THE NEGRO IN THE NOVELS OF
RÉNÉ MARAN

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This study of the Negro in the novels of René Maran, France's most prominent contemporary Negro author, is one of several being made at Atlanta University on the Negro in French literature. This attempt to show how a Negro, the only one ever to receive the Prix Goncourt, portrays his African brothers, is the first American study of René Maran's novels. It is hoped that it will be a modest contribution to an almost unexplored field in French literature and that other students of France and her culture will be inspired to make a more extensive study of René Maran and his works.

The first chapter is devoted to the life of René Maran and a discussion of his style and most important works. The second chapter presents the physical characteristics of the Negro as portrayed by René Maran. Emphasis is placed on physical appearance, tribal marks, dress, disease and odors which seem to be especially characteristic of the Negro. The third chapter is devoted to the social characteristics of the Negro with emphasis on home life, food, religion, feasts, and government. The last chapter will present a summary of the findings of this study. The appendix includes short synopses of each of the novels with Negro characters, and a letter from Monsieur Maran to the writer.

It is to be regretted that such a small amount of material has been written on René Maran. Because of his modesty he has written even less about himself. Biographical material consists principally of Léon Bocquet's "Préface" to Le Petit Roi de Chimérie, a fairy story by René Maran; Le Coeur serré, an autobiography written as a novel; several articles which have appeared in periodicals and the aforementioned letter from Monsieur Maran.

First editions of all novels, with exception of Le Livre de la brousse, were used. As the latter was unavailable, the second edition (1937) was used. René Maran's most important novels on Africa, Batouala,
Djouma, Chien de brousse, Le Journal sans date and le Livre de la brousse have been studied. The novelettes Bokorro and Bassarragba have also been used as references but the longer novels have constituted our major interest. Le Petit Roi de Chimérie, though it contains no Negro characters, was quoted because of one excellent example of René Maran's style. Less stress has been placed on Le Journal sans date because only one of its characters is a Negro.

The writer sincerely appreciates the kindness and help of René Maran, whose letter was a source of constant encouragement.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Chapter** | **Page**
---|---
I PREFACE | ii
I RENÉ MARAN, THE MAN | 1
II THE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEGRO | 13
III THE SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEGRO | 25
IV CONCLUSION | 35
APPENDIX | 39
BIBLIOGRAPHY | 47
CHAPTER I
RENÉ MARAN, THE MAN

The fifth of November, 1887, at Fort de France (Martinique), René Maran was born to the eighteen-year-old wife of the clerk to the Secretary-General. Four years after the birth of the baby, the father was given another governmental position, that of assistant chief clerk to the Director of the Interior at Libreville (Gabon).\(^1\) The climate in Gabon did not agree with René and in 1894 the Maran family moved to France where the child was placed in the École de Talence, the annex of the Lycée de Bordeaux.\(^2\) He remained here until he received his baccalauréat.\(^3\)

Life in school was lonely at first for René.\(^4\) He was a brilliant student,\(^5\) interested in books and the more serious side of his scholastic life, as well as in athletics and other activities. He not only won prizes in grammar contests\(^6\) but also was a winner in sports.

"L'an dernier, il a remporté le championnat interscolaire de fleuret de la région du Sud-Ouest. Cette année, ses camarades lui ont confié le capitaine de l'équipe première des "Muguets" du lycée de Bordeaux. De plus, il porte chaque dimanche les couleurs du "Sport Athlétique Bordelais", dont il est... l'un des meilleurs équipiers premiers."\(^7\)

\(^1\) Personal letter from René Maran to the writer, December 10, 1939.


\(^3\) Personal letter from René Maran to the writer, December 10, 1939.

\(^4\) Bocquet, op. cit., p. 12.

\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 12.

\(^7\) René Maran says in his letter of December 10, 1939: "Voilà ce que peut dire l'ancien champion scolaire de fleuret et l'ancien capitaine de la première équipe de rugby du Sport Athlétique Bordelais que j'ai été dans mon jeune temps."

Many of his vacations were spent at school.\textsuperscript{1} In \textit{Le Cœur serré}, (1951) which Monsieur Maran admits is an autobiography "à peine romancée",\textsuperscript{2} he describes this loneliness:

"Jamais personne ne le fait demander au parloir pour le combler de sucreries, il ne reçoit jamais de lettres, il ne sort jamais le dimanche, bien qu'il ait un correspondant, ni pendant les fêtes carillonnées. La Noël il l'a passée au lycée. Pâques aussi."
\textsuperscript{3}

As he had much time to himself, he developed a great love for reading. Poetry and novels were his favorites.\textsuperscript{4} He had one desire that has remained with him until the present day:

"...se démontrer et démontrer à qui méprise les nègres qu'un Africain d'origine est aussi intelligent que n'importe quel Européen et qu'il possède parfois et écrit mieux le français que bien des autochtones du Midi ou du Nord."\textsuperscript{5}

In 1909 he was forced to discontinue his studies.\textsuperscript{6} He left Bordeaux for French Equatorial Africa where he had been named to a post in the Colonial Service.\textsuperscript{7}

René Maran, now a young man of twenty-two, felt that a trip to Africa would be a great adventure, yet he was not completely happy over the thought of the journey. He loved France and had no great desire to exchange its mild temperature for the tropical warmth of the Congo.\textsuperscript{8} He thought of the French people he had just left, the people to whom

\textsuperscript{1}Bocquet, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{2}Personal letter from René Maran to the writer, December 10, 1939.
\textsuperscript{3}\textit{Le Cœur serré}, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{4}Bocquet, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 13-14.
\textsuperscript{5}Ibid., p. 13.
\textsuperscript{6}Personal letter from René Maran.
\textsuperscript{7}Bocquet, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{8}Ibid., pp. 14-15.
he owed his culture and civilization; then he turned his thoughts to
the new people he was to meet, the Africans, to whom he was indebted
for his racial heritage. He realized that in spite of their lack of
high mentality and civilization and though he reproved and censured
them, they were his ancestors. This is indicated in one of his letters:

"Car maintenant, avec un coeur français, je sens que je suis
sur le sol de mes ancêtres, ancêtres que je réprouve parce
que je n'ai pas leur mentalité primitive ni leurs goûts,
mais ce n'en sont pas moins des ancêtres."

He did not love them; he knew very few of them, and he felt sympathetic
and sorry for them as he would have done for any primitive people who
were in need of help. He was neither "Européanophile" nor "Nérophile"; he
belonged to the Negro race but the bonds which linked him to France
seemed stronger.

"Car ce n'est pas une race ici que j'attaque ou que je défends...
J'appartiens à l'une. J'ai trop de raison pour aimer l'autre
qui, au surplus, par les parents de ma mère, a instillé dans
mes veines quelques gouttes de sang."

At Bangui, he became the Commissioner of Police. The work was
hard and consumed much of his time; he often spent twelve hours and
even more going over the village to see that all was well. Yet, in
spite of these well-filled days, he found time to read and do a
little writing.

