnade de mauvaise qualité.[3]

His devoted cook, "homme à tout faire", he treats worse than an animal. From abuses and sporadic kicks he stepped up the poor African's undeserved punishments to "pin-picking":

> "Quand il revient par hasard à la factorerie, Yoka de qui il est jaloux, doit se plier à ses extravagances, courber l'échine sous la chicotte du maître ..."[4]

Because of his being too loving a husband, Yoka was sentenced by Roch Morax to twenty days' imprisonment at Dongou, the administrative headquarters. There Yoka was exposed to untold tortures:

(3) Jean Malonga, "Coeur d'Aryenne", Trois écrivains noirs, (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1948), p. 168.
(4) "Coeur", p. 183.

> "..... quinze coups de chicotte tous les matins en guise de petit déjeuner, vidange et nettoyage des latrines à longueur de journée, transport de lourds fagots de bois mort et de grandes touques d'eau pour la cuisine du Commandant et des auxiliaires de ce haut fonctionnaire, les miliciens".[5]

Physical exploitation and cruelties are not all that Roch Morax had in store for Africans. Like the administrator Clarke in Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God, he exploited the women sexually too. Although this practice by colonialists is generally believed by critics to be widespread and common throught African literature, nevertheless that by Roch Morax is excessive, to put it in a simple language. He is a sex machine. For him there was no distinction of categories. Mature, immature, married, they were all the same thing to him as long as he could satisfy his sexual urge. He threatened and bribed the senile chief of Mossaka to allow him access to all the females in his chiefdom. Soon after, the place was teeming with half-breed bastards. And as regards the fate of the poor innocent girl-mothers Malonga is quick in pointing out that they were objects of disgrace and public ridicule in the eyes of their countrymen, and had no hope of ever settling down any more in marriage. That is for those of them who were lucky to have had safe delivery. For the less fortunate ones it was death through "accouchements anormaux, ... faiblesse de parturientes, infections diverses par excès d'hémorragie ou avortements"[7] This sexual exploitation is to be considered the most painful blow which the colonialists

(5) "Coeur", p. 184.
(6) c.f. William Cartey, Whispers from a Continent, (London: Heinemann, 1971),p.52.
(7) "Coeur", p. 188.

in the person of Roch Morax dealt on the Africans in the sense that an entire cross-section of humanity was turned into sex bags just beaause, though no fault of theirs their skin happened not to be white. This is how Malonga sees it. Hence his bitter comments as he ploughs through the mournful tale.

The only opportunity Roch Morax had to do a little good was after his daughter had been saved from drowning, and this he let slip. Instead of a little tip to Mambeké in recognition of the personal risk he took to render him such a wonderful service it was "reproches amers" for the boy's father and for the whole of Africa:

> "Vraiment, on ne pouvait rien attendre des nègres. Ils n'étaient bons qu'à voler leurs patrons".[8]

As for the saviour himself, he got the following package from the brute:

> "Tiens! moricaud, voici trois morceaux de sucre et un coupon de cotonnade ..... Maintenant, Mambeké écoute et retiens bien ce que je vais te dire. Si je te revois à roder près de ma maison, je te fais dévorer par la panthère ou je te descends à coup de fusil. Tu as compris, petit macaque?"[9]

What a reward!

Meanwhile, the "raciste insolent, homme brutal et bourru, ivrogne invétéré"[10] appears to be weighed down into inactivity by age. He has already attained the age of fifty-six. The bewitching sun of the "dark continent"

(8) "Coeur", p. 167.
(9) "Coeur", p. 167.
(10) Mounikou, p. 182.

no longer seems to tickle his voracious sexual appetite of yester years. Such was the Roch Morax that Mambeké met on his arrival from Europe. Cautious both in speech and action, he welcomed Mambeké rather warmly, (perhaps out of timidity occasioned by the august presence of Monsieur le Directeur), but refused to gulp his own share of the delicious " Solangine". In the course of the uneasy dialogue that followed Malonga had the foresight of making his hero adopt a stand in African Literature and African literary criticism, a stand which is upheld by Thiam and many other African scholars:

> "Ce qui explique pourquoi vos écrivains les plus éminents, quand ils décrivent l'Afrique, le font en la déformant, en la gratifiant d'une âme et d'une physiognomie qui ne sont pas les siennes propres".[11]

The reference to Thiam in this respect is purposeful because, writing also in 1948 and in the same "Présence Africaine", he has this to say about the European scholar:

> "A stranger from the distant corner of Europe; his attitude is complicated. He may be prejudiced: he has read and heard a lot about Africa; he looks with pity on these 'primitive' people ..... He may want to understand: he observes carefully, we translate some of our stories for him, but his mentality is such that he cannot always understand the rich but complex soul of Africa".[12]

Roch Morax has no reply for Mambeké's shattering arguments.

(11) "Coeur", p. 259.
(12) Doudou Thiam, "Des Contes et des fables en Afrique noire", Présence Africaine, 4, 1948, p.667.

Solange, of a different stuff, felt elated by the subtle way Mambeké outreasoned her father. For her it is a sign of future things to come.

In spite of the apparent change in Roch Morax's life, his addiction to alcohol and his hatred for Africans remain unshaken. The two propensities are to accompany him to the grave. He returned from hunting at 3.00 a.m. At that time of the night he still had appetite for three glasses of rhum. Hearing the cry of a baby helplessly asking for its milk, the "ogre" quickly became oblivious of himself as the father of a "countless" number of mulatoes in Mossaka. He took exception to this one because its father is an African. His hatred for Africans is such that he was even ready to kill in order to do away with a vile object that he did not want to see. But in an attempt to shed an innocent blood vengeance got the better of him.

Jean Malonga exercised a lot of restraint, no doubt, in his treatment of the powers that be in the colonial administration. Whether this is the actual situation of things or whether he was acting simply out of fear of the powers in question thus making his story unrealistic is not a matter to be discussed here but in the subsequent chapter. One thing is obvious - that the "administrateur de Mossaka" was as we say "the man behind the mask", his physical presence in the story being only much felt as that of the Commandant in Batouala. The only arm of the government that is in full display in the story is the police, and even so with the type of disparity in character that exists between the two European warders of the Dahomey (Republic of Benin) prison in Olympe

Bhêly-Quénum's Un Piège sans fin. While the highest authority in the force, the Inspector General, is in support of "la Fraternité humaine", the next officer to him, the Commissioner of Police, is on the side of the forces of "apartheid" and is almost as bad as Roch Morax. Mornay, the "sous-officier" is simply a tool at the disposal of the Police Commissioner.

Following a tip off by an informant Mornay was despatched with a team of ten African constables to arrest Obambi and his family, Mambeké and Solange. It was feared that Solange would be eaten up, to use the language of the Commissioner. Instead of making a neat job of their assignment they took extra chances to belabour the offenders "généreusement" with strokes of the cane before finally pushing them handcuffed into the police van. There in custody their torture continued:

> "absorption d'urines en guise de vin ....
> frottage du front contre le mur ....., la chicotte,
> toutes les atrocités sans nom ...." (13)

The young African recruits in inflicting these atrocities on their countrymen usually exhibit a lot of zeal in order to show their colonial masters that if they cannot be accepted as "assimilés" with respect to other aspects of French culture, at least they know well how to satisfy their hatred for Africans: the important thing is that they must get their promotions though at the expense of their brothers and sisters. This is the irony of the colonial situation. Such was the case in Coeur d'Aryenne. When Mambeké was produced from his prison

(13) "Coeur", p. 225.

cell at the intervention of the Inspector General, he was an eysore - clothes bespotted with blood and mud, eyes poached and bleeding, hands padlocked. The Commissioner jeered at him:

> "Ma parole! ils ne l'ont pas trop abimé. Il a encore bien de la chance de séduire toutes les jeunes filles égarées de Brazzaville. Alors ....? mon cher Mambeké, vous êtes content? Il paraît que vos congénères ne vous disent plus rien de bon? Ho!ho!ho!"[14]

Distrustful, devilish and contemptuous of Africans, he warned his country girl against allowing herself to be trapped "au sortilège et aux airs suaves et candides de tous les Mambeké du monde, même quand ils mettent des uniformes blancs aux écussons grenat, et qui restent, quoique vous en pensiez, croyez-moi des démons malfaisants".[15]

The Inspector General was at a loss for words to express his bitter disappointment. False to his type throughout almost all anti-colonial literature he rebuked the Commissioner for negativing the noble plans of "mother" France for her colonies, for militating against France's noble presence in her colony, for upsetting the peace in the area under his jurisdiction and for undermining the vitality of the "Union Française". He remonstrated with the Commissioner to watch out:

> "Ne savez-vous donc pas que nous sommes en face d'amis peut-être jaloux, curieux et sceptiques qui épient notre politique indigène pour y découvrir une fissure, une défaillance à critiquer?"[16]

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(14) "Coeur", p. 225.
(15) "Coeur", p. 223.
(16) "Coeur", p. 225.

It is with the missionaries that Malonga's bile got ruptured. The issue at stake is not whether he has fallen away from Catholicism or not, but his commitment to seeing that religion change totally for the better or pack it up. After all, his compatriot J.-P. Makouta-Mboukou is supposed to be "un homme gagné à la foi chétienne et qui ne cache pas sa lampe sous le boisseau",[17] but still, out of awareness of the ignoble role of the church in colonial politics, weaves in his novels characters like Jean Kayilou who refused to be consecrated, though a pastor, by the authorities of his church. Does France, the home country of the Catholic Holy Ghost Fathers under whom Malonga grew up and the activities of one of whom he described in his novel, a country that was in 1964 95 per cent Catholic by birth, 80 per cent by baptism, not enjoy to date her fame throughout the Catholic world as the "fille aînée de l'Eglise" with less than 12 per cent of her population as "les véritables pratiquants"?[18] So Johnston's remark that "any race of purely Negro blood accepts and loses Christianity with great facility"[19] can only be in bad taste. It is malicious for him to push his argument further to the point that

> "..... after a century's work the Bakongo fell away from Christianity, and in another hundred years had absolutely relapsed into Heathenism, and expelled all the priests".[20]

(17) Ndamba, p. 40.
(18) See Guy Michaud, Guide France, (Paris: Hachette, 1964), pp 138 - 139.
(19) Johnston, pp. 46 - 47.
(20) Johnston, p. 147.

Our author's spiritual disposition is, therefore, out ot the question here. At the worst he can be daubed "Communist", like his main mouthpiece Mambeké in the novel, even though the hero had every opportunity to block or at least discourage the pupils' frequentation of la Mission Sainte Barbe but did not. After all, has Kesteloot not said already that Malonga's complaints and recriminations against religion "bear out the communist theory of religion as the opiate of the people"?[21] What is important, at least for the purposes of this thesis, is the ugly face of the church in the colonial Congo which he is unmasking.

That Father Hux, like his prototypes in most African novels, is one of the most despicable characters in Coeur d'Aryenne is not in doubt. In conformity with the well-known pattern of internship in the mission house of candidates for marriage, (well-known because it is a practice that was widespread throughout anglophone and francophone West Africa, wherever the white Catholic clergy manned the missions), he imposed "une petite corvée expiatoire" on his "ouailles". Like Mongo Beti in Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba who did not see the rationale for the existence of that "house of prostitution" otherwise known as the Sixa there in the heart of one of the biggest mission premises in the Cameroons, Malonga bitterly disapproved of the gratuitous deployment of the poor souls in quest of sacraments "aux plantations d'arachides, de tarots ou de patates de la mission" where some of them were occasionally bitten by poisonous snakes. Above all, the women lose their hair to the bargain on admission, the enormity of which act can only be

(21) Lilyan Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, (Philadelphia: Tempel University Press, 1974), p. 49.

understood in the light of the fact that an African woman is never shaved to the skin except on the sorrowful event of her husband's death.

The Congolese critic Josué Ndamba referred to earlier talked about "le pouvoir politique" and what he aptly called "son complice, le pouvoir religieux".[22] The marriage between the colonial authority and the Church is leak-proof. Malonga frowns at the unholy union. The two institutions see nothing wrong with the other whatever the circumstance. Father Hux, in spite of all that has been said earlier, sees in Roch Morax "Le bon Blanc" who "vient dans ce vilan (sic) pays pour aider le Noir ă sortir de sa misère et de sa sauvagerie traditionnelle".[23] The fine qualities that the missionary observed in Yoka for which he recommended him to the service of the bully include his being "un peu décroute". This recommendation is closely followed by the warning that for "une seule faute" he, Yoka, is for the gallows in Dongou.

No sooner did Yoka, under the advice of the mediator between him and the Almighty, enter into the service of Roch Morax than his tortures started - all for actions that do not constitute even "une seule faute". It is not a sin, at least in the eyes of Malonga, for a man to safeguard the chastity of his wife. For doing so Yoka earned twenty days at Dongou. For our "man of God" it is the right treatment for the "intempérament indiscipliné du cuisinier bouillant et rebelle". He continues:

(22) See Ndamba, p. 39.
(23) "Coeur", p. 182.

> "Il faut en effet avoir de l'autorité sur ces Nègres pour obtenir une obéissance passive ... Ces grands enfants ignorent, les malheureux, que c'est surtout pour leur bien et pour le salut de leur âme qu'on est quelquefois obligé de les malmener".[24]

Such is the Reverend Father's récipe for the sufferings of a member of his flock.

Once Yoka tried to escape from prison to go and rescue his wife from the immoral clutches of his oppressor. For that his punishment in prison was increased. On his release he was sent directly to "Father" for some spiritual readjustment. Yoka, up till that moment a humble lamb, lost his temper and started to complain on top of his voice to Father Hux about the abuses he had been subjected to for no just cause, thinking that Heaven was hearing his voice of sorrow. But the "bon pasteur" lashed him into silence:

> "Yoka, es-tu devenu fou, par hasard? ..... ne te souviens-tu donc pas que ton maître est chrétien et qu'il est marié à une belle et jolie 'Madame'?"[25]

Thus he refused to believe Yoka's story. On the contrary he asked him to respect Roch Morax for making it possible for him to earn his living.

Father Hux then goes to pity the roughhandled cook for being in the "état prélogique" and consequently unable to see or comprehend his master's "sollicitude" for him on account of which "il est souvent obligé d'être

(24) "Coeur", p. 184.
(25) "Coeur", p. 185.

un peu dur avec toi". After asserting that Roch Morax was only trying to rescue the cook from his savagery he went on:

> "....je constate que tu oublies ton catéchisme. Vas-tu redevenir un païen? Allons! va donc m'attendre à la chapelle, je t'entendrai à confesse".[26]

The Reverend "play-boy" then turns round to advise Roch Morax over a glass of Pernod to desist from adultery and that "afin d'éviter de la peine à Marie-Rose" and not because God forbids it. Such like experiences have made the South African Ezekiel Mphahlélé to declare that

> "To us the church has become a symbol of the dishonesty of the West."[27]

But as for our author his odium for the ecclesiastical institution is pushed to its paroxysm. Falling into the bandwagon of Ferdinand Oyono, Mongo Beti, Jacques Roumain, Jacques-Stephen Alexis, Langston Hughes, Charles de Graft-Johnson, Parmenas Mockerie, Kenneth Kaunda, James Baldwin, Assane Seck, Lothrop Stoddard, Eannes de Azurara, Charles Grove,[28] and even some movements like the "Moral Rearmament" of the early 50's, he condemns the church outright and even goes to the extent of accusing the God of Reverend Father Hux of racism in lines replete with emotion and revolt:

> "Il est vrai que tout ceci se fait sous les auspices d'un Dieu certainement blanc qui ne peut être la

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(26) "Coeur", p. 185.
(27) Ezekiel Mphahlélé, Down Second Avenue, (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 221.
(28) This list is far from being exhaustive.

> providence que d'une seule catégorie de ses créatures. Et d'ailleurs, qui sait si l'homme de couleur est de création divine. Vue sous cet angle, la question devient plus claire et on peut conclure que Dieu est le premier raciste des Mondes possibles".[29]

If it is possible that the God of Father Hux is a racist as Malonga points out then not much is expected of HIS minister. The instructions he organises in his mission are contaminated with racism. He believes that the white man is superior to the black and that the two races should not move together on terms of equality like in the case of Mambeké and Solange in the same canoe, but on terms of master and servant. Thus the "holy one" reproaches Solange for undermining his racism by her "irresponsibility":

> "Ma petite Solange, mais tu es extraordinaire. Comment oses-tu te faire conduire en pirogue par un petit nègre tout sale? N'as-tu pas peur de te voir jeter à l'eau par ce sauvage qui se régalera ensuite de ta chair si tendre? N'as-tu pas peur de te contaminer de vermine ..... Oublies-tu donc que tu es une blanche, une maîtresse pour tous les nègres quels qu'ils soient? Il faut savoir garder ses distances, que diable!"[30]

This racial catechism to the aryan girl is followed by a severe punishment for her complice, Mambeké, and a report of his misconduct to Roch Morax who immediately reacted by flogging Yoka for dereliction of duty.

(29) "Coeur", pp. 185 - 186.
(30) "Coeur", p. 170.

The learning conditions at the mission Sainte Barbe were not the same for both races. The blacks and the whites were not allowed to stay together. While the only aryan girl in the group had a "coquette salle d'études", all to herself, the Africans had to make do with an unhealthy shed equipped with "une table rustique en branches de bambou accolées, un petit crucifix en fer rouillé" with "aucune trace de banc pour les catéchumènes qui s'asseyent à même le sol fourmillant des vers de terre et des oeufs d'ankylostomes".[31]

The medium of instruction was not the same for both categories. Solange was taught in French but the Africans in Likouba. The purpose of this is to try to limit education for the Africans to the barest possible minimum, thus leaving them as much as possible in the dark. The colonialists strongly believe, as has been seen in the first chapter, that giving Africans access to Western education tantamounts to equipping them with weapons with which to fight them and chase them out of Africa. Hence Mambeké's fluency in French and his "gate-crashing" into the erstwhile official language of the mass resulted in Solange, the "unpatriotic" author of the mischief, being exiled to a convent outside the country, and in Mambeké running for his dear life as far as to Brazzaville, about four hundred kilometres away from Mossaka. Otherwise he would have been accused of civic disobedience and clamped into jail at Dongou, also about four hundred kilometres away from Mossaka but near Congo's boundary with Oubangui-Chari.

The contents of the lessons were different also:

(31) "Coeur", p. 170.

"contre-vérités, contradictions flagrantes avec les 'Vérités théologales'" to the African children. The mainstay of their lessons is fear: fear of Purgatory, fear of Hell. The author tells us that at the sight of these double truths the faith of the white girl started to wane:

> "Il y a donc un Dieu blanc et un autre noir, une 'Révélation divine' pour le Blanc et une autre pour le Noir?"[32]

To deal with Father Hux and the religion which he represents summarily Malonga decided to expose to ridicule the priest's levity of character and his artificial brand of religion camoufladged under a banner of capitalism without rival. His first rencontre is with a fellow aryan, Marie-Rose, who has just learnt of the whole gamut of her husband's amorous escapades with the unripe African girls and, especially, with the wife of her steward. She collapsed at the sad discovery and was rushed back to her house. When the priest tried to dismiss before her her husband's abominations as "un incident banal et sans aucune gravité" she ordered him out:

> "Maintenant, laissez-moi goûter à l'amertume de ma douleur et de ma honte et les digérer avec courage, voulez-vous".[33]

The next meeting is with his arch-enemy Mambeké, just back from Europe. Armed with logic and reasoning the young Headmaster sought to reach a compromise with the

(32) "Coeur", p. 171.
(33) "Coeur", p. 190.

missionary on several religious issues. The first commandment of God, the young man argued, demands that His creatures adore only Himself and never the images and other things carved by men, but still in every Church he saw people genuflect before pictures, images and other carved images. [Is this not in utter disobedience to God's injunctions?][34] Secondly, he had seen priests burning the amulets which the cadidates for baptism wore and forbidding them their juju incantations. As a substitute these neophytes were given scapulars and medals. [What else can these scapulars and medals be if not jujus themselves?] Thirdly, the Headmaster went on, "Dieu dit: 'Aimez-vous les uns les autres'," but it had come to his notice that in most of principal towns of Equatorial Africa the native clergy were relegated to the background and were discriminated upon in matters concerning housing and nourishment. [Is this not racial segregation there in the heart of the church and among the ministers of the same religion?] In the fourth place, in private schools the blacks and the whites were separated, and a special place reserved for mulatoes as a middle race. [Is the church in pursuing such obnoxious racist policies not exposing the society to social conflicts and unhealthy rivalries?]. In the fifth place, religion was being spread with the aid of the cane. There were raids, to his knowledge, in the villages and young girls and women were abducted from their husbands' homes and bundled into convents. [Is that the best way of showing people the road to the Kingdom of Heaven?]. In the sixth place,

(34) The natural questions that arise but not expressed by the author are put in hook brackets by me for the purpose of elucidating each argument.

young children of both sexes recruited from far and wide for schooling were in reality deployed to the mission farms as farm hands, or to building projects as labourers, without any form of financial reward. [Another massacre of the holy innocents?]. In the seventh place, he had observed that some proviledged people and some highly placed ministers of religion were dispensed from certain religious obligations. [Is the Kingdom of Heaven only for dignitaries?]. He concluded his catalogue of the anormalies he had observed in the Catholic Church by casting a cursory glance at his own traditional religion and observed that in that religion what is good for the goose is good for the gander: that what is sinful or permissible to the rich is same for the poor - in short, that African traditional religion knows no discrimination be it racial or hierarchial.

Then Malonga, through Mambeké, drives his point home, and makes his stand clear as far as Christianity is concerned: he is not against the Catholic religion per se but against the way it is being mishandled by its ministers:

> "..... nous nous demandons seulement si on ne se fait pas un plaisir de la saboter, de la transformer pour les besoins de la cause et pour l'usage exclusif des peuples moins avertis, c'est-à-dire ceux qu'on appelle les primitifs."[35]

But Father Hux would not listen any more. The "holder of the key to Heaven" lost his temper and started to abuse Mambeké. Mambeké is to him like the seed fallen by the way

(35) "Coeur," p. 270

side, who had made nothing out of all the education he received at the mission. He even accused Mambeké of atheism and of having become 'un petit démon'. On the face of all these abuses Mambeké maintained his sang-froid, but quickly refuted his being accused of atheism by asserting his identity as an African.[36] His gentleness and maturity of approach earned him some further listening from Father Hux while he enacts his CREDO:

> ".....je crois en une force Supraterrestre qui régit l'Universe
> Je crois aussi en la Fraternité humaine.
> Je crois en la Beauté du monde, en tout ce qui est grand,noble et bon.
> Je crois en l'esprit de l'eau, du vent, du feu et des planètes.
> Je crois en un Monde meilleur pour ma Race si oubliée ici-bas."[37]

His Credo is followed next by his qualifications of his GOD:

> ".....l'infiniment Bon, infiniment Equitable, Juste pour tout le monde et qui, comme un père impartial pour tous ses enfants violets ou verts, ne s'occupe pas de leur couleur qui ne peut être, en somme, qu'un accident cosmique".[38]

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(36) It is a general concensus that all Africans basically believe in the existence of God. Their qualifications of this God depend on the individual religious sects to which they belong.

(37) "Coeur", p. 270. Arrangement in this order by me.

(38) "Coeur", p. 271.

Father Hux became furious and ordered Mambeké out of his house, accusing him of making nonsense of God and His missionaries. Mambeké politely replied that on the contrary he was trying to save the face of the missionaries and "la Grandeur et la Pureté de l'Autre". But Father Hux has already summed him up as "un communiste forcené". It is interesting to note that it is in keeping with a certain pattern of thought during the colonial era for anyone who exhibits sign of mature independent thinking to be styled "athée combatif" for the Catholic religion at the time expected its clients to swallow all its doctrines without questionning. In the same vein anyone who is seen to be a nationalist is equated automatically to a communist, hence the famous "binôme traditionnel" of the Archbishop of Yaoundé, Jean Zoa:

> "nationalisme égale communisme
> catholicisme égale colonialisme".[39]

Apart from Mambeké's Credo, apart from his sound definitions of the African God WHO is God as God should be, Malonga endeavours to show in the final words of Mambeké to Father Hux that, in contrast to the priests of the African religion, the ministers of the white God have something to hide about their religion. The frequent outbursts, the wantom accusations, the vicious condemnations, the unreadiness to listen to or engage in a dialogue or discussion with one curious to learn and to be convinced, are all pointers to the hide and seek approach of the white Catholic clergy to the

(39) Quoted by Claude Wauthier, L'Afrique des africains, (Paris: Seuil, 1964), p. 225

doctrines they propound. Thus Malonga would like to conclude: The African traditional religion does not have all these anormalies inherent in the European system; its priests have nothing to hide, are always ready to dish out all information solllicited to anyone who cares.

In African "protest" novels the good, friendly, white man is not entirely lacking. Pierre's worries over the monopoly and greed of the European companies in Sembène Ousmane's O pays, mon beau peuple, Targe's brotherly letter at the end of Bernard Dadié's Climbié, Barge's rescue of the hero of Ake Loba's Kocoumbo from the abject poverty into which he was immersed in the capital of France, the schoolmaster Salvain's exasperation at the contemptuous attitude of his countrymen towards Africans in Ferdinand Oyono's Une Vie de Boy, the Pastor Martial's warmth and friendliness with Samba Diallo in Sheikh Hamidou Kane's L'Aventure Ambiguë, are ready examples. In Jean Malonga's Coeur d'Aryenne it is the Inspector who saved Mambeké from the racist Police Commissioner's grasp out of the love he had for his brilliant pupil. His concept of religion for the child is not the barren dogmatic, suppressive type of Father Hux but our hero's simple down-to-earth practical genre based on natural laws:

> "courage et moralité, mes enfants, loin du mal et de la corruption du siècle, de la haine et des mépris préconçus, le coeur haut...."[40]

Mme Thillard is like her husband. She loves Africans and talks about "cette ensorcelleuse Afrique". She encourages

(40) "Coeur", p. 232

S] nge on in her exceptional love for Africa and sees nothing wrong with her naturalising Congolese as she asserted she would. Occasionally she served her and Mambeké meals and was kind enough to ask their driver to take the two young people down to the pontoon when she noticed that Solange was getting late for the boat. If only more of the white settlers were like the Thillards, Africa's colonial history would have been different.