In 1912 he received a new appointment. This time he was placed
in the district of Grimari, another governmental station. The work
was much easier and the hours were shorter, thus giving him time to

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1 Socquet, op. cit., p. 15, quoting René Maran.
2 Ibid., p. 53.
3 Ibid., p. 48, quoting René Maran.
4 Ibid.
compose a volume of poetry, *La Vie intérieure*.\(^1\)

In his Preface to the fairy tale, *Le Petit Roi de Chimérie*, Bocquet speaks of René Maran's passion for poetry:

"Il a dévoué son cœur et son esprit, son énergie et son intelligence à la poésie. ...a littérature a été son vice élegant, son péché d'habitude, sa religion unique, la nécessité et l'aliment de son cerveau et de son âme."\(^2\)

Being in Africa did not prevent his reading the books the world knew and loved. He had a traveling library in which there were more than one hundred volumes including works of all centuries and literary "genres". The works of Baudelaire, François Villon, Vigny, the poets of the Pléiade and Rabelais were in the collection. It should be noted that André Gide was included among the favorites.\(^3\) As Gide was not then the famous writer he is today, the fact that René Maran recognized his genius and placed him in the collection testifies to Maran's literary taste.

The death of his mother in 1915,\(^4\) one of the great sorrows of his life, affected his writing greatly, made him pessimistic and discouraged.\(^5\) For more than eight years he wrote and rewrote *Batouala*, his first and most famous novel, which in 1921 was awarded the Prix Goncourt.

One of the first novels to criticize the colonial policies of France, *Batouala* is the only novel by a Negro ever to receive this award. *Batouala* made him famous but it also brought him disappointment. Not

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 18.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 32.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 54.
\(^4\)Ibid., p. 31.
\(^5\)Ibid., p. 64.
long after the novel was published René Maran was accused and tried for an alleged newspaper attack on a Senegalese deputy, Diagne, a charge of which he was cleared, but which caused his books to be banned by many French publishing houses. Only recently the ban was lifted and he published his latest work, Livingstone et l’Exploration de l’Afrique. (1928)\(^1\)

Many who were against him felt as René Gillouin, in the essay "Le problème de la colonisation" which is included in his work Le Destin de l’Occident.\(^2\) They remembered that this Negro had dared attack France, the country that had given him education and a home for the greater part of his life. So this was the way he repaid the country which had befriended him. Gillouin makes this statement:

"...voilà un homme qui proclame que la France lui a tout donné, et à qui elle a donné, en effet, sa langue, sa culture, un poste d’administrateur colonial: et tous ces bienfaits, il les retourne contre sa bienfaitrice. (...) quel comble d’ingratitude!":\(^3\)

Soon after the publication of Matouala, an anonymous journalist accused Maran of plagiarizing the subject, plot and descriptions found in the novel.\(^4\) Later works, such as Le Livre de la brousse, Djouma, Chien de brousse(1927), prove the falsity of this statement. His letters, veritable works of art, are proof enough of his genius.

"...les lettres de René Maran où tant de passages s'offrent comme les ébauches dispersées des chapitres de son roman, ont, par avance, donné le plus net démenti à de semblables insinuations. Maran ne plagie que la nature. Il ne fait point de l'exotisme imaginé.":\(^5\)

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\(^3\)Gillouin, *op. cit.* , p. 75.

\(^4\)Boquet, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

\(^5\)Ibid.
Later in the Preface to Le Petit Roi de Chimérie, Bocquet again comments on the correspondence of René Maran: "Les lettres offrent un intérêt littéraire considérable. Je les crois du reste rarement de premier jet."¹

He did not, however, invent his characters: Batouala really lived in the Congo region under the name of Goara. Goara furnished René Maran much of his information on Africa and from him he learned how the Negroes in the colonies hated white people. "Il a intégré dans son livre des types de sa connaissance, non tels qu'ils devraient être, mais tels qu'ils sont dans la réalité."²

The descriptions found in each novel by René Maran are further proof of the originality of a man who knew the names of the African birds, flowers and beasts as well as he knew French animal life. He describes what he really saw. Though Le Petit Roi de Chimérie is of no importance in this study, it is worthy of mention because it contains some of René Maran's most colorful descriptions. Here is one of the most striking passages:

"Il neige. Roses souffre, roses blanches, roses rosées, il ne neige que des roses, roses roses, roses pourpres, roses incarnadines."³

The Maran plot is simple and great emphasis is placed on setting and characters. Its greatest attribute is exoticism. Therein lies the beauty. "C'est de l'exotisme vécu, vrai, cru. Et pour le rendre, je n'ai cru devoir employer que de l'excellent français."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 37.
²Ibid., p. 45.
³Le Petit Roi de Chimérie is a short fairy story and contains no Negro characters.
⁴Maran, Le Petit Roi de Chimérie, (Paris,[1924]), p. 133.
⁵Bocquet, op. cit. p. 41. quoting René Maran.
Bocquet says of this exoticism:

"Pourant il cède rarement au plaisir d'un exotisme ingénue et facile. Quand il s'abandonne vraiment à la description il est, dirait-on, submergé et conquis, à son insu, par l'afflux et le pittoresque des images qui se déroulent comme un cinéma vivant." \(^1\)

Never quite satisfied with the work he has done, René Maran takes extreme care, words and rewords each sentence until he has the desired effect. \(^2\) In one of his letters he says:

"'Alors, je crois que le français est une langue admirable, qu'on ne la soignera jamais assez et que le meilleur moyen de prouver combien on l'aime est de l'écrire aussi bien que possible.'" \(^3\)

He believed that by studying the language and style of the great classic writers of antiquity, an author might develop a heretofore unknown originality. \(^4\) He seems to have accomplished this originality in his effective use of short, emphatic sentences and phrases of two to four words.

René Maran learned the customs of the people by studying their language. \(^5\) Gillouin accuses him of using too many of these African words without including a glossary to help the reader. \(^6\) It should certainly be pointed out that his characters rarely use "petit nègre" or Negro dialect. \(^7\)

Batoouala is the only one of his works to be translated into English.

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 24.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 40.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 41, quoting René Maran.
\(^4\)Ibid., p. 36.
\(^5\)Ibid., p. 44.
\(^6\)Gillouin, op. cit., p. 71.
\(^7\)Bocquet, op. cit., p. 44.
It has been translated into almost every language. Though this is
his best known work, he feels that his later novel, Le Livre de la brousse,\textsuperscript{1}
is his masterpiece and that France has every right to be proud of it.\textsuperscript{2}

The purpose of the novel Batouala has often been debated. Many
hold the opinion that it is a propagandist work written against
France's treatment of her natives in French Equatorial Africa. Others
feel, however, that it was written to present the customs and manners
of an almost unknown people and to give a detailed description of a
beautiful and picturesque country.\textsuperscript{3}

The preface to Batouala was the cause of much disturbance after
the appearance of the book; it contains many of Maran's most important
accusations and criticisms. This preface is divided into two parts.
In the first part he accuses France of lack of interest in her colonies,\textsuperscript{4}
of sending inadequately trained and morally inefficient men to Africa
as colonial officials\textsuperscript{5} and of causing famine in the most fertile
section of the country.\textsuperscript{6} He asks the help of French writers in bringing
these abuses in Africa before the public.\textsuperscript{7}

The second part of the preface presents a word picture of the Ubangi-
Shari, one of the four colonies which make up French Equatorial Africa.