Next in our list of those who have understood "la beauté de l'Idéal dont nous sommes ses (sic) apôtres" is Marie Rose, the wife of Roch Morax. Of inward goodness, she has not got her daughter's force of character and pushfulness. She occupies a place of timid innocence in a world that is full of violence and mischief. Her married life is an unhappy one due to heartless desertion by her husband. Within the precincts of her home she is treated by her husband more like a kitchen-girl than a mistress:

> "Une minute ma chère. Je voudrais que tu me dises avant comment tout cela est arrivé ..... Tu sais très bien que nous sommes en pleine saison de hautes eaux, et tu te permets de laisser sortir ta fille toute seule. Tu es impardonnable, Marie-Rose"[41]

She is the placid type, trusts herself, trusts everybody. And this is why Roch Morax was able to be unfaithful to her for such a long time without her finding it out. She will however regret on her death bed her too much confidence in people when everything is already late. The development of her character is smooth and convincing. But it would

(41) "Coeur", p. 165.

have been smoother, more logical and progressive if the author had omitted the pseudo-flamboyant sentence: "Tu sais très bien que ta fille est toujours fourrée chez ce négrillon de malheur duquel nous arrivons difficilement à la détacher".[42] It appears to conflict with the apostle of "la Beauté de la Fraternité Humaine" and the defender of "l'Idéal de la Communion des hommes de toutes couleurs" which she was on her death bed.

But people at times change according to the circumstances in which they find themselves. Her discovery at the church of Sainte-Barbe that her husband was sleeping steadily with young African women, a discovery that almost shocked her to death, could have opened her eyes to the realities of life: if her aryan husband could be involved in such shameful connections with Africans the idea of separation of races being championed by the white colonizers is nothing but a farce and barefaced hypocrisy, she might have thought. It is therefore possible that Marie-Rose underwent a change, a change for the better. It is a pity that Malonga did not show us this clearly. What we have from him are only pointers like Marie-Rose telling Solange not to abandon herself "à la peine, au désespoir et à des regrets inutiles", and her injunction to the unhappy girl to inform her father that "je lui pardonne tout" - all of which are in keeping with Malonga's political ambitions in the novel.

Still talking about Marie-Rose's sick bed: we have there one of the most striking marriage scenes that can only be rivalled by that of Aeneas and Dido in Virgil's Aeneid, Book IV. The officiating "priest", Marie-Rose, with her

(42) "Coeur", p. 165. [It is Marie-Rose who is speaking].

last breath blessed the union of Mambeké with Solange, a prophetic metaphor for Malonga's dreams of a union of the races represented by the hero and the heroine. The couple understood the uneasy responsibility heaped on their shoulders as they joined their hands from the two sides of the sick bed on the feeble breast of the departing lady. Mambeké has snatched Solange from the jaws of the crocodile. He is commissioned to continue saving her from the grips of those aryans who undermine France's so-called "mission civilisatrice" in Africa. Solange's dual assignment is not less difficult. "Ton devoir va consister à prouver que tu es fille d'un grand pays, d'une nation aux idées larges, hardies, libérales ..."[43] she is told. Since her childhood she has been doing so. But the problem lies in the fact that she has now to continue doing it in the absence of her main succour in life. Thus it becomes a "mission sacrée" which will include protecting Yoka from the ire of an intemperate father. This is a test for an ardent will-power, but as the sick lady rightly pointed out, she is "une fille de grand caractère" and will surely be equal to the task. The two young people left the hospital determined to carry out Marie-Rose's last wishes to the letter.

If, in spite of the good offices of some understanding ones among them, the white society is unwilling to admit blacks into their social complex, the blacks were, are, and will ever be disposed to welcome them into their fold. This is the core of Malonga's polity in the novel. Jean Malonga, after his Certificat d'Etudes in 1942,[44] was elected into the French National Assembly the

(43) "Coeur", p. 194.
(44) See Janheinz Jahn, Who's who in African Literature, (Tübingen: Horst Erdinan Verlag, 1972), p. 206.

following year. The French made to the Congolese the same empty promises of racial equality under the banner of "liberté, égalité, fraternité" which she made to Sénégal, and the deceit behind which Crowther points out thus:

> "Reforms of an assimilationist nature were promised on the termination of the war. But this was a measure taken in the desperation of war, and since the war was over, the promised reforms slipped into the background".[45]

Like the two half-brothers, Massyla Diop and Birago Diop, like Ahmadou Mapté Diagne before them whose Les Trois volontés de Malic is seen as pro-assimilationist in character though a book for children, Malonga was imbued with the hope of total assimilation by France within the framework of the "Union Française". This is the main role that Solange plays in the novel, namely to bring France nearer to Africa. This is the first face of Malonga's political commitment. But unlike the "tirailleur Sénégalais" Bakari Diallo who, demeaning himself in his continued shameful postulation of integration of the Senegalese into French culture and politics in spite of the persistent cold shoulder by France, went as far as to accept the myth of the inferiority of the black man and treat the African as a baby in need of "mother France"[46], Malonga saw in

(45) Michael Crowther, Senegal, A Study of French Assimilation Policy, (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 29.

(46) Bakary Diallo, taking a stroll one day in a street in Paris where he was recuperating from the injuries he received during World War I, saw a lady scattering grains to pigeons and made the following comments: "Ah! Que c'est doux à voir. Car il me semble que ces oiseaux, c'est nous les noirs, ... et que cette Dame est la France! Oiseaux reconnaissants ... en face de votre Bienfaitrice, cette dame au visage doux ... aites avec moi: Vive la force-bonte de la France". /Bakary Diallo, Force-Bonté, Paris: F. Rieder, 1926), pp. 107 - 108./

France's cajoling double-dealing a challenge that must be accepted by any true African, an invitation to him to self-development. This is the second side to his politics towards the end of the novel when Solange is no more in the picture.

Solange's story started with her being saved from drowning and from the crocodile's jaw by the negro boy Mambeké, son of her father's cook. The incident of her falling into the River Congo, which threw the whole of Mossaka off gear, reveals for the first time what tremendous respect and silent admiration the little girl has for Mambeké's sterling qualities. The way she broke into mum's and dad's conversation:

> "Oh! si vous saviez comme il est bon et brave. J'avais affreusement peur sous les flots, ... Mais dès que j'ai aperçu Mambeké luttant de vitesse avec le gros lézard je me suis dit que je n'avais rien à craindre .... Oui, père; oui, mère, Mambeké est très brave, dévoué et intelligent",[47]

confirms her disciplinary bankruptcy as revealed by her mother. Her inquisitiveness, coupled with her determination to find out every detail about the white man's treatment of the black man, made her abandon her own classroom to spy on the teaching going on in the African section of the mission. Her discovery wounded her feeling in her negrophile disposition towards the blacks.

In whatever concerns the political role which Malonga assigned to her of defending the cause of Africans before her aryan counterparts Solange acquitted herself creditably. She lets no opportunity slip of preaching racial equality

(47) "Coeur", p. 166.

to them. She frustrated Father Hux's attempt to instil fear for Mambeké into her. When he told her "N'as-tu pas peur de te voir jeter à l'eau par ce sauvage qui se réga lera ensuite de ta chair si tendre?", she understood what he was driving at - racial separatism - and quickly disagreed with him:

> "Mais, mon Père, Mambeké est un garçon très habile. Il manie la pagaie mieux que tous ceux de la factorerie. En outre, il est poli, correct, discipliné et ne m'a jamais rien dit de méchant. Il se couperait plutôt la main que de me voir souffrir. Je m'amuse énormément à son bord".[48]

With the Police Commissioner another brand of accusation is levelled against Mambeké, namely that of witchcraft. The Commissioner cannot see any rationale behind her referring to Mambeké twice during her interrogation as her "ami d'enfance". Morevoer she referred to him too as "Monsieur Mambeké" which connotes some measure of egalitarianism. The "wily" African must have bewitched her, the Commissioner thought. But such an impression is unacceptable to Solange.Finding the renowned words of Governor-General Eboue: "Ne pas penser pour l'Africain, mais

(48) "Coeur", p. 170.
(49) The Guyanese born Adolphe Félix Eboué, formerly Governor of Tchad, became the Governor-General of Afrique Equatoriale Française from 1941 to 1944 with headquarters in Brazzaville. He fought indefatigably for the recognition of the African personality, introduced a lot of bills which seemed revolutionary at the time relating to native law and tradition, condemned France's economic politics in the Congo, enthroned traditional rulership and won it official recognition by France. At the time of his death in 1944 his name was in A.E.F. what Chairman Mao's is in China. His political sayings were household words everywhere in the Congo at the time Jean Malonga wrote his novels.

penser en lui",[50] she retorts at the commissioner bouncing back to his face his suspicions:

> "Je sais très bien que ce n'est pas de leur côté qu'il faut chercher les démons malfaisants dont vous parlez: je sais où les trouver, moi, ces démons. Je connais bien les Africains pur avoir grandi parmi eux. Au lieu de les calomnier, on ferait mieux peut-être de les connaître, de les étudier selon leur optique pour arriver à les aimer comme des êtres semblables à nous".[51]

The underlined words must have struck the ears of the Commissioner like a blasphemy, thus confirming his fears of some foul play, some "black power", on the aryan girl.

Solange's love for Africa grows day after day, despite all the obstacles placed on its way by fellow whites. Everything she sees in the Congo has an attraction for her - the countryside, the crocodile-infested river, the forest, the birds, the talking drums, Bacongo itself and the life of the Bacongo. And she feels that it is because she has taken some pains to study the people closely and examine all the facets of the Congolese life with unprejudiced eyes that she has fallen so much in love with the country and her people. She even goes so far as to wish to be naturalised a Congolese in order to be able to "partager plus à mon aise leurs jeux et imiter leur sagesse, goûter avec un peu plus de liberté au charme captivant de leur pays. Coeurs adorables, milieu merveilleux, âmes toujours gaies, hospitalières et seviables". All the whites in the Congo, if they adopt a similar attitude, will also end up loving the people and treating them as fellow human beings, Solange would like to insinuate. This is also the view of Jean Malonga.

(50) Quoted by Hubert de Leusse, Afrique et Occident, (Paris: Orante, 1971), p. 9.
(51) "Coeur", p. 223. Underlining by me.

Having seen the theoretical side of the proposed French-African "communion" as propounded by the author's mouth-pieces throughout the novel we now come to a practical demonstration of his concept, a sort of laboratory experiment of his idealism. The focus is full on the two giant characters, Mambeké and Solange. Everyone else is secondary, including even Marie-Rose and the Thillards. It is worthwhile that they are in support of the move towards racial integration for the table is set in such a way that their opposition would not have upset the mapped out sequence of things.

Right from the beginning of the novel Mambeké and Solange are prepared for this union. At the ages of ten and twelve respectively they are already innocently in love. Then comes the scene of rescue of Solange for which she is indebted to him forever. They are thereafter drawn closer together. Oppositions from the aryans end up making them closer and closer. Then comes the initiation of each into the other's culture and language. This is indispensable for the facile cohabitation of the two, and for the mutual understanding of one another. This wise, there are no problems with Solange who is already speaking Likouba as fluently as the natives themselves, thanks to her long sojourn in that part of the Congo. She is only given some practical lessons in swimming and canoe-paddling - two things which every Likouba knows perfectly since Mossaka is water-logged for a good part of the year. Basket-making, fishing in all its peripeties, which are all the Congolese wòman's trades in her husband's home, were taught to Solange in readiness for her future responsibilities as a housewife to a Congolese. The teacher all along is Mambeké. On

Mambeké's side, Solange taught him to read, write, and speak French fluently. Learning the verses of the Mass and singing were also part of his lessons. Culturally and language-wise, the two young people are now ready to live together.

Learning, such as the above, cannot and did not take place in a day. It was a lengthy process that necessitated a lot of meetings of the two students regardless of the fact that they were exceptionally talented. Roch Morax's watchful eyes were on them as much as Father Hux's scrutinizing attention. But thanks to the scheming ingenuity and pushfulness of Solange contacts were still possible. A complicated assignment which had to be completed after the official lesson hours, a lesson badly learnt by heart which had to be relearnt, were some of the reasons which the clever girl advanced to her parents each time she came home late after a clandestine meeting with Mambeké on their way back from the mission. As she grows older in age her meeting with Mambeké especially in "la Maison du Bois" takes an amorous, though platonic, turn.[52] Her lies to conceal such meetings become more subtle too. They had been to Poto-Poto, to Bakongo, "au bord du fleuve, aux bois, voir les tam-tams et les jeux, nous baigner, écouter le chant des oiseaux et les cris de la cigale",[53] the

(52) Her age at this time should be about twenty years. But Malonga, both out of the reasons already stated in the first chapter of this thesis regarding the average Congolese's problems with time coupled with the requirements for the development of his plot, gives her 14 years. A discrepancy indeed! but I still maintain that even this is not weighty enough to subtract from the merits of the novel as a political treatise in a novel form.

(53) "Coeur", p. 242.

scheming girl explained to the inquisitive Mme Thillard, hiding from her the new world of love which they had discovered together and which now has become their main preoccupation as their contacts become more regular.

As things stand in Coeur d'Aryenne it does not seem as if Jean Malonga believes very much in the practicability of the doctrine of racial equality, as exemplified in the living together of the aryan Solange and the African Mambeké, which he is propounding. I am not saying that the painting of his character is not realistic. This is a subject of discussion in the next chapter. What I am simply arguing is that it would have been better for practical purposes of the novel if, in the place of a Mambeké we have ordinary African students imbued with African qualities like Kocoumbo, Samba Diallo, Camara Laye, Climbié, Fara, Kabuku. It appears that Mambeké's excellent qualities are a bit exotic, calculated to prepare him for the white girl's company. Not many Africans are like Mambeké, and I do not think that the union that Malonga is forseeing is only for Mambekés. It is a union that is global in nature, meant to enfold all and sundry from both races. But it is likely that the author wants to show that since Solange, in spite of all Mambeké's extraordinary qualities, could not love him enough to live with him whatever the odds in compliance with the solemn promise which the two of them made in silence to Marie-Rose on her death bed, the black race and the white cannot live together under normal circumstances within the framework of the "fraternité humaine" and the ephemeral "Union Française". What party is responsible for this impossibility is one of the things that the story undertakes to illustrate. If this is accepted

to be the case, then Malonga has proved his case most convincingly.

Ideed, Mambeké is endowed with immense qualities. Right from the start we are told his "intelligence" is "dévorante". Without any formal teaching he got to learn all the verses of the Mass by heart and thus qualified as an altar boy. His French is said to be immaculate too and to have drawn the anger of Reverend Father Hux who consistently hid the knowledge of the language from his pupils. When he at last managed to find himself a place in school he was the most brilliant in his class. His efforts were crowned by his being sent to the metropolis. He came back to head the only government school in his village and was regarded by everyone as "the light" of Mossaka. His brilliance and thirst for learning make him import books from Europe in order to be abreast with the current trends of thought beyond. The old Father Hux, unable to withstand the destructive reasoning thrust of the young évolué recently back from Europe had to dismiss him as belonging to hell and to the communist ideology. His brief tête-à-tête with Roch Morax almost on the very day he came back from France shows how superior the black man's reasoning faculties can be to the white man's given similar opportunities.

Physically, Mambeké has all the appealing qualities that would send any woman melting with love. He holds from his village of Mossaka the nickname of "Mobalé-O-Tembé" (the handsome man). Solange calls him by this name any time she is attracted by his handsome appearance. The Adonis of Brazzaville, he could have easily turned into a Don Juan if he had wanted. The "Brazzavilloises" had grown tired of making futile amorous gestures at him. Pauline Osseré, a nurse with the government's General

Hospital in Brazzaville, had to taunt him thus:

> " - Bonjour, Mambeké. Est-ce bien vrai que tu n'as pas le temps de saluer les gens, étant perdu dans tes livres? Tu fais semblant de ne pas voir le monde qui t'entoure ..... Allons! Mobalé-O-Tembé, reviens donc sur la terre".54

But beneath the appearance that is appealingly delicate and soft lurks a strength that is Herculean. We still recall his speed in overtaking all the paddlers racing to rescue Solange from drowning and from the crocodile's jaw. In swimming he is a fish, Solange tells us. At the Ecole Supérieure Edouard Renard he beat his classmate Makosso for accusing him falsely of homosexuality with their teachers and of witchcraft until the latter begged for pardon to the satisfaction of his teacher and classmates. Mambeké works hard physically, always determined to succeed. In order to better the hard lot of his uncle Obambi, a demobilized soldier who spent the better part of his life fighting for France as a combattant of the F.F.L., but now living in abject poverty like most of his counterparts throughout West and Equatorial Africa, Mambeké

> "confectioonera des paniers et des corbeilles dont la vente lui rapportera un peu d'argent. Il louera ses services, travaillera aux corvées du Port, de la Gare, s'offrira comme voltigeur aux nombreux cercles de la ville ....."55

Equally striking amongst Mambeké's smashing qualities is his parabolic humility. He has a tremendous respect for the aryans, a type of respect that borders on timidity. Throughout the novel he never raised a voice against Roch Morax's misconducts. His position is that of a raisonneur,

(54) "Coeur", p. 192. (55) "Coeur", p. 200.

a sort of philosopher. He meditates a lot, ruminates, and when he talks at all, it is to himself. But this does not mean that he is unmoved by his people's malaise. Far from it. He is simply the type that suffers in silence. After his father, Yoka, had been severely beaten by Roch Morax for delegating his responsibility to Mambeké of taking Solange in his canoe to the mission, at the innocent girl's request anyway, Solange still insisted on her meeting with Mambeké in a hide-out but Mambeké shied off:

> "Moi de mon côté, je dois éviter de faire torturer mon père toujours brutalisé par le tien. N'essaie donc plus de me voir ni de me parler, ô enfant du Blanc".[56]

He quickly and timidly went into hiding for three months in his uncle's house and from there to Brazzaville after Solange had been whisked off to Léopoldville and his father to jail at Dongou following the discovery of his secret education.

The hero's sense of pathos is such that he is aggrieved each time he finds someone in trouble, someone he would have like to help but unable to do, especially if it is the white man that is involved. Two examples of this in the novel come readily to mind. The first is when, with Marie-Rose dead, Solange asked him to leave the room before the entry of Roch Morax. We are told that he has not "la force de dire un seul mot à la jeune fille" and left quietly wondering within himself whether he did the correct thing to have left the girl at the very moment he was supposed to console her on her loss. He had to leave because of the

(56) "Coeur", p. 173.

bully Roch Morax whom he could not understand in what way he had offended. He pondered over why it was Marie-Rose alone who could see the necessity for the égalité de tous les hommes malgré les différences épidermiques", and why Roch Morax was incapable of reasoning the same way. In his brooding, he went to the extent of doubting who in the circumstance was correct, Roch Morax or his wife. Like Hamlet meditating over his predicament he asked himself whether it was not better to muster courage and confront Roch Morax. But unlike Hamlet he opted for inaction, always convinced angelically that it does not pay to harm even for the best of intentions. The second example is when news reached him about the increasing immorality of the same Roch Morax. At the end of the rigmarolling list of the preys to the white man's voracious sexual appetite, culminating in the village of Mossaka itself being put to the sack by dint of the white man's "sex machine", is Omboko, scarcely thirteen years old, expecting a baby for the sex maniac. Mambeké was revolted but remained inactive. Here Malonga intervenes to explain to us the cause of his helplessness:

> "Il lui [à Mambeké] [57] était interdit de toucher à lui, parce qu'il était de la race des Aryens, de la race des surhommes, parce qu'il était le Maître".58

This should not be misconstrued to mean that Mambeké is a weakling. On the other hand it is a demonstration of Jean Malonga's realism. It has already been seen what wealth of physical prowess he commands when he thrashed Makosso.

(57) Brackets mine.
(58) "Coeur", p. 211.

Going hand in hand with his humility is his unparalleled respect for superiors, be they black or white. This quality contributed in no small measure to his successes in life. It gained him entry into the Cours Moyen Poto-Poto without any letter of introduction or recommendation from an authority as was officially required. To obtain a hearing from the Headmaster he addressed him "poliment" as "Ondelé-N'Dombé"[59] and put his case forward, desperately supported by copious shedding of tears. Mouanga not only admitted him into the school but, highly impressed by the boy's respectful conduct, was his succour throughout his stay at the Cours Moyen de Poto-Poto, and was instrumental to his gaining admission into the Ecole Supérieure Edouard Renard which would have been impossible for the boy because he had nobody of any worth around to sign his bond papers. So that he should never lose his respect for his seniors whatever the circumstance, Malonga developed him into a stoïc. Following the doctrines of Zeno, a Greek philosopher, he bore his tortures in detention without bitterness. Before his saviour, the Inspector General of Police, he could have vomitted angrily all the tortures he had been subjected to in prison, like his father did before Reverend Father Hux on his return from Dongou prisons. Nothing would have happened to him. But on the contrary, we are told that "lentement, posément, sans une note d'émotion démonstrative dans la voix" he narrated his horrible experience to the "haut fonctionnaire". Also during his last meeting with the Reverend Father he did not not show any sign of disrespect for the old man. He still remembers that the priest was his teacher whether

(59) Means "a white black man".

it was the correct thing that he was taught or not. In the face of the "holy" Man's hostilities towards him he calmly and respectfully pushes his point home: the Catholic Church per se is not at fault but her ministers who behave the way they should not, who give all the twists possible to her doctrines, and, in addition, fail to practise what they preach.

We are still in the laboratory. Man does not live by bread alone. The analysis of Mambeké's personality is not complete without a look at the sexual side of his person, in so far as this side of him is useful in the eventual evolution of Jean Malonga's political theory. From the sexual angle Mambeké is most undeveloped and most unamenable to change. Here Solange once more plays a leading role. She is the one who taught Mambeké some tenderness. Right from their young days she had always been warm with him, calling him her friend, especially when she observes that he is not having it fine with her family. Left to Mambeké alone the laboratory test would have been an outright failure right from the start. And the fault would have been entirely the African's. Mambeké's bitter experiences, the sufferings of his parents and his people in the hands of the colonialists develop in the boy a tendency to always retreat into his inner self. And since his association with Solange is one of the main causes of these sad encounters he naturally would want to call it off. In fact he was once vocal about it. But Solange always insisted on their continuing to move together, showed him such warmth and friendship to counteract the ugly impressions being created by her aryan counterparts that the disappointed young African always decided at the end to keep on "trucking". During their private get-togethers, although one type of teaching and learning is always on,

the two friends unconsciously study themselves and get more used to one another.

The combination of stoicism, a philosophy which Malonga admires so much, and a firm belief in purity of existence,[60] makes Mambeké unamenable to sexual love. Stoicism condemns lack of control of the senses and any demonstration of passion, whether sexual or otherwise. The Catholic Church frowns at sexual love outside marriage. And Mambeké is faithful to the two philophical institutions. It happens, therefore, that Solange understands Mambeké's love problems more than Brench can ever claim to understand the working of Malonga's mind.[61] Mambeké's attitude to love is not "unhealthy". It is perhaps naive, unpractised. Nothing is wrong with Malonga preaching chastity to a nation whose moral tone was far from appealing, as has already been seen in the first chapter of this work. Nothing is wrong in one trying to control one's lower appetite. That man can do this and should do it is what differentiates him from lower animals. There is no question of Mambeké trying to be over chaste. Future developments show that he has a capacity for love. With a little initiation he is as normal as everyone. But it seems normal to infer from the general trend of developments in the story that his temporary indisposition to sex stands him in good stead and makes him deserve in a special way the highest post in the land which the government reserves for him. In fact, no responsible father would like to entrust his child to a Roch Morax to

(60) Malonga had a rigid training in the seminary under the Holy Ghost Fathers.
(61) A.C. Brench claims that Malonga's attitude to love is "unhealthy". c.f. The Novelists' Inheritance, p. 81.

educate and bring up. So, Mambeké has been well prepared for his career as a Headmaster.

But the estrangement from love cannot continue forever, especially as one grows older. To create a congenial atmosphere for shaking Mambeké out of his stupor and gearing him towards marital life is the raison d'être of "la Maison du Bois". In readiness, Mambeké's position vis-à-vis sex is made by Malonga to shift a little for the better: he starts to feel inside him that urge that is associated with biological changes in a boy growing into manhood. Unable to understand what was happening to him he tried as usual to control himself at the sight of Solange now ripe and sexually appealing:

> "Une sueur froide aux tempes, le jeune homme ne peut néanmoins s'empêcher d'admirer la splendide silhouette élancée qui lui fait face .... "62

Solange quickly caught the signal, and then strove to enable him put his feelings together and discover this other part of himself which still eludes him. She smiled more courage into him.

The amorous scene continues. At the tomb of Marie-Rose their prayers ran in contrary direction. Solange prayed to her late mother to open the eyes of Mambeké to see how much she loves him. Mambeke asked her forgiveness for eyeing her daughter differently from the way he used to. But he is never the same again. Mechanically they headed for the wood, as soon as their devotions were over, trying to seek shelter away from people's gaze. Curiously enough they walked each on each side of the road with Mambeké fifty yards ahead. Earlier it was cold sweat, now it is a

(62) "Coeur", p, 228.

total loss of consciousness beneath a big tree in the heart of the forest. Solange joined him and they lay in silence. Solange was first to speak. The drama continues. She accused him of being unhappy because of all he had suffered in the hands of her people. Not getting a single response from him she burst into tears. It was then, and only then, that Mambeké's heart became positively pierced. Offering his excuses to her he addressed her for the first time as "mon amie" and by her name "Solange". As for the white girl, she was in Paradise!

> "Vous m'appelez enfin Solange! Mobalé-O-Tembé .. Mobalé-O-Tembé, dites-moi maintenant ce dont vous souffrez. Allez! dites cela a votre petite soeur. Je vous soignerai, je vous consolerai, je ferai tout pour vous guérir. Mon ami .... mon ami, parlez-moi encore![63]

This said, she glued herself to the boy gasping for breath out of nervousness. This is already some union, and work has already commenced on the foundation to the "édifice indispensable à la famille humaine".