\textsuperscript{1} First edition appeared in 1934, the second in 1937.
\textsuperscript{2} Personal letter from René Maran to the writer, December 10, 1939.
\textsuperscript{3} Bocquet, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., p. 14.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p. 11.
"Ce n'est point la civilisation que condamne René Maran, c'est la manière de certains civilisateurs qu'il réprouve", says Bouquet who believes as does Batouala:

"Il n'y avait ni bandas ni mandjas, ni blancs ni nègres. Il n'y avait que des hommes. Et tous les hommes étaient frères."

Today, Batouala stands with Le Voyage au Congo and Le Retour du Tchad, both by André Gide, as the three works which have done the most to bring the attention of the public to Africa and her troubles. André Gide has proved that René Maran was correct in his accusations. Gide, who is from an old French family and who was already a well-known author when he wrote the two books on Africa, was of course believed. René Maran, Negro and insignificant as a writer, remained the cause of much discussion for many years. The conditions which he exposed are being corrected today and many natives in French colonies have since been shown the liberality and friendship of France.

His latest works, excluding the biography of Livingstone, are for the most part animal stories. They are cleverly written, interesting and filled with descriptive passages of the Africa René Maran knew and loved. However, it seems regrettable that his interest in this new type of work is becoming much greater than his interest in novels.

After spending a year in Paris, he returned to Africa where he remained until 1926. He resigned his position then and returned to

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1Bouquet, op. cit., p. 47.
4Ibid.
5Bokorro, (1937), Bassarragba, (1939).
France after having become a third class "adjoint principal". Since then he has written _le Coeur serré_, _Djouma_, _Chien de brousse_, _le Livre de la brousse_ and several other novels and short stories.

Today he and his wife live quietly and happily in an apartment near the Latin Quarter in Paris. He has by no means ceased to contribute to the literary world. In France today, he writes for several French newspapers and periodicals, among them: _Vendémiaire_, _Candide_, _le Monde illustré_. He contributes anonymously to the _bulletin quotidien_, a bulletin from the "Service Intercolonial d'Information et de Documentation" in Paris. Selections from several of his works have been included in anthologies and are being used in several lycées and collèges in France.

"En d'autres termes, la plupart de mes ouvrages, même ceux qui étaient les plus controversés au début, sont en passe de devenir classiques. Voilà qui prouve mieux que tout le libéralisme des masses françaises."

René Maran is extremely modest and wants no honors or recompense of any kind for the work he does. This is especially seen in his correspondence. In December, 1939, René Maran sent the writer, on request, a short biography and some very helpful material. His very polite and interesting letter has been of much help in this study. The first paragraph gives an immediate insight into the personality of the writer: "Je crains cependant de beaucoup vous décevoir. Je n'aime

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1 Personal letter from René Maran to the writer, December 10, 1939.
3 Letter of December 10, 1939.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
guère parler de moi et toute publicité me fait horreur.”¹

Professor Mercer Cook of Atlanta University, one of Monsieur Maran’s American friends, in an address to a University Convocation in 1928, spoke of his friend:

"Of an independent nature, Monsieur Maran shuns society and honors. I heard him one day refuse to have his name considered for a decoration, much to the amazement of the Deputy who wanted to nominate him. He could probably be a rich man today if he had been willing to retract some of the things he said about the treatment of natives in Africa."²

Bocquet also stresses this characteristic:

"René Maran n’avait jamais, aux jours de sa plus grande confiance, osé espérer semblable retentissement auprès de son livre et auprès de son nom. Il est trop modeste pour en tirer vanité."³

He has kept his great love for good literature and his love for France. Bocquet, who claims to be the only one to have seen René Maran’s diary,⁴ includes several letters from this "journal intime" in his biography. In one of the entries, Monsieur Maran says:

"Parce que la ville où j’ai vécu et grandi est une ville de France, parce que la France est mon pays, enfin parce que je l’aime de si exclusif amour que s’il venait à disparaître, vivre me serait à charge — que la fortune sourie aux destins de la France!"⁵

In another entry, not long after the death of his mother, he writes again:

"Je suis toujours aussi abattu. Il n’y a que l’idée de patrie qui me soutienne. Je pense avoir le temps de rentrer et de me faire tuer pour notre France."⁶

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¹Personal letter from René Maran to the writer, December 10, 1939.
²Cook, "The Race Problem in Paris and the West Indies".
³Bocquet, op. cit., p. 57.
⁴Ibid., p. 29.
⁵Ibid., pp. 29-30, quoting René Maran.
⁶Ibid., p. 31, quoting René Maran.
Though he loves France dearly, he wants no part of her political life. He has never voted; he belongs to no political party.\(^1\) He is simply a Frenchman with the interest of his country at heart.

"Ceci m'amène à vous dire que je ne fais pas et ne ferai jamais de politique; que je n'ai jamais voté et ne voterai jamais de ma vie; que je ne suis ni communiste, ni réactionnaire, ni royaliste, ni socialiste, ni anti-tout cela, mais que je ne demande à tous ces partis et à leurs succéderés que de me laisser vivre en paix et de ne pas traiter mes congénères comme Hitler traite les siens ou les Polonais."\(^2\)

The majority of his novels have African settings. This study will include the most important of these stories of the Negro in Africa: Batouala, Djouma, Chien de brusse, Le Livre de la brusse, Le Journal sans date and several of the novelettes about the animals.

The Negro in each of these works will be studied physically, morally and socially. Is the Negro presented differently from the Negro as he appears in other novels on Africa? What does he look like? What does he do? How does he speak and what does he think? With these questions in mind, the writer hopes to give a clear picture of the Negro as he is presented by René Maran.

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\(^1\)Personal letter from René Maran to the writer.

\(^2\)Ibid.
CHAPTER II

THE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEGRO

René maran's position in the colonial government afforded him a great opportunity of becoming friendly with his African brothers and of learning their customs and language. Being an official, he had to serve in many capacities, even as doctor, when no other was to be had. This brought him closer to those people who, although of his race and color, were so foreign to him. Still, however, he felt only pity and sympathy for them.

Though his novels are a means of educating people of other continents on Africa and her people, the physical characteristics of the Negro in these novels are subordinated to the local color and descriptions of nature which fill the books. There are few passages which give full descriptions of the Negro as a character, while there is page after page describing tropical birds and flowers, trees, animals, dawns and sunsets.

René maran uses four ways to bring out the physical characteristics of the Negro in his novels:

a. Description within the plot, as

"...un jeune homme bien découplé, vigoureux et beau. Il trouvait toujours chez Batouala de quoi manger et un bogbo pour dormir, car Batouala l'honorait d'une particulière estime."2

b. The Negro's opinion of his own race, as in Le Journal sans date, (1927)

c. The white man's opinion of the Negro, as in Le Journal sans date and Djouma, Chien de brousse.