During the second meeting, the closeness becomes more spontaneous. But still we are told that they were "étendus chastement" on the bed made for themselves from dried leaves. They read a verse from the Holy Bible and then started to discuss it. While Solange argued from the biblical, therefore spiritual point of view, Mambeké, true to his philosophical leaning, refused to accept any argument that is not subjectable to reasoning as Stoicism demands. As he went on with his flamboyant analysis of the line in question Solange got on to his shoulders, held him close, and their lips were gummed in

(63) "Coeur", p. 231.

a blissful kiss:

> "'Et la lumière fut' ... Je t'aime .... je t'aime .... Imbécile, ne vois-tu pas que je t'aime comme une folle. Je t'aime ...., je t'aime ..., je t'aime, gros imbécile. Tu comprends ce que cela veut dire: 'Et la Lumière fut'? Tu vois plus clair maintenant, aveugle que tu es".[64]

In a typical Garden of Eden scene, the couple felt they had eaten the forbidden fruit, sprang aside from each other's embrace and went to hide - Solange behind a tree trunk and Mambeké behind a coffee tree. Immediately Mambeké started to apologize naively for having perhaps injured the feelings of his aryan friend by the scene that had just taken place. But Solange stopped him short and tried to talk him off his inferiority complex:

> "Que tu es bête, mon beau Mobaló-O-Tembé. De quoi veux-tu me demander pardon? N'est-ce pas plutôt à moi à te prier d'excuser ce que je viens d'oser, mais que je ne regrette pas, parce que je suis trop heureuse de savoir enfin que tu m'aimes un peu".[65]

At this a new Mambeké leaps forward. He confessed to Solange his boundless love for her; he is now very sure of himself -

> "Solange! Solange! petite maîtresse, si tu savais jusqu'à quel point je t'aime ..... Maîtresse! ma chère bienfaitrice, qu'est-ce que nous allons devenir tous les deux, maintenant que nous savons ce que nous sommes l'un pour l'autre?"[66]

The two races have merged in these two young people. Their hearts no longer belong to themselves but to one

(64) "Coeur", p. 233. (65), "Coeur", p. 234.
(66) Coeur", p. 235.

another. Solange narrates what has taken place: victory over an African's inferiority complex on one hand and destruction in an Aryan of her supposed superiority -

> "Je l'ai tué, moi, ton sale complexe, ce serpent visqueux, ce garrot qui t'entourait la gorge, t'empêchait de parler, de m'ouvrir ton coeur .... Je viens de tuer en moi l'Aryenne en même temps que j'écrasais ton complexe".[67]

And in an answer to Mambeké's question above she offers to be his wife:

> "Tu me demandes si je sais ce qui nous reste à faire? Eh bien! oui, je le sais. Je vais devenir tout simplement ta femme devant Dieu".[68]

With their hearts together, marriage having been proposed and tacitly agreed upon, we go to the next step

Borrowing Malonga's own citation of an old French adage "Qui s'y frotte, s'y brûle", once the forbidden apple is tasted there is no going back. Their love grew by leaps and bounds. Her leaving her convent became more frequent and more regular. "Amor habendi habendo crescit",[69] says a well-known proverb. They signed a blood pact of everlasting union. We have words as solemn as Solange's "tue-moi si je te trompe et suicide-toi si je meurs". They were so much in love that Solange wept for happiness. Up till this time, though their love remains platonic. Then came the sad news, a sort of an anti-climax: Solange is to return to Mossaka; her father,

(67) "Coeur", p. 235. (68) "Coeur", p. 235.
(69) Meaning "The love of having grows by having".

now an old man, has requested her to come back and take over the running of his business from him. Solange asserted her preparedness to rejoin her father. Poor Mambeké! He was seeing red. He thought that at such a stage in in their love the only place for Solange was in Brazzaville by his side and never again at Mossaka with the negrophobe her father, Mambeké's arch-enemy. But as for Solange, she can never abandon Roch Morax for he remains forever her father:

> "Quoiqu'il fasse et quelque honte que j'ai de sa conduite, cet homme ne reste pas moins mon père. Je suis sa fille, je n'y peux rien faire".[70]

Mambeké could not believe his ears. His heart failed him completely. "La tête inclinée sur la poitrine, il pleure silencieusement", we are told. It was only a promise made in "deux mots magiques" that awoke him from his melancholy. The promise was kept. And on her way back from her convent in Léopoldville to Mossaka Solange stopped at Mambeké's in Brazzaville to pass the night. All we have is "Tu es un ange. Vite! viens et débarrasse-toi de ve vilain déguisement ...."[71] and the curtain is drawn.

Since Jean Malonga never studied in France he made no statement in the novel about Mambeké's student life there. It may be mentioned in passing that in the paragraph of eleven lines, the only paragraph in the whole novel that has something to do with Mambeké's stay in the metropolis, he tried to guess, and that naively, what the weather is like in France in summer. The important

(70) "Coeur", p. 247. (71) "Coeur", p. 249.

thing is that Mambeké was home sick. The author tries to attribute it to the hostile climate but Solange more rationally thinks it should be because of herself. When he eventually returned, the clandestine meetings with which they innocenty started continued, but this time with sexual activity. They met every night in Mambeké's "peutsh" appartment.

The nocturnal meetings resulted in the birth of Bienvenu while Roch Morax was away from home. The old man came back home unannounced. His reaction to the existence of a new métis under his roof is not unexpected. Solange's determined effort to keep the child out of her father's reach is also quite in consonance with her character. But the inexplicable is her reaction to her father's death through the violence he unleashed. Naturally she ought to have rushed to Mambeké's house yelling for help and protection, Mambeké, with the type of social image he has cut for himself in Mossaka and beyond, would have been equal to the task. Instead, she chose to put an end to her life, after leaving a message with Omboko that Mambeké should take care of Bienvenu.

Politics of total abandon

- inter-racial cooperation
- inter-racial understanding

The result of the laboratory test on inter-racism is out. It is a gross failure. Mambeké is all alone, like one duped. And here I reconcile with Drench whose comments on this part of the novel are worthy of note:

> "This tragic conclusion is meant to demonstrate the irreconciliable differences which separate Europeans and Africans. It shows that, no matter how profoundly attached to an African, Europeans can never overcome the ties of the Aryan blood and race completely".[72]

Brench, in the lines quoted above, has summarised neatly the argument behind Malonga's new politics in this part of the novel. The "Union Française", "la communion des races", "la fraternité humaine" and so on, have all proved to be a farce. Europeans can never accept Africans into their fold as brothers. All their apparent good intentions, their so-called "mission civilisatrice" which is what Brench thinks Marie-Rose is committed to and not "égalité des races", their empty politics of assimilation, acculturation and so on, should be taken with a grain of salt. They are all shrouded in a quest for one material gain or the other. There is nothing that colonialists in an African country can do in the interest of real brotherhood. In practical terms, the white-skinned and the dark-skinned can never live together. And it is with the whites that the blame lies, not with the blacks - so thinks at least Malonga.

What then should the African do under the circumstance? It can be seen that Mambeké even wanted to accompany Solange to her watery grave. This is a symbol. Many Africans, in spite of the Europeans' deceit, untruthfulness, and double-dealing, still allow themselves to be taken for a ride. They still love them, ape their manner of living, and forget their real identity

(72) Novelists' Inheritance, p. 76.

in the bargain. "La compagnie des Evolués, le Commerce avec ces hommes venus de si loin et leur rhétorique avaient tué en moi le sens et la notion de la responsabilité. J'étais devenu, moi aussi, un individualiste",[73] they should regret with Mambeké. They should change with Mambeké. There is some pride in being black, or "Black is beautiful" as people say nowadays. They should cast aside all those habits which they borrowed from Europe and substitute the African in their place. The Europeans say Africans are uncivilised. Fine! Africans should be ready to say with Mambeké in reply: "Je reprends ma nudité". They say Africans are savages. We should reply by going once more for our bows and arrows like Mambeké did. An Igbo proverb says: "onye ajuru agaghi aju onwe ya" meaning that one rejected should not reject himself. We should face our self-development squarely in the belief that what we cannot do for ourselves no one can for us. The hope of Africans lies ultimately with the Africans themselves. The sooner we "remontons à la Vie pour la vie, pour la lutte, pour souffrir encore ....."[74] the better for all of us.

(73) "Coeur", p. 285.
(74) "Coeur", p. 285.

Chapter Four

JEAN MALONGA: REALIST and ARTIST

- Thematic realism
- Poetic and folk-loric influences
- Objectivity in narration and fidelity to details
- Author-narrator style as a means to realism
- Realistic characterisation

No African is unaware of the existence in each of the so-called independent countries of Africa of a colonial government in those days which represented more the aspiration of the "mother country" than those of the governed. As we found colonialism in Africa so it was in all the countries of the Third World. In the Antilles it gave birth to the concept of négritude. From India we have exactly the same stories best put in the words of Montaigne who has this to say about the attitude of his fellow Europeans in that subcontinent:

> "Nous nous sommes servi de leur ignorance et inexpérience à les plier plus facilement vers la trahison, luxure, avarice et vers toutes sortes de

déshumanité et de cruauté ...."[1]

Even today Rhodesia and South Africa are fully in the picture. The Africans in those countries are still experiencing to date what the Congolese and other more fortunate African countries went through in those days. Thematically speaking, therefore, the substance of Malongals novels is a reality.

There is yet a new dimension to Malonga's novels which makes them the most realistic at the time they were written. Following the realism of the English-born prolific novelist, E.M. Forster, he subsribes to the hypothesis that "the distortion of black-white relationships imposed by a colonial situation afflicts both parties equally".[2] Hence we have good and bad Africans, as well as good and bad Europeans. As we have Mambeké and Mouanga on the good side and Makosso and the "senile" chief of Mossaka on the bad, so also we have Solange and and the Inspector-General of Police on the good and Roch Morax and Father Hux on the bad. Malonga strikes such a balance in the choice of his characters that in every institution the good and the bad exist side by side. The table below shows this:

Institution	Good	Bad
Education	Schoolboy Mambeké	Schoolboy Makosso
Family	Materfamilias Marie-Rose	Paterfamilias Roch Morax
Police	Inspector-General of Police	Police Commissioner
Religion	Catholic Church per se	Rev. Father Hux

* See footnotes 1 and 2 on page 138.

As is expected the good and the bad are always in perpetual conflict. Mambeké and Makosso exchanged physical blows. Marie-Rose and Roch Morax are two parallel lines that will never meet. In fact she suffered more from the evils of colonialism than anyone else in the novel, including the Yoka family. The evils cost her her life. The Inspector-General of Police and the Police Commissioner are diametrically opposed to one another, hence the furious exchange. Reverend Father Hux is perpetually in conflict with the precepts of his religion, for which reason Mambeké tried to call him to order.

The balance does not stop with Coeur d'Aryenne. It extends to La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono. Unlike Camara Laye and others who try to create the impression that their society is very sound, that the traditional life of their people is so attractive that one cannot help feeling a nostalgia to return to it, Malonga did not make a secret of his commitment in the legend to maintain the past but condemn whatever is cruel and despotic in it. This is a decision taken by his hero in the legend and it is not the first time that such is happening in Congolese literature. Mpiku, in his "Introduction à la Littérature Kikongo", says that

(1) Lilyan Kesteloot, Négritude et situation coloniale, (Yaoundé: CLE, 1970), p. 72.
(2) Gerard Moore, "Towards realism in French African Writing", Journal of Modern African Studies, (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), p. 68.

Kwendwenda, the hero of Kwenkwenda, a novel written by the Congolese Disengomoko,[3] after studying the history of his clan,

> "découvre qu'il y a dans sa culture de bonnes choses, mais aussi de mauvaises. Il décide de garder les premières et de combattre les autres.."[4]

For Malonga, it is not only the colonial set up that needs the broom but the traditional as well. Thus he departs from the view that all was well with the traditional society until the Europeans came to mess it up. Neither would he associate himself thematically with those African writers who uphold the European social norms as the most suitable for Africa and will have nothing to do with their traditional past which they evoke with nausea and contempt. He prefers to steer a middle course that brings him nearer the other Bantu novelists from the Congo and the Cameroons.

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Malonga chose to treat his themes in prose. The function of the novel as a social art was first known in Europe around the time of the Industrial Revolution.

(3) "Congolese" before the partitioning of the Congo. A.Emile Disengomoko was actually born in Banza Manteko in Zaïre, but schooled at Madzia near Brazzaville in the early 1930's.
(4) Mbelolo ya Mpiku, "Introduction a la Littérature Kikongo", Research in African Literatures, Vol. 3, No. 2, Fall 1972, p. 139.

But it was only after the Second World War that its impact was felt as a literary genre in Africa. And even so, it was not easy for it to find a footing on the literary movement of the period; poetry was essentially the means of literary expression at the time. Traditionally poetic expression was regarded as an individual art. But it assumed wider dimension with negritude writers, notably Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, coming into the scene. While these poets cut a revered literary socio-political image for themselves through poeticised expressions of their dreams and individual experiences, they at the same time radiate collective consciousness. Other African writers followed their footsteps in using literature to defend the cause of the oppressed blacks.

The sincerity and the good intentions of the average African writer are never in question. It is only a pity that when some African writings fall into the gambit of European literary criticism a good lot of what is said is founded on sheer sentimentality. The reality of the issues in question is lost sight of. The result is a sort of retaliation for the bad things said against the Europeans in the writings discussed. No positive effort is made to do a disinterested spade work mandatory for an objective appraisal of any particular writing. Accusations of over-idealisation, exaggeration, bad faith abound. However, with people like Lilyan Kesteloot coming into the scene a ray of hope dawns in the realm of literary criticism of African literature. Profitting from the many useful years she spent in the Congo, the brilliant critic of African Literature comes up with the striking revelation that

> "les écrivains noirs, Antillais ou Africains, n'ont réellement pas exagéré les malheurs de

> leurs peuples! Souvent même, nous paraît-il, la formulation littéraire atténue la brutalité des statistiques, des rapports des témoignages établis par le colonisateur lui-même".[5]

Such is the case with Jean Malonga. His couching his stories in a novel form, his obsession with linguistic attainments which are far from his reach, all prevent him from waxing a more horrifying image of the colonial situation

Malonga's main preoccupation in his novels is the systematic exposition of things that happened in the Congolese society of his time. But his prose was not completely uninfluenced by the predominantly popular literary style of the day which is poetry. In this, once more, he is not alone. That Ngando le crocodile, written by Lomami Tchibamba (himself too a Congolese) and published in 1948 (the same year that Malonga completed his Coeur d'Aryenne) is famous for its "inherent poetic qualities" testifies to the existence then in the Congo of the poetic apishness in novel writing. Here and there in his first novel, Coeur d'Aryenne, Malonga made visible efforts to go poetic. Apostrophes, onomatopoeic lines like

> "Prise de pitié profonde pour cette misère vivante ....."[6]

and

> "Roch Morax, cette pieuvre retranchée derrière

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(5) Négritude et situation, p. 73.
(6) "Coeur", p. 189. Underlining by me.

sa puissance, cette superbe supériorité
maintenant plus basse qu'une fière infériorité .."[7]

purposeless interjections, all abound. Paradoxically they tend to amuse the reader instead of making an impression on him. His clichés are flat, and attempts to create suspense clumsy. His hyperboles are rugged and humourless. But as usual, he is not alone in this. Esthetically speaking, Eza Boto and Abdoulaye Sadji with their Ville Cruelle and Nini respectively published at the same time as Malonga's Coeur d'Aryenne, are as imperfect too. Their novels are riddled with similar faults. But while they had an opportunity of improving in their later novels (especially Mongo Beti who attained perfection and renown with his Pauvre Christ de Bomba) Malonga stopped writing novels after his La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono. There is no doubt that this romanticised "conte" is better literary writing than his Coeur d'Aryenne. But whatever literary merits his legend has his Coeur d'Aryenne has in topicality.

Indeed there are elements of technique and style in the construction of La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono. A professional teacher, Malonga gives a pedagogical touch to this novel. He divides it into two parts, and could have called the first part "SET" omstead pf "La Rançon d'une alliance", and the second "CLOSE" in the place of "Le Rachat ou le pardon d'une erreur". In the first part the problem is laid out, and in the second a solution is advanced. This methodical, objective and realistic approach to committed literature sky-rockets

(7) "Coeur", p. 211. Underlining by me.

Malonga above many other African committed writers. There are some who spotted no faults in their social system. A few other who did simply laid out the problématique without suggesting solutions. In this they can hardly be said to be of any useful value to society. There is yet another group whose main concern is for the rumbustious and the funny. Their characters come under their pens for caricature. Scenes are created here to deflate some self-conceited beings who have swollen ideas about themselves, there to cudgel an institution in the name of all that is impish and mischievous, without envisaging anything constructive. F. Oyono, M. Beti and others come readily to mind. But with Malonga we are faced with a wholesome approach to literature as a means of healing our social ills. He lists them, discusses them, and advances solutions - all falling artistically within the framework of what he chose to call a legend. His well-renowned sense of creativity stems from this, coupled with a sense of commitment which is unrivalled in Francophone African Literature.

In La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono we see traditional life exactly as it was in the Congo of Malonga's birth. The numerous details of traditional and social life outlined in the first Chapter of this work bears testimony to this fact. The first paragraph of the legend introduces the reader to the countryside where "la nature" plays a dominant role. Scenes in the countryside are so lucidly painted that the reader feels physically present there. The author has a taste for curious details.[8] With the evening approaching, the fowl

(8) This recalls R. Maran whose novels are also set in A.E.F.

re-enter that part of the house which they share with man, while the goats find their way back to the usually uncompleted building that shelters them from sun and rain. But the pig family does not escape the novelist's keen observation. They behave differently from the other domestic animals in that they continue feeding till late in the evening which, as the author correctly puts it, gives birth to the adage that "Malgré les ravages opérés dans les champs de manioc et d'arachide, le verrat a toujours le ventre vide".[9] Such details of African rural like, very true in themselves, escape easily the attention of the unwary.

Malonga's description of feminine charm and beauty is Ovidean in character: M'Polo, despite the five successive births which she has recorded, remains still "belle, souple, svelte sans souffrir de ces plis enlaidissants du ventre, de cet aplatissement trapézoïdal des hanches et de cet effondrement en nappe de la poitrine ....."[10] Such a beauty naturally gave birth to something more handsome: her daughter, Makoula, "a de beaux traits fins, l'ovale de sa figure fait ressortir plus nettement l'énergie du regard malicieux; un teint d'ocre jaunâtre donne à sa taille flexible, très élancée, un éclat de cire brillante. La bouche, petite et bien dessinée, s'harmonise avec des lèvres ciselées à la perfection qui abritent l'ivoire des dents éblouissantes. Le nez est droit ...."[11]

Coeur d'Aryenne does not lack descriptions like the one above. Tango, which is the name Mambeké's mother retains throughout the novel is a nickname meaning "the

(9) La Légende, p. 10.
(10) La Légende, p. 11.
(11) La Légende, p. 16.

sun" because of her radiant beauty. Her shapely figure can only be imagined:

> "un corps effilé, menu, avec une tête légèrement ronde, des yeux de biche effrayée, un sourire éternel aux lèvres charnues, une éb ouissance des dents fixes et sans défaut .... une poitrine riche et impeccable avec des bourgeons bien pointus, des bras hardis entraînés à la pagaie, des mains petites, mignonnes et bien fournies, des hanches fermes, souples et harmonieuses bien assises sur des jambes longues et pleines sans excès .... "[12]

Like M'Polo in the legend, her offspring is remarkably handsome too, always referred to by other Africans as "Mobalé-O-Tembé", and by Solange often as"Mon beau Mobalé-O-Tembé". Even the young ladies involved in the fishing scene constitute a "Joli spectacle" with their "jeunes corps souples, bronzés ...." Who says that black is not beautiful? Malonga cannot be more realistic in the way he describes beauty in the African. He must be talking about real persons. Senghor, the poet, is no less admirer of African beauty.

Malonga's realism in painting African scenes goes as far as the kitchen. In expectation of the august visitors from Kadi-Kadi items of food hurriedly being prepared for them include "la pistache .... piment, ... l'arachide et le haricot".[13] The menu in Obambi's house in Coeur d'Aryenne is of a different stuff: "un gros poulet ..... pommes de terre ..... du riz ... gigot de mouton ..... du fromage ..... des pêches fraîches ..... un gros pain blanc ..... vin de France".[14]

(12) "Coeur", pp 179 - 180
(13) La Légende, p. 11.
(14) "Coeur", pp. 218 - 219.

The process of turning these items into meals cannot be more African. All hands were on deck, excluding, of course, those of men who should not have anything to do with the kitchen. The difference in the two menus is not difficult to understand. The society for which the latter menu is destined is mixed. Solange is a white visitor to the family, and she brought some of the items along with her. But for those who would have still argued that in consonance with the negritude in the net of which Malonga has already been caught, Mambeké should have prepared an entirely African dish for Solange since he has earlier initiated her to African woman's domestic duties, Malonga points out in good time before the kitchen scene that Mambeké is an "Evolué" - a designation for that African who, because of his acculturation, is little by little losing touch with his African norms and values.

The interest our author exhibits in feminine psychology is far from superficial. The ardour and the hilarity of the African women engaged in fishing are characteristic of the African woman immersed in an enterprise that she likes. The feverishness with which M'Polo prepares the meal for the visitors, her mildly provocative invitation to her daughters to redouble their effort in their culinary assignments, are not unexpected in situations of that kind. The blushes of Makoula before the visitors at the M'Bongui, her sense of shame and guilt at her lewd dealings coming to light, and her eventual disappearance into thin air, the soothing rebuke of the late grandma Mazonga's ghost

for the misdemeanours of her lascivious daughter, Hakoula's disquiet over her son's frequent disappearances from the grotto in quest for adventure, Omboko's warmth towards her brother's mistress and Solange's revelation of all the secrets between her and Mambeké to Omboko, Mme Thillard's concern for the morals of the young ones under her surveillance, Solange's eagerness to make sure that her idol, Mambeké, has no other girl friends and her biting his nose once on a vague suspicion he has one, Marie-Rose's collapse at her tragic discovery at the Chapel Sainte Barbe and her ultimate disregard for Reverend Father Hux on ascertaining his complicity in the scandal, Pauline Osseré's amorous gibes at Mambeké for his much orchestrated devotion to his books, the emotional depression and discomfort that are a concomitant of an early stage of pregnancy especially in an inexperienced teenager girl - all these things cannot be more convincingly put. They are all, blacks and whites alike, women in every sense of the word.

Often in African Literature we find a mode of narration which puts the author a distance away from what his characters say and do. At times it is only by delving into his background that some form of ressemblances is traced between the incidents of his life and the content of his work. Where the possibility of this identification is hampered by the writer's attempt to exaggerate or to idealise, the position of realism vis-a-vis his writing becomes shaky. Whenever this is the case critics go further to determine where the clog in the wheel lies. Very often it is located in the author's lack of originality. This is what happened to Devoir de Violence

of Yambo Ouologuem which is an unsuccessful attempt by Ouologuem to adapt Schwarz's Le Dernier des Justes to African situations. Fortunately most African writers are not like him. The acolyte-narrator in Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba lends voice to Beti's thoughts. All the actors in the burlesque scenes of Une Vie de Boy view situations from the comic angle as Oyono sees them. Other novels assume autobiographic proportions. The hero of L'Enfant noir can as ell be the author himself. Ake Loba and Kocoumbo are one and the same person.

But the novels of Malonga are novels with a difference. As if his mouthpieces Ma Mazono and Mambeké are not expressive enough of his ideas, he decides to intervene directly. These novels are in no way autobiographic. The crude reality of the facts is the author's watchword. His position in his novels is that of a jornalist, physically present in every scene he reports. He says:

> "Quant à nous, spectateur neutre, qui ne faisons que rapporter les faits, voulant rester impartial dans le débat ... "15

The adjective "impartial" used above is a key word which underlines all his narratives.

Malonga intervenes directly in his récit for several reasons, all aimed at convincing the reader of the unequivocal validity of the stories. Some incidents revolt him so much that he is temporarily at a loss for words to express his feelings through the mouth of one of his characters. He is not trying to create an

(15) "Coeur", p. 231.

artificial climax, as some of his critics would like to believe. He is simply losing control of his feelings, which, without his being aware of it, goes to authenticate the surreality of the incident in question. For example, confronted with the fact of Yoka being sent to prison by Roch Morax and his wife being taken over by same, the thrashing Yoka received on his returning home from prison from the same man in order to keep his mouth shut, the jeers at his misfortunes by God's minister to whose patronage he had fled, the turning round of the same Reverend gentleman to invite Roch for a discussion over a glass of Pernod while the poor African was sentenced to an examination of conscience in the chapel, Malonga's feelings ran wild:

> " - O cynisme! ô ironie de justice! On ne voit que les soucis domestiques eventuels du vrai coupable pour méconnaître le martyre de la double victime. On tolère l'immoralité qui se commet sous ses yeux pour la sauvegarde d'un préjugé aryen".[16]

Such an "emportement" can have ugly consequences. The ex-seminarian thinks of God as a racist:

> "Il est vrai que tout ceci se fait sous les auspices d'un Dieu certainement blanc qui ne peut être la providence que d'une seule catégorie de ses créatures. Et d'ailleurs, qui sait si l'homme de couleur est de création divine ..... Dieu est le premier raciste des mondes possibles.."[17]

Further on in the text his feelings push once more to the

(16) "Coeur", p. 185.
(17) " Coeur", pp. 185 - 186.

extreme. He despairs at the failure of his ideal at the face of man's inhumanity to man just because of the colour bar:

> "Est-ce vraiment manquer de respect à une personne que de la recevoir chez soi? Enfin cela ne nous regarde pas. Laissons le monde se créer comme on souhaite qu'il soit. On doit seulement se demander si c'est à travers ce panneau racial que se fera la fraternisation des hommes".[18]

In order to make the reader feel how much love has taken possession of the two young betrothed, each shaking with apprehension and fright as to whether each will be accepted by the other as an everlasting partner, we have the following outburst reminiscent of the Latin Horace's Odes:

> "Oh! mystérieux Amour, inexplicable Aimant qui fait ballotter en épave la sensible nature ... Qui comprendra jamais, ô! grand et indomptable Animateur de l'Univers! Amour! Amour! qu'es-tu?"[19]

Another reason why Malonga enters into the récit is to explain a fact of tradition which the Western reader would not otherwise understand. Normally when the problem is that of language he explains the word in a footnote or translates the Kikongo language into French if it is whole phrases or sentences in his native language that are involved. But the European is bound to understand nothing from a harangue delivered in a typical African manner by an experienced patriarch, although written in French. Where this is the case he tells the

(18) "Coeur", pp. 226 - 227.
(19) La Légende, pp. 22 - 23.

reader what the elder means:

> "Le lecteur considérera sans doute le discours de Mi N'Tsembo comme une demande officielle de la main de Makoula quand il saura que cette péroraison a été suivie d'un coup de feu tiré en l'air par le Patriarche".[20]

As a matter of style our author sometimes witholds a certain fact from his reader in order to arouse his curiousity. He nevertheless releases it to him not long after, after the reader might have perhaps made several attempts at solving the riddle himself. To reveal to the reader, for example, the one who effected the renovations and the decorations in Koch Norax's house, the author chimes in:

> "Le lecteur a sans doute deviné que les diverses transformations obtenues et signalées plus haut .... sont l'oeuvre de Solange, revenue à Nossaka sur la demande pressante de son père."[21]

If the reader's guess corresponds with the author's, the reader must have been following the story closely.