1Léon Bocquet, "Préface" to René Maran, Le Petit Roi de Chimérie, p.49.
2Ibid., p. 47.
3Batouala, p. 45.
d. The animal's opinion of the Negro, as:

"Un petit d'homme était né, un de ces dangereux petits êtres verticaux privés d'ailes, un de ces vilains singes sans pelage qui ne sont même capables de grimper aux arbres bosselés de lianes et d'orchidées ni de vivre parmi leurs branches..."1

There are four important male characters in the novels we are considering: Batouala, Bissibingui -- Batouala's rival for the love of his wife -- Kossi, young warrior of Le Livre de la brousse, (1954) and Jean Veneuse, who writes Le Journal sans date.

The first of these and hero of René Maran's first novel, Batouala, was patterned after a real native chieftain.2 Leader of his people and from an old family, Batouala believed in the customs of his forefathers.3 Strong, vigorous, and well-built, this young man was a match for anyone in running or wrestling, with the javelin or knife.4 His great strength and cleverness as a hunter were a legend among the people and lent him a certain distinction.5 Handsome, too, was Batouala, as is seen in the description given by Mbimé, mother of Djouma, "chien de brousse":

"Grand, beau, fort, il commandait à tous les hommes qu'elle (Mbimé) connaissait. Il était brusque et avait la main prompte et pesante."6

Sleep was one of Batouala's favorite pastimes; this made him somewhat lazy. Work was nothing to be afraid of but it merely had a new, strange meaning to him.

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1Le Livre de la brousse, p. 16.
2Bocquet, op.cit., p. 46. (cf. also p. 6 of this thesis).
3Batouala, pp. 29-30.
4Ibid., p. 20.
5Ibid., pp. 20-21.
6René Maran, Djouma, Chien de brousse, (Paris, [1927]), p. 27.
"Le travail ne pouvait donc l'effrayer.
Seulement, dans la langue des blancs, ce mot revêtait un
sens étonnant. Il signifiait fatigue dans résultat immédiat ou
tangible, soucis, chagrins, douleur, usure de santé, poursuite
de buts imaginaires." 1

Batuouala felt that work was for those people who never would understand
life. He made a clear distinction between being just "plain lazy" and
"doing nothing". 2 To do nothing was not degrading; it was a means of
profiting from one's surroundings. 3 He was, however, perfectly
satisfied to live from day to day without thinking of the future. He
scorned the weakness of the white man, who, unaccustomed to conditions
in Africa, was afraid of the insects and animals, and even feared walking
on the ground. 4 This weakness is strongly contrasted to the endurance
of Batouala and his wife who slept among the white ants and other in-
sects; 5 who never bothered about taking baths and were never worried
by little jiggers on their bodies. 6

A far more colorful character is Bissibingui, who at fourteen 7 was
the answer to every maiden's prayer. His handsome appearance, physique
and youth made him unpopular among the men and too popular with the
women. Fourteen in the less torrid regions is considered mere ado-
lescence, but in Africa, says René Maran:

1 Batouala, p. 21.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., pp. 36-7.
5 Ibid., p. 19.
6 Ibid., p. 36.
7 In Batouala his age is given as sixteen.
"C'est à ce moment-là que les mâles vraiment dignes d'être des mâles, du matin au soir courent après les femmes, comme la panthère après une antilope."\(^1\)

At this early age, Bissibingui had already been the cause of discontent and unhappiness in many families. Complaints became so numerous that he was threatened with imprisonment.\(^2\)

Even his voice was one that would charm women:

"Bissibingui parlait. Sa voix était monotone et basse, comme sont basses et monotones certaines de ces chansons que les pagayeurs chantent dans leurs pirogues, sur l'Oubangui, mère des rivières..."\(^3\)

Though Batouala's friend, Bissibingui was his rival for the love of his favorite wife and the secret passion of his other eight wives.\(^4\)

There is little difference in René Maran's description of Bissibingui in *Batouala* and *Djouma, Chien de brousse*; the character retains the same characteristics in both novels:

"...Bissibingui, le meilleur ami de Batouala. Beau et admirablement découplé, il avait environ quatorze saisons de pluies, et semblait ne se plaire qu'en la compagnie de femmes, qui le lui rendaient bien et ne juraient que par lui."\(^5\)

Bissibingui was evidently very proud of his physique and popularity and the fact that women "cried, even submitted to beating and insults to keep him."\(^6\) In his feathers and oiled skin, Bissibingui was the main "performer" at tribal celebrations and feasts. His dance to the rhythmical beat of the tom-tom, exciting and highly sensual, always swelled the emotion of the crowd.

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\(^1\) *Batouala*, pp. 46-7
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 47.
\(^3\) *Djouma, Chien de brousse*, p. 89.
\(^4\) *Batouala*, p. 45.
\(^5\) *Djouma, Chien de brousse*, p. 79.
\(^6\) *Batouala*, p. 119.
"De tous, Bissibingui était le plus beau, le plus fort. Ses yeux brillaient comme un incendie dans la brousse. Ses muscles saillaient. Et il commandait à ses compagnons, parce qu'il les dominait de sa haute taille fine, nerveuse et membrue."¹

Kossi, main character of *Le Livre de la brousse*, one of René Maran's later novels on Africa, considerably less wild than Bissibingui and much livelier than Batouala, represented to perfection the race and tribe to which he belonged.² "Il n'était plus rien en lui qui ne fût maintenait d'un vrai banda: port, démarche, gestes, réflexes, tatouages..."³ With black eyes and white teeth, erect, strong, vigorous, Kossi was unequaled in wrestling and with the bow and arrow.⁴ Though young, he knew how to swim, something unusual among his people;⁵ he excelled in hunting and dancing; his strength and brilliance were known everywhere.⁶

"On l'admirait, quand il passait, les cheveux annelés ou tressés, membru, rabli, large de poitrine, étroit de hanches, le ventre plat mais bourré de muscles, les cuisses dures, longues et fortes, la tête haute, l'air insolent."⁷

Respected for his knowledge, Kossi was feared because of his powers as a sorcerer.⁸

"Les maux de tête, les maux de ventre, les maux de dents, les divers malaises dont les noirs ont accoutumé de se plaindre ne résistaient jamais bien longtemps à ses sortilèges. Il était de notoriété publique qu'il transmettait sa pensée à distance et jetait des sorts sur qui bon lui semblait. La pluie obéissait

¹Ibid., p. 85.
²*Le Livre de la brousse*, p. 35.
³Ibid.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Ibid., p. 32.
⁶Ibid., p. 61.
⁷Ibid., p. 35.
⁸Ibid., pp. 61-2.
à ses incantations, le gibier à son appel. Il connaissait les moindres nuances de langage somalé et, de ce langage, les formules les plus denses, les termes les plus hermétiques, qui rendent visible à ses seuls possédants la face de Ngakoura."