As we have said earlier, thoughout his novels Malonga has his eyes on the reader. In the course of his story, if he discovers a point that the reader may not likely believe, he interrupts his story to reaffirm to him the veracity of the fact in question. Narrating the miraculous crossing of the Madzia he announces that he is relating a fact which may seem doubtful but which those who witnessed believed -

(20) La Légende, p. 20.
(21) "Coeur", p. 251.

> "Doutez, lecteur, si vous le voulez, mais pour les spectateurs oculaires ayant vécu le fait, leur conviction est absolue".[22]

But it is not always that Malonga would appeal to the reader to believe the phenomenon which he is describing. He at times allows the reader's imagination free wondering, but does not fail to point out all the same that the doubtful nature of the incident is not to his making. Talking, therefore, about the participation and the cooperation of the "Mânes" in traditional rituals he says

> "Nous laissons au lecteur le soin d'interpréter, comme il l'entendra, le fait authentique que nous lui rapportons. Crédule ou sceptique, nous décrivons intégralement ce que nous a confié la Tradition".[23]

The touchy feelings of the white reader is well taken into consideration as the story is told. He may likey feel that the author is being unfair to the whites, hence the author politely informs him that his is not a tall story borrowed from nowhere, calculated to annoy or to embarrass. His story is a simple truth. "C'est pourtant la réalité même", he says as he narrates the monstrosities of the "ogre", Roch Morax. But if the reader feels revolted it is because "il ignore sans doute les coutumes d'une colonisation bien comprise".[24]

To insert a detail which he feels is very important and which his reader will find most interesting to listen to, Malonga makes a special stop in his story to

(22) La Légende, p. 35.
(23) La Légende, p. 31.
(24) "Coeur", p. 184.

call the reader's attention to order. "Il est peut-être nécessaire de décrire cette cérémonie au lecteur qui ne nous pardonnerait sans doute pas de lui taire l'épisode le plus intéressant de l'histoire d'une fête aussi mémorable dans les annales de toute la contrée de Kadi-Kadi",[25] he says to the reader after the manner of an American educationist, Jack Lutz[26], who always tells his students "Now listen, I gonna make a point" before unleashing an important educational fact to them. The curiousity of the reader thus stimulated, Malonga goes ahead with the story of the crossing of River Madzia on elephants' backs, which is one of the greatest portents in the legend.

When it comes to the psychological analysis of the functioning of the human soul, an area in which Balzac so much excels, Malonga fights shy and informs the reader accordingly. After the mutual recognition of their identities, the emotional feelings of Ma Mazono and his father are beyond what Malonga is capable of describing in words. He shifts the task to specialists:

> "Que se passe-t-il dans ces deux âmes nobles .... Nous ne risquerons même pas de le décrire, car nous l'ignorons nous-mêmes .... Nous préférons laisser ce soin aux psychologues pour qui l'âme humaine n'a plus de secret".[27]

The happy scene of renion continues. Makoula's nother

(25) La Légende, p. 27.
(26) Dr. Jack Lutz, an American educationist, is presently the Acting Chief Technical Adviser of the UNESCO at the College of Education, Abraka, in Bendel State of Nigeria. He is also the UNESCO adviser attached to the Department of Education of the College.
(27) La Légende, p. 125.

and her other daughters are also around. The Viola-Sebastian scene, at the injunction of the young M'Pfoumou, moves into Makoula's chambers, a more fitting place for the expressions of joy that would melt even the most stony hearts. Once more Malonga is at a loss for words:

> "Il est bien dommage que nous ne puissions pas les y suivre et écouter les effusions de tous les coeurs assoiffés d'affection, et qui se retrouvent ainsi théâtralement".[28]

From the legend we move to Coeur d'Aryenne, from scenes of unspeakable happiness to that of indescribable woes. Tango has been sexually exploited to the maximum by Roch Morax, and is abandoned for her own daughter. Her feelings on learning this are omitted by Malonga, apparently for the same reasons as have been stated earlier, but he cleverly puts his omission as a time-saving device in the reader's interest:

> "Nous dispenserons le lecteur de l'analyse du drame poignant qui se joua à l'annonce de ce nouveau malheur, dans le coeur et l'âme de la mère délaissée pour sa propre fille .... "[29]

It is human to forget. Malonga at times forgets one fact or the other in the course of the story. As soon as he remembers it, he halts the narrative, recalls the incident and inserts the missing fact. There are literary methods of coping with this type of situation but Malonga prefers to stick to the oral form of story-telling with all its imperfections. It makes for realism. Hence he

(28) La Légende, pp 183.
(29) "Coeur", p. 188.

reader four pages afterwards what happened to Bizenga after he has been shot by Bitouala -

> "Nous avons omis de dire au lecteur que, pour flétrir à jamais la mémoire de l'esclave, terroriser tous ceux de sa condition qui auraient par la suite l'envie d'imiter son exemple, le corps de Bizenga a été pendu à une branche de bois de fer ....."[30]

Fortunately the déroulement of the story is not upset by such later interpolations.

Finally, as if to give himself a pat on the back for a job well done, he amusingly congratulates the reader if he can understand the mystery behind a "longue et filandreuse tirade". Of course the average African would easily, but the European may not. There is no doubt that Jean Malonga is a true "son of the soil" who is very familiar with his people's customs and tradition, as well as with the native rhetoric. The talent of Boueta-M'Bolo is indeed remarkable but not exceptional enough to warrant our author's "Nous demandons au lecteur de juger lui-même du talent de l'orateur, un des Mages les mieux écoutés de l'époque".[31] And on page 235 of Coeur d'Aryenne he prides himself of having exhausted his stock of vocabulary. At the end of the scene where Solange offers her "coeur d'Aryenne" together with her entire self to Mambeké, our author asks rhetorically:

> "Existe-t-il les mots plus pertinents, plus catégoriques et plus fermes, ... que ceux que nous venons d'entendre ..... Dans tous les cas,

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(30) La Légende, p. 46.
(31) La Légende, p. 56.

il ne doit pas y en avoir d'autres".[32]

What is amusing about all this is that while the author feels he is at his best, his reader, at least of today, feels there is room for improvement. Such is the drama of life. Whatever the case, our author is being true to himself, being faithful to details.

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The characters of Jean Malonga's Coeur d'Aryenne exist as real people. (We do not mention the other novel here whose characters are supposed to be legendary.) They are also representative of the social groups from which they are drawn, but the emphasis here is on their reality as human beings. We have already shown that there is no premeditated effort by our author to categorise them into good and bad. As there are good Europeans so also there are good Africans. There are bad Africans as well as bad Europeans. Hence Brenoh's assertion that "the characterisation suffers, in the first place, from the categorical division into good Africans and evil Europeans",[33] does not hold any water. Malonga paints human beings as they are in real life, preoccupied as usual with stark reality and unquestionable impartiality.

It is with his descriptions of the characters of Roch Morax anx Reverend Father Hux that Malonga incurs the unforgiving hatred of a cross-section of his readers.

(32) "Coeur", p. 235.
(33) The Novelists' Inheritance, p. 77.

He foresees this and prophesies well ahead that as reagards all he says about Roch Morax

> "On croirait à une fiction pure agrémentée à dessin en lisant ces lignes. Mais hélas! C'est pourtant la réalité même. Les Morax, des milliers et des milliers de Morax ont vécu et vivent encore en chair et en os ....."[34]

What further testimony do we want to the fact that he is writing about a real person, not a sort of Alice in Wonderland, but a character that is true to type? The first chapter of this thesis furnishes enough evidence to this effect. Roch Morax exploits Africans economically, sexually. Whatever his reasons were, whether it is because, as some critics say, he feels "cut off" from "civilisation" and can at any time be "cut down" by disease, the fact remains that he makes a sorry sight of Africans living in his trading-post. The prison at Dongou supplements his efforts and he uses it at will. Dongou is a real town near the Congo Brazzaville's border with Oubangui-Chari, as we have pointed out earlier. Morax operates an illegal commerce with Congo Léopoldville in spite of the ban on such a business by Brazzaville government. This is in keeping with an earlier sketch in the novel of his character as a crook. His relations with the Catholic mission and the colonial administration are all real situations.

Roch Morax's insatiable appetite for women goes together with his addiction to alchohol and tobacco. Such a combination is not new. The young English poet, Keat, talks about women, wine and snuff as his "Blessed

(34) "Coeur", p. 184.

Trinity". Roch excels in the native palm wine and local"chanvre", which are easier to come by under the circumstance. It is because of his heavy drinking habit, abetted by his frequent absence from the house, that he did not discover his daughter's pregnancy.

His racist tendencies are not unusual. It is to his type that André Gide refers in his Voyage au Congo where he says that the less intelligent a white colonist is the more he is inclined to look on Africans as subhumans. Roch hates the blacks, calls them all sorts of names, punishes them whenever he feels like. Even the offsprings of his debauchery he hates too. He does not feel that Africans, be they metis or entrely dark, are of flesh and blood like himself. He sees them as objects on which he can use his gun as freely as in the thick forests of the Congo where he chaes wild elephants. Hence he talks about shooting down Mambeké if he sees him near his house again. And he actually tried to use it on Bienvenu but found himself accidentally on the receiving end of the bullets.

A man with such excesses cannot help being a failure in his marital life. Since he became fully immersed in illicit love outside his family environs he has little or no time for his wife. Not once in the story do we see him show a single act of affection towards her. He covers up his evil machinations by pretending to be too much involved in his business concerns. Marie-Rose does not mean much to his life. Throughout her admission in the hospital until her death he showed up only once by her bedside. In fact, at her moment of passing away, he was not there. The impression that one gets throughout the novel is that he feels his wife is a clog in the wheel

of his liberty, a sort of thorn in his flesh. And when she died he hardly ever mourned her but fell back to his sexual revelry with redoubled energy. As he gets older his urge for sex declines. The totality of his character cannot be more convincing. His wild feelings of younger years become dulled by age. Mambeké was surprised on his return from Europe to find his former bully's temper so tuned down, and so ready to listen and to discuss. But his fundamental hatred for the black race remains intact, which is not unexpected.

Father Hux is a character as real as Roch Morax. His weaknesses are not exaggerated in any way. In fact he could have been made to be worse if Malonga were not talking about a real individual and if he had not decided to be unbiased in his analysis. Nothing prevents the author from giving him the violence of the R.P.S. Drummont in Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba. But Father Hux is not like the Father Superior. His hatred for the blacks does not push him as far as to be violent with them, though his approach is not less mischievous. He reported Mambeké to Roch Morax for seeing him in the company of Solange. To the priest of God, Yoka is recommendable to the service of Roch Morax because of his smattering knowledge of French, and of being a bit "décroute".

A man of double standards, the rightness or the wrongness of an act, as far as Reverend Father Hux is concerned, depends on the doer. If it is the white man it is permissible and is viewed lightly. But if it is the African, it is anathema. While the slightest act of indiscretion is a serious sin for an African, turpid immorality and various other heinous offences against humanity are waved off as "incident banal et sans aucune gravité". Roch Morax's affairs with his cook's wife is viewed only from the angle of the sufferings the act will cause a white lady if she hears of it. He runs a

racist school where white and black children are separated and different instructions imparted. He knows that this is the best way to keep the Africans in the dark.

When Mambeké tries to point out to Father Hux that he is not practising what he preaches Malonga is not being unfair to the Mission. He is simply being objective. And that is why Mambeké draws his examples not only from Brazzaville but from far and wide in order to show to Father Hux that the careless, negligent attitude that he is condemning in the white religious minister is general and limited only to the Catholic Mission of Mossaka. Without this meeting between the graduate of Saint-Cloud and Father Hux which affords the latter an opportunity of hearing directly what the Africans whom he is evangelising think about him and his mission, the painting of the character of Father Hux would have appeared to be in bad taste, or at least caricatural. But those of us who were brought up in the mission schools know that we met worse Reverend Fathers than Father Hux. This explains the rift, for example, between Nigerian Holy Ghost Fathers and their white counterparts culminating with the Headquarters in France granting autonomy to the Nigerian group.

Coming to Marie-Rose, Sainville comments thus admiringly:

> "On s'étonne que sa femme, la sensible Marie-Rose, qui aime les noirs, ait pu souffrir si longtemps la brutalité de son époux".35

The angelic tolerance of this woman gives her a unique place

(35) Leonard Sainville, Romanciers et conteurs négro-africains, I, (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963), p. 291.

amongst the most delicate characters in Malonga's novels. Mari-Rose lacks her husband's robust health. She loves him, although deserted hy him. She is negrophile, which opposes her ideologically to her husband. Sometimes people marvel at how it was possible for her to recover temporarily from comatic state to exhort Mambeké amd Solange to the attainment of the concept of "communion des races". But hers is not an isolated case in Literature. Here is a parallel scene from Balzac:

> "Lorsque le curé de la paroisse vint l'administrer, ("l'" referring to the last communion for the dying man), ses yeux, morts en apparence depuis quelques heures, se ranimèrent à la vue de la croix, des chandeliers, du bénitier d'argent qu'il regarda fixement, et sa loupe remua pour la dernière fois. Lorsque le prêtre lui approcha des lèvres le crucifix en vermeil pour lui faire baiser l'image du Christ, il fit un épouvantable geste pour le saisir, et ce dernier effort lui coûta la vie".[36]

The tremendous effort made by Marie-Rose to address the two young people at such great length could have also cost her her life, for gold is to Eugénie's father what "l'entente humaine" is to Marie-Rose. Her death is another mile-stone in the failure of racial oneness which Malonga conceptualises.

That Marie-Rose is ideologically at daggers' drawn with her husband shows no "inconsistency". In the first Chapter of this thesis it is clear that among all the Roch Moraxes and the Reverend Father Huxes that were in abundance in the Congo, Brazza was alone in his love and

(36) Honoré de Balzac, Eugénie Grandet, (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1955), p. 220. Underlining by me.

kindness to Africans, which is an uncontested historical fact. The situation developed to a point that they became so hostile as to campaign openly against him both in Belgium and in France. They did everything possible to undermine his noble works in the Congo. We recall especially the ignoble role of King Léopold II of Belgium and of Bishop Augouard. His shameful dismissal from office which he bore most magnanimously, his subsequent mission to the Congo under the mandate of the French government to investigate there the alarming increase of atrocities by the Europeans against defenceless Africans, the sacrifice of the last ounce of his health for the African cause - all go to show that in a world of European negrophobes there can be one white who can like Africans and will even be ready to lose his life in the process.

Some critics find it difficult to believe that Marie-Rose could have been so "oblivious" of Roch Morax's "attitude and behaviour" for such a long time. This is answerable by reference to the living conditions at that time in Mossaka. In a different circumstance his character could have been rightfully termed unrealistic. The Commandant in Une Vie de Boy could have been as "oblivious" as herself if his duty does not take him out from time to time where he meets Africans directly. Thus he is able to find out that he is being referred to by the indigenes as "le commandant dont la femme écarte les jambes dans les rigoles et dans les voitures".[37] But Marie-Rose is most of the time indoors. Living in a village that is marshy most of the time, her movement is restricted to the environs of her domicile. Even if she is aware of some suspicious moves on the part of her husband it is impossible

(37) Oyono, p. 150.

for her to "chase" him and confirm her fears. What is more, her spiritual disposition is such that she trusts herself and consequentially everyone around her. Her only known outing is to the Mission Sainte-Barbe, and it is there that the cat was let out of the bag.

Side by side with France's irresponsible officials are some magnanimous ones who stand for her good intentions in Africa. This is the situation in Coeur d'Aryenne with the top échelon of the Police Commission, the most active arm of the colonial administration. It is significant that Malonga does not call the officers by their real names for as usual, they must be real persons. His safety might have been in jeopardy had he dared to. It suffices for his purposes that they are the Inspector-General of Police and the Police Commissioner. M. Mornay is a "sous officier" who is of no real significance since his duty is to carry out instructions. That the Inspector-General, who is a superior officer to the Police Commissioner is a negrophile, while the Police Commissioner is a hater of Africans, is understandable when put against the light of the arguments already advanced to explain why Marie-Rose conflicts with her husband in their respective attitudes towards Africans.

Solange is far from perfect, unlike what some critics think. This makes her all the more natural human being. She tells lies and disobeys her parents. Her curiosities, her quick temperament, her "manigances" - all go to make her a real person. But her recklessness and lawlessness do not leave much to be desired. Since from a very tender age she is gifted enough to be able to distinguish between good and bad, it becomes more serious for her when she leaves good for bad. One convincing truth about her

faults is that they are, although Malonga does not point this fact clearly, those found in any child who is the only child of a family. This sort of child tends to be over-indulged at infancy and eventually spoilt. Her Maria Monk attitude at the Léopoldville convent is not encouraging.

On her good side, Solange is Marie-Rose made active and pushful. Her love for Africans is indomitable, and knows no boundary. Very few children of her age can boast of her courage. Before the Commissioner of Police she fearlessly pleads for Obambi and family. She knows what risk she runs by frequenting Mambeké but still continues to do so. She loves Africa and her people so much that she will like to naturalise a Congolese. This should not be regarded an exaggeration for the malaise of the present day South Africa includes the unwillingness of the whites to go back home to their respective countries. Her protecting her child from the angry grip of an irate father is in keeping with the biological functions of every mother. Unfortunately, her tragedy lies in the fact that, although she says that she has destroyed in her her Aryanness, in spite of all her courage and positive love for Africans, she remains "au fond", unconsciously, a white. And when she takes her life by drowning it a typical European that we find in action.

In contrast to her, Makosso is a good example of a bad African. Discriminatory in his attitude towards all his compatriots who are not natives of Pointe-Noire, swollen headed, or "bouffi d'orgueil" as Mambeké puts it, by his having been born near the coast which makes his forefathers see the white man before everybody else, he

sees in Mambeke an obstacle that must be surmounted if he is to continue demonstrating his superiority in every nook and corner of the Cours Moyen de Poto-Poto. His efforts to exclude Mambeké from every sport in which he himself takes part pinpoints his selfishness. In his regard Malonga reveals an evil practice which is still the order of the day in rural schools and which unfortunately still evades the attention of many a school authority:

> "l'ambitieux petit Vili a recours à des moyens occultes pour nuire à tous ses amis internes et handicaper les camarades plus doués que lui".[38]

His main annoyance with Mambeké is that he could not bewitch him since Mambeké lives off-campus. He is jealous, insolent and disrespectful. If it is true that people judge others from their own dispositions, Makosso must be the type that "travaille dans l'ombre, s'active dans les ténèbres la nuit chez les professeurs célibataires"[39] as he accuses Mambeké. In short, Makosso incarnates all that is rotten in an African.

Coeur d'Aryenne is a catalogue of Mambeké's good qualities, none of which is unexpected in a decent conscientious African thorough-bred. About the reality of Mambeké as a character Brench rightly passes the following comments:

> "His life as a schoolboy is like that of any other boy whose family cannot support him; his application in class is non extrordinary, he has terrified respect for Europeans and their strict social code which any boy in his position is bound to have".[40]

Mambeké's cold attitude to love is quite in order. It

(38) "Coeur", p. 205. (39) "Coeur", p. 206
(40) The Novelists' Inheritance, p. 78.

shows to what extent strict missionary education can reduce the sexual instinct in one. Most of his prototypes are like that: In Mongo Beti's Mission Terminée Medza spurns Eliza, Denis resists the charming advances of Catherine in Beti's Pauvre Christ de Bomba, Toundi in Oyono's Une Vie de Boy is the most violent in his rejection of Kalisia's invitation to love-making. Like all the three, except Toundi, he was eventually initiated into sexual life.

But the fear that Mambeké has of the whites is, however, more than Brench's "which any boy in his position is bound to have" can express. It is the pattern of things in colonial Africa of yester years and in independent Africa of today that the white man is a superhuman, superior in everything to the black man. There is no African in the novel that is not like Mambeké, if not worse, in his deep-rooted fear for the white man - the chief of Mossaka, Yoka, everyone! The women-folk, especially the unripe girls, who succumb to sex with Roch Morax do so out of fear. It is fear for the white man that sends the whole village of Mossaka panicking because a white man's daughter has fallen into the river in a scene packed with imagery and action which opens Coeur d'Aryenne. The fear of the white man metamorphoses itself into a complex which Solange says she has killed in Mambeké. Psychanalytically, the cause of this complex is best defined in Fanon's words -

> "The Negro .... is comparison: that is, he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation and with the ego-ideal. Whenever he comes into

> contact with someone else, the question of value, of merit, arises".[41]

When the process of self-comparison becomes habitual it degenerates into a sort of reflex action which has nothing wrong in it per se. It is only when it is put alongside the oppressive nature of the colonial situation that the African helplessly opts for the unenviable inferior position. Such a feeling of inferiority is the sum total of what transpires in Mambeké each time he is confronted by Solange. Hence most of the time he addresses her as "enfant du Blanc". This cannot be imputed to him as a fault for it cannot be otherwise.

But Mambeké lacks Solange's will-power. It makes for a man when he knows that something is not to his best of of interest and keeps away from it. Mambeké is aware that his association with Solange brings punishment to his father and he does not like to see his father suffer. Normally one would expect him to take a firm decision to sever relationship with her. In fact he did so, but soon after rescinded his decision under pressures from Solange. It was only when his father was sent to Dongou prison the second time because of his continued association with Solange that he eventually made up his mind to leave her for the distant capital city of Brazzaville, a decision which he ought to have taken quite earlier.

(41) Frantz Fanon, Black skin, white masks, trans. by Charles Ram Markmann, (London: Mac Gibbon, 1968), p. 211.

CONCLUSION

Malonga has carefully selected his themes. In his handling of them he has tried to be as impartial and objective as possible. In spite of his occasional outbursts he has all along displayed a lot of maturity and self control. His tone which is high most of the time is aimed at convincing the reader of the naked truth behind his facts. It follows naturally that the conclusions he draws at the end of the novels were not only logical at the time he wrote but are still the current trends today and will likely be tomorrow. This situation vindicates his realism and makes him a writer for all time. Today the Parti Congolais du Travail rules the Congo, thus enshrining his insistence on hardwork as the main pillar on which rests the rapid economic growth of any developing country, including his utopian N'Tsangou of the legend. Today the whole of the African and negro world are gradually abandoning the exotic civilisations of the white world to rediscover their own culture, their own tradition, their own identity. This Mambeké did as early as 1948 at the end of Coeur d'Aryenne. If Chimua Achebe's assertion that the novelist's duty is "to explore in depth the human condition"[1] is anything to go by, Malonga has more than acquitted himself, for not only did he explore "the human condition" in the traditional and the pseudo-modern society of the colonial era, but also added

(1) See Nigeria Magazine, 81(June, 1964), p. 157.

to his diagnosis a prophetic dimension that is not common in any literature.

Unfortunately, critical opinion is not on Malonga's side. Pains have been taken in the course of this study to find out the criteria on the strength of which an African novel can be termed "good" but none of our scholars seems to be ready to commit himself. In fact "African Literature" has no universally accepted definition yet. While Africans started writing novels around the 1920's, European novels have been flourishing centuries before that. The standard texts on literary criticism on our shelves today are those written by Europeans. Are African novels to be appraised alongside those produced in France **or** England?, one may ask. To this many African scholars will say "no", adding that esthetics should not be made applicable to African Literature since neither French nor English is our mother tongue, and that moreover, by the very fact of their being the tongues of our former colonial masters, they are already unpalatable in some African minds. What then should be the yardstick for measuring the success of an African novel? To this, some will say realism. Some will say realism and esthetics. Some will disagree, and say realism and esthetics are self-eliminatory. Some will go out of their way to say that "African Literature" will be born the day Africa has a lingua franca, which should be Swahili, and that it is only when there is an "African Literature" that we can talk about any standard criticism.

It results from the above confused situation that a good deal of criticisms that we have today on African Literature are by the same Europeans who naturally view African writings from their own norms. Having gone through

all available criticisms, most of which are by Europeans, on Jean Malonga's novels, the following percentage of scores of their "success" as novels are arrived at:

Coeur d'Aryenne ..... 5 per cent
La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono ..... 65 to 75 per cent,

while novels like Une Vie de Boy or Pauvre Christ de Bomba enjoy 90 to 95 per cent each. The above scores explain why the legend has already been published as an integral book while Coeur d'Aryenne still remains in the Trois Ecrivains noirs collection by Présence Africaine. One would naturally wonder why so much disparity in the grading of the two novels written by one and same person and published one year after the other. But the fact that existing articles by Africans on the novels assume an apologetic undertone when talking about Coeur d'Aryenne shows that this scintillating novel has lost its "droit de cité" with a cross-section of the reading public mainly due to its contents which have been a little misconstrued. If,then, after reading this thesis the novels are better understood, and Coeur d'Aryenne is scored higher in the opinion of critics, I must have made my contribution. Indeed the Congolese writer has made a laudable contribution in the enrichment of Congolese Literature in particular and the African Literature in general. A more careful appraisal of his works would tend to support my view that his rating among African writer should be upgraded.

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