The last of these characters, Jean Veneuse, who records the

Journal sans date, though quite different from the three heroes previously mentioned, must be considered, for he too is a Negro. Jean Veneuse was educated in France and held a governmental position in the colonies. Thus, he had little contact with people of his own color until he went to Africa. In his diary he says very little of the Negroes he met and with whom he associated. He does describe on several occasions the white women who are his companions and once or twice he mentions the Negroes. The following is perhaps the longest description:

"Longs, secs, durs, dents laiteuses, visage d'une noirceur comme huilée, de longs diables de Sénégalais aux yeux étincelants marchandent les denrées avec une orgueilleuse insouciance. Ils chiquent des noix de kola,orent, rient, crochent dédaigneusement, s'injurient, se grattent, bâillent, gesticulent. Leurs mouvements sont amples en leur ample tunique, qu'ils appellent boubou. Des colliers de grisirí, des amulettes et de chaînettes de cauris pendillent à leur cou ou à leurs doigts."

Throughout le Journal sans date, Jean Veneuse expresses his opinion of the Negro in, first, his frequent references to his own racial inferiority and his attempts to justify his color, as in this example:

"Je sais en effet, à présent, que ni l'éducation ni l'instruction ne prévalent contre les préjugés de race. Je sais que la plupart de mes chefs n'ont jamais voulu voir en moi qu'un nègre, -- qu'un sale nègre qu'il fallait tenir à l'écart, briser, humilier; qu'un sale nègre indigné au moindre avancement et, malgré sa tenue, ou peut-être à cause d'elle, -- de toute considération."

One cannot fail to notice this sense of inferiority in his letters to

1 Ibid., pp. 57-8.
3 Ibid., p. 113.
Andrée. Such passages as the following are frequent:

"...Andrée chérie, cela ne se peut, car l'amour n'abolit pas les préjugés de race.
Je suis nègre. Je me permets de vous le rappeler puisque vous l'avez oublié. Nègre. — ne vous réjouissez pas, -- je connais tous les arguments que vous allez élever contre les miens."

Jean Veneuse is not always a likable character, for his personality is warped by this evident self-pity and inferiority complex.

Of the women characters, less numerous than the men, Yassiguindja, wife of Batouala, and Yassi, heroine of Le Livre de la brousse, are the most outstanding.

Dark-eyed Yassi² is beautiful among the women of her race. To Kossi she was:

"...grande, ...belle...bonne... Elle avait des cuisses bien faites, le bassin large, des fines chevilles cerclées d'anneaux sonores, les pieds menus, portait longs ses cheveux toujours admirablement tressés. "³

Her grace, one of those feminine charms which all men strive to possess, was not to be rivaled.⁴

"Douce, jolie et plaisante, elle prenait son temps pour parler, ne prononçait jamais un mot plus haut que l'autre..."⁵

Even less is said of Yassiguindja, Batouala's favorite wife, who was especially charming to Bissibingui, so much so that he said of her on one occasion:

"Une si belle fille!... Et savante, préendaient certains dans l'art des caresses...De plus, bonne cuisinière, et vaillante au travail; tout ce qu'il fallait pour un homme..."⁶

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¹Ibid., p. 204.
²Le Livre de la brousse, p. 39.
³Ibid., pp. 78-9.
⁴Ibid., p. 79.
⁵Ibid., p. 31.
⁶Djouma, Chien de brousse, p. 189.
Her figure was no less attractive to him: "...les seins plats, de larges hanchoes, les cuisses rondes et fortes, de fines chevilles."\(^1\)

A more general view of the Negro’s appearance in the novels of René Maran will show that while clothing was very scant, the accessories of the women seem more important. They wore many trinkets, bells and beads, painted and oiled themselves in bright colors and often wore a small piece of wood pierced through the nose and the right ear. \(^2\) "Ces bijoux lui donnaient un air distingué, qui ne convient qu'à elle."\(^3\)

René Maran does not speak of the color of the characters themselves but he does mention difference in color among Negroes in both le Journal sans date and Batouala. In the latter, it is mentioned only to blame the mixture of white and Negro blood for the laziness and maliciousness of the mulatto. In his famous speech on the whites and Negroes, Batouala says of the mulatto:

"Se sachant fils de blancs, ces derniers ne daignaient pas fréquenter les nègres. Pleins de haine et d'envie, en boudjouwoukos qu'ils étaient, ces blancs et noirs vivaient exécrés de tous, pourris de vices, paresseux et malfaisants."\(^4\)

Except for tatooing, there seems to be no especial stress placed on tribal marks. Oils and greases seem to be a part of the daily "attire" and of great importance.

"Tous, ils s'étaient cint le corps ce bois rouge et de graisse. Ils avaient des grelotes et des sonnailles partout... Ils dégagaient une odeur forte. La fatigue en sueur ruisselait sur leurs tatouages. Mais ils ne la sentaient pas, la fatigue."\(^5\)

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\(^1\) Batouala, p. 116.
\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 78.
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 86.
Odors seem to be of even greater importance and Monsieur Maran takes every opportunity to describe the many odors which seem to be characteristic of the Negro. Here he describes the various scents at one of the festivals:

"Misérable, hâve, squelettique, sans hâte, sans arrêt, en mesure, odeurs de sueur, de crasse, de maladies et de vermine âcrement confondues, tout ce monde..."  

Some of the most pungent odors were to be found at the dances; for example, "Ces odeurs de fumée et d'urine, de lait aigre et de crasse, de sueurs d'aunes ou d'aisselles...l'avaient enfîvé."  

Little insects, often called jiggers in English, also appear to be characteristic of the Negro as portrayed in the novels of René Maran.

"Les chiques, en vérité, il faut que le pauvre bon nègre se les cherche.
Chez les blancs, il n'en est pas de même. L'une d'elles s'attaque-t-elle à leur peau? Comme ils sont douillets, il s'en aperçoivent aussitôt et ne reprennent sentiment que lorsqu'un boy a réussi à leur extirper."  

It almost seems impossible that these people could live with animals and dirt and still remain healthy; however, Monsieur Maran rarely mentions disease. He gives little proof of the truth of the statement made by André Gide in his Journal: that during his journey through the Congo, he rarely met "un seul être qui ne fût pas taré, talé, taché, abîmé par quelque point de son corps..."  

In the novels of René Maran, the younger people seem to be very healthy but the maladies of the older people are dangerous. Sleeping sickness is mentioned in Batouala:

"...cependant que le maigre Kosséyéndé, que la maladie du dormir avait rendu fou, s'ingeait, en bon fou qu'il était..."  

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1 Djouma, Chien de brousse, p. 159.
2 Ibid., p. 163.
3 Batouala, p. 36.
5 Batouala, p. 196.
René Maran describes Kosséyéndé, who has the disease:

"Il ne tenait plus sur ses jambes qu'avec peine, et à condition de s'appuyer sur un bâton. Pauvre Kosséyéndé! Koboholo, la maladie du dormir l'avait décharné au point qu'il avait l'apparence d'un squelette vivant. Sur son cou maigre, aux veines bourrées de ganglions, dédoublait sa grosse tête osseuse. La maladie avait rendu roux ses cheveux, faisait étinceler ses yeux dans le trou des orbites. Et, lui, tremblait de tous ses membres, glaçés déjà par le froid de la mort."

There is also mention of dysentery, in *Le Livre de la brousse*:

"Par trois fois, en deux jours, la foudre chut sur les villages de Krébédjé, incendiant deux cases et tuant sept hommes. La dysenterie emporta, dans le même laps de temps, une douzaine de femmes et d'enfants, dont le petit-fils de la vieille Bandja."

It is evident from this description of Kossi's youth that the usual children's diseases are common among these Africans:

"Les premières années de Kossi furent des plus heureuses. Il ignora la plupart des maladies qui déciment l'enfance. Un gros rhume, qui disparut d'ailleurs aussi brusquement qu'il était venu, le secoua néanmoins quelque peu au début de sa troisième saison sèche... II respirait la santé..."

In spite of these maladies, the characters René Maran portrays are strong and healthy for the most part.

Monsieur Maran's tendency toward the naturalistic often shows the ignorance, brutality and lack of sympathy of his characters. An excellent example of this is the fact that Batouala was left alone, seriously wounded, until his friends and companions returned for him several hours later. Maran gives their reason for this:

"Pauvre Batouala!
Et pourtant, on l'avait bien soigné! Oh! pas dès après l'accident.

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1Ibid., p. 173.
2*Le Livre de la brousse*, p. 113.
3Ibid., p. 25.
Il est bien vrai qu’un blessé est toujours intéressant, surtout lorsqu’il s’appelle Batouala.
Mais, pour un blessé, doit-on négliger un troupeau de gogouas meuglant à une portée de sage?
Ça, non.
C’est pourquoi, roulé dans une couverture, on vous avait laissé mon Batouala, à l’ombre d’un arbre, sous la garde de Djouma, son chien, pour courir après les boeufs sauvages.
Un peu plus tard, l’on s’occupa de lui.  

A more striking example of naturalism is the appearance of Yassi and her child, dead on the road to Krébéjdé:

"Au petit jour, Kossi buta, en allant faire ses besoins, contre Yassi, dont le corps étendu bouchait le sentier en lacet menant aux villages de Krébéjdé.
On l’avait éventrée -- et dans ses bras raidis par la mort reposait la chair de leur chair: le cadavre de leur enfant.
Il ne pouvait s’y tromper. La signification de ce meurtre rituel était des plus claires. On le mettait au ban de son village, de sa race, de sa tribu."

It is interesting to note how closely the Negroes in the novels of René Maran resemble each other physically. The men have the same physique: strong, vigorous, erect, well-built, handsome; while dispositions and interests differ widely. The women have the same characteristics. Batouala, Bissibingui, and Kossi were excellent hunters and wrestlers; all three excelled with the javelin; Kossi alone knew the art of swimming and was skilled with the bow and arrow.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau began comparing civilized and primitive societies. His philosophy -- that man close to nature is good -- influenced the literature of that century to a great extent. The "bon sauvage", as he came to be called, was handsome, tall, erect, very dark; he was of unusual strength and

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2Le Livre de la brousse, p. 119.
was able to perform the most unusual tasks.

Physically, the Negroes in René Maran's novels come very close to being "bon sauvages", but in character they are more human. René Gillouin, in his "Problème de la colonisation", uses this as a weapon against René Maran:

"Mais voyons maintenant sous quels traits M. René Maran romancier, et non plus idéologue, nous figure ce "bon sauvage". Sale et vermineux, ivrogne, goinfre et paillard, abruti de superstitions stupides, soupçonneux et cruel, jaloux et ne songeant qu'à tuer avec le moindre risque l'homme en qui il craint un rival, tel nous est représenté Batouala, le héros du liyre, que la civilisation européenne n'a point cependant touché. Les autres sont à l'aventant, et c'est dans une oppressante atmosphère d'épaisse barbarie, d'affreuses bassesses intellectuelle et morale, que se déroule la "succession d'eaux-fortes"1 de Monsieur René Maran."2

They kill each other; they are jealous; often they are unclean; none of these things would be characteristic of the "good savage" of the eighteenth century, but they do form the human being of the twentieth century.

With Bocquet and Batouala, let us conclude:

"Il ne doit y avoir au monde ni blancs, ni noirs, mais simplement des hommes qui ont des droits égaux à la liberté, au bonheur et à la paix."5

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1From M. Maran's "Préface" to Batouala.
2Gillouin, op. cit., pp. 82-3.
3Bocquet, op. cit., p. 47.
CHAPTER III

THE SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEGRO

Among the important factors to be considered in the study of the social characteristics of any people are education, marriage, religion, work, recreation, government and death. These factors differ from continent to continent, from country to country, and in Africa, often from tribe to tribe.

Batouala, Kossi, Bissibingui and the other Africans portrayed by René Maran have their own views on marriage, their own burial ceremonies, their own ideas on religion and their own means of recreation. Let us visit the homes of these Africans of the Congo region with René Maran.

First, Batouala's hut is described:

"Le mur circulaire de la case suinte. Un confuse clarté filtre par le trou lui servant de porte. On entend sous le chame, le frottement discret et continu des termites. À l'abri de leurs galeries en terre brune, ils fouillent les branchages de la toileture basse, qui leur offre un refuge contre l'humidité et contre le soleil."\(^1\)

This thatch-roofed dwelling was home to men and animals for they both slept there often in very crowded conditions.

To such a house the wife, or wives — as polygamy was practiced among these people — was brought. She was bought from her father for a certain price: usually the dowry was paid with animals, poultry or various kinds of goods. The variety of goods used in payment may be seen from Batouala's description of the price he paid Yassiguindja's father:

"Oui, Yassiguindja! Ne l'avait-il pas payée de sept pagnes, d'une caisse de sel, de trois colliers de cuivre, d'une chiennne, de quatre marmites, de six poules, de vingt cabris femelles, de quarante grands paniers plein de mil, et d'une jeune esclave."\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Batouala, p. 19.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 94.
Yassi's father wanted at least "vingt cabris, cinq fois ving cabs de poules, dix fers de sagaies et quarante de ces houes qu'on appelle 'ngapous'."1 Kossi, who wished to marry Yassi, paid a still higher price for her:

"...trente poules, sept canards, vingt houes bien emmanchées, treize fers de sagaie, onze grands paniers de manioc, autant de paniers de mil, dix-sept cabris, dont cinq sur le point de chevreter, et un petit morceau de natron dont ses amis les pagaieurs sangois lui avaient autrefois fait cadeau.

Il lui avait donné en outre, rien que pendant la saison de la chasse au feu: huit cibissis, cinq rats palmistes, quatre lapins aux longues oreilles, une épaule de boeuf sauvage, trois cuissots d'antilope et quelques œufs de caïman."2

Upon payment of the dowry, the couple was married. It is regrettable that the actual ceremony is not described by René Maran for it is among the most important events. Conversations on the "everlasting subject" of love and the relationship between man and woman appear throughout the novels. Many do not feel that love among these people who inhabit the French colonies is the same as that of more civilized peoples. Among these is Trautmann, author of Au pays de "Batouala", who, in his chapter on "Women and Marriage", states: "L'amour (comme nous le comprenons au moins) n'entre guère en ligne de compté, sauf exception, bien entendu."3 Monsieur Maran does not at any time indicate that this love differs from that of other people; he merely tries through conversations and short discussions, to give his readers an idea of love as his characters understand it. An example of this is Yamanga's conception of woman's place in the world: "La femme, en ce bas monde, n'était redevable à l'homme que d'un bienfait un peu amer. Et ce bienfait, c'était l'enfant."4

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1 Le Livre de la brousse, p. 38.
2 Ibid., p. 11.
Quite often conversations like the following between Yassim Ali and Bissibingui occur:

"Or la femme est un fruit savoureux. Nécessaire complément de l'homme, elle appartient à tous et à chacun. Qui plus est, de par sa complexion même, elle n'a pas le droit d'ignorer l'impérieuse loi du désir, quelles que soient les restriptions que l'égoïsme de l'homme invente... Mais si la femme est le nécessaire complément de l'homme, la réciprocité est également vraie... Il leur est défendu de se refuser au désir.

Il est donc stupide de blâmer l'adultère. L'adultère est normal, naturel, indispensable." ¹

Unfaithfulness in marriage then, seems to be a custom rather than an offense:

"Une femme ne doit jamais se refuser au désir d'un homme. La réciprocité est vraie. La seul loi est d'instinct. Tromper son homme, ou plutôt ne pas être qu'à lui, n'a pas grande importance. La possesseur habituel, si on use de son bien, il suffit qu'on le dédommage en poules, en cabris ou en pagnes, du préjudice causé. Et tout est pour le mieux." ²

Goats, sheep and other animals may have served as a means of consolation to some of his fellow tribesmen, but Batouala, being jealous, was not to be pleased by such trifles; his only remedy was to do away with the one who trespassed upon his property. He felt that his wife was his alone since he had paid such a high price for her. ³ Jealousy was prevalent and too often resulted in serious crime.

However, great or small though her love may have been, the wife had to perform many of the harder tasks of the day. She helped with the farming, sowed seeds, made flour, cared for the old people and last but not least, she cooked for her children and her husband. As she knew no European dishes, only native produce was on her daily menu. Manioc, prepared in various ways, was the main dish at almost every meal. Other food consisted of such items as sweet potatoes, grilled caterpillars, fish, alligator's eggs, gourds and several African dishes, végés, dazos, and purslane. The

¹Djouma, Chien de brousse, p. 85.
²Batouala, p. 46.
³Ibid.
beverage was a fermented drink called ké né.¹ Monsieur Maran does not fail to mention more than once that dogs were eaten by the natives. Djouma, the little "chien de brousse" gives an example of this: "Déjà, du temps de sa mère, que ses maîtres avaient mangée, chaque matin ressuscitait pareil vacarme."²

Incidentally, eating dogs was perhaps less cruel than some of the mistreatment the latter received from the Negroes. Djouma emphasizes this in his comparison of the treatment he received from the white men who protected him and the Negroes who stoned him.

"Ah! si l'Homme Blanc ne l'avait pas retenu, comme il les aurait mordus à pleine gueule, au lieu de leur gronder des injures. ...Sales hommes à peau noire, rampants avec les forts, rudes avec les faibles!... De quoi pouvaient avoir à se plaindre ces hypocrites et ces menteurs!...³

The festival of the ga'nya, one of the year's greatest celebrations, was always an occasion for much food and drink. Here is one of the festive dinners:

"Il y avait sur le sol, étalés, des panier de millet, des gâteaux de manioc, ces régimes de bananes, des plattées de chenilles, des œufs, du poisson, des tomates amères, des asperges de brousse. Il y avait, séchés au soleil ou grillés au feu, des umas de viande d'antilope et d'éléphant, des quartiers de phacochère et bœuf sauvage. Il y avait de ces tubercules que les blancs dédaignent, -- des dazos, par exemple, qui valent bien leurs pommes de terre; des bangaos ou patates douces, à peau tantôt rouge, tantôt jaune. Il y avait des baba'sos, qu'ils appellent igname. Il y avait aussi de vastes jarres, contées de la boisson que l'on obtient avec du mil ou du maïs fermenté. Enfin, il y avait quelques bouteilles de pernod."⁴

The women were important to the farm, but the men were the real farmers. Millet and manioc were the principal crops and were planted at the beginning of the rainy season.⁵ Those who were not interested in farming were hunters

¹ Ibid., p. 42.
² Ibid., p. 25.
³ Djouma, Chien de brousse, p. 239.
⁴ Batouala, pp. 64-5.
⁵ Le Livre de la brousse, p. 41.
or worked on the large rubber plantations.\footnote{Djouma, Chien de brousse, p. 60.}

Religion, an essential part of family life, is a motivating factor in the lives of Batouala, Bissibingui and Kossi, their families and companions. They were worshippers of many gods and firm believers in the powers of these gods. The principal deity, Ngandré, over all the others, had three sons: Olokodo, the most powerful, inhabited the sky, his knee surrounded by fire; the second son, Brahélé, lived in the mountains and was able to predict the future; Télé, the last and the evil spirit, dwelt on earth.\footnote{Le Livre de la brousse, p. 29.}

The most beloved god was N'Gakoura in whom the people had infinite trust. He had the power to grant wishes and desires and was very willing to do so if offered a sacrifice. He gave the people luck and helped them in all crises.

Batouala explains the legend of N'Gakoura to Bissibingui, who is not very well informed on the gods:

"Il a une bien brave femme. Et ses enfants surpassent en nombre les herbes de brousse. Les deux plus âgés, Nadoulou et Nangodjo aident leur père à régir ses villages.

La famille de N'Gakoura n'a que bienveillance pour les hommes. Elle exauce généralement les demandes qu'on lui formule, à condition toutefois qu'on les fasse suivre de présents de toutes sortes.\footnote{Batouala, pp. 144-145.}"

N'Gakoura's only enemy was Kolikongbo, god of isolation and death.\footnote{Le Livre de la brousse, p. 29.}

So small was Kolikongbo, that many thought he existed merely in the imagination. He lived in the hills and caverns, with honey, rubber and choice meats for food. Except for his size, baldness, and incredible strength, he was quite like any other man.\footnote{Batouala, p. 146.}
"Quelque petit qu'il soit, Kolikongbo est d'une force extraordinaire. Il est plus fort que tous les hommes et tous les animaux réunis. Si fort que, si tu le rencontres, il faut te garder de lui tendre la main. Sa poignée de main t'arracherait les doigts."

There were a few gods of lesser importance, among them were the Sun, the Noon and the Nioubangui, the great African river.

Religious ceremonies consisted of offerings to N'Gakoura and dances in his honor. These ceremonies seem, however, to remain in the background and more festive occasions were more frequently celebrated.

The most important of these are the annual ga'anza and the seasonal burning of the brush. One of the most vivid descriptions and one of the most widely criticized for its frankness, is that of the ga'anza. The purpose of the feast was to initiate the young men and women of the tribe into manhood and womanhood. Preparations for the ceremony lasted two months. During this time those who were to participate in the rite were required to speak in a secret language; laughing and playing were forbidden; their bodies were whitened; they ate roots and lived in the woods. Absolute seclusion was of primary importance.  

On the day of the ceremony people came from miles around, wearing their tribal dress and many trinkets.

"La fête s'organise. Les meneurs de jeu, ce sont les mokoundjis-yangal! Voyez comme ils se dévouent! On les reconnaît aux longues plumes d'oiseaux plantées dans leur chevelure tressée et aux sonnailles qui tintent à leur poignets, à leurs genoux, à leurs chevilles."

Multitudes of people arrived and excitement reigned the entire day. The gaiety of the crowd is seen in this description by Monsieur Maran:

"Et quels cris! Et quels rires! Et quels gestes! Car la présence de tant d'hommes et de tant de femmes, la bière, le chantre, le mouvement, la joie, avaient accumulé la frémissante chaleur du désir."
Dances and songs were a major part of the festivities; the principal dance, the dance of love, permitted freedom of all emotions and too often resulted in crime. René Maran points this out:

"Tout ce qui avait précédé n'était rien. Tous ces clameurs, tous ces danses confuses n'avaient fait que préparer ce qu'ils attendaient tous: la danse de l'amour, celle que l'on danse guère que ce soir là, où il est toléré de se livrer à la débauche et au crime."

"Perdus dans la foule, ils dansaient la danse de l'amour, la première des danses, celle de qui toutes les autres dérivent sans l'égaler jamais."

Naked and intoxicated, they danced madly far into the night to this weird tune:

"Ga'anza... ga'anza... ga'anza... ga'anza!
Ce soir, femmes vous serez toutes.
Vous serez vraiment des hommes, ce soir,
Après avoir subi le ga'anza,
Ga'anza... ga'anza... ga'anza... ga'anza!
Ga'anza... ga'anza... ga'anza... ga'anza!

"Ga'anza... ga'anza... ga'anza... ga'anza!
On ne l'est qu'une fois, en sa vie.
A nous, femmes! A nous, hommes!
A présent, vous êtes ga'anzas.
Ga'anza, etc..."

The other festival, the burning of the brush, was more serious and more important in one way: it meant food for a certain time. Dangerous though it was, it was a means of exercise. Each dry season the great expanse of brush was burned to chase the little animals from their cozy homes.

"Le feu, maladie rouge qui a chaque saison sèche se love autour de la brousse comme un boa aux têtes innombrables, et la broie, et la lèche et la déglutit avec effort, en imitant l'inépuisable grondement des rapides, le soir!... La chasse au feu... Partout, des incendies... Odeurs d'heroes brûlées de cendres... Odeurs de fauves abattus! Qui n'aimé pas la chasse au feu, n'est pas un homme..."

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1 Ibid., p. 90.
2 Ibid., p. 93.
3 Ibid., p. 87.
4 Ibid., p. 90.
5 Djouma, Chien de brousse, pp. 199-200.
The frightened animals made the hunt more dangerous, many of the hunters were trampled, others were burned alive. The approaching fire caused fights among the animals who were frightened by the danger.

These were among the joyful occasions in the lives of Bissibingui, Batouala, and Kossi, but as is always true, there is a sadder side of life. One of the most interesting ceremonies that Henri Maran describes, is that for burial of the dead. The entire ceremony required a period of eight days and nights before the actual interment took place. These days were spent in dancing and singing around the corpse. As a sign of mourning, they blackened their faces with charcoal and whitened their bodies with ashes. Many of the younger people thought this prolonged burial unnecessary, but for two reasons they were unable to do away with it.

"Seulemt, la coutume et les anciens veulent que l'on accompagne de danses, chantées sur un air lugubre, le voyage de celui qui, par des sentiers invisibles, se dirige vers ce village de N'Gakoura ou de Kolikonbo, si loin situé que jamais personne n'a pu en revenir." Fear that the corpse might still be alive was another reason for the ceremony, for this served as a test.

The day of the funeral, the body was placed on a straw mat and brought to the place designated for the burial. Two round pits, connected by an underground passage, were dug. A slave woman slid down in one of the holes and the body was placed in the other. She pulled the legs down until they were straight in the passage and the body was covered with dirt.

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1Batouala, p. 139.
2Le Livre de la brousse, p. 92.
3Batouala, pp. 99-100.
4Ibid., p. 100.
5Ibid., p. 102-103.
6Ibid., pp. 107-108.
"C'était fini, bien fini.
On dansa autour des fosses et, dans un grand feu que l'on alluma, on détruisit tous les biens meubles qui avaient appartenu au mort."¹

The roof of the dead person's house was removed and the people went about their daily duties, having forgotten the man almost completely.²

The folk song plays a great part in these ceremonies and in the daily lives of these people as it does with any people. Throughout the novels, René Maran quotes a variety of lyrics which express the sentiment and emotions of the people in almost the same manner as the American Negro folk songs. There are work songs, play songs, lullabies, death chants, songs which were meant for war. This lullaby, sung by Kossi's mother to her child, is one of the most impressive.

"Sois tranquille petit Kossi
Ne bouge pas et dors bien. Dors.
Voici ta maman, Yamanga
Iayayao!
Dors mon petit, dors mon Kossi."³

There must be a way of governing any group of people no matter how civilized or uncivilized they may be. Tribal chiefs, usual governing body in Africa, seem to have little power in the section of Africa which René Maran portrays in his novels. French colonial authorities seem to do the greater part of the ruling. The most important of these officials are the governors, the commandants and the "sous-commandant", a native, who is known as Sandoukou in all of the novels. Evidently carried away with his high position and superiority, Sandoukou sought to impress his fellow tribesmen by sternness and cruelty.⁴

Though Monsieur Maran says little about the education of his characters,

¹Ibid., p. 109.
²Ibid., p. 110.
³Le Livre de la brousse, p. 22.
⁴Batuala, pp. 95-96.
it is quite possible that they had some schooling, since this is one of France's important colonial policies. Du Bois, in his Black Folk, Then and Now, speaks of the French educational system of the colonies:

"...the French have carried to Africa the French idea of the pre-eminence of education in any social plan; they have assumed without argument that education is best for the African and should be pursued mainly along the same lines that education is pursued in France."

The language used by the Negroes in Batouala, Djouma, Chien de brousse and le Livre de la brousse, could certainly indicate that they had some education.

The visit is over. We have seen Batouala, Bissibingui, Kossi and their friends, how they lived and what they did every day. They were peaceful, contented people, living happily doing their work, getting their food. This has probably been their routine for years and years, since they so strongly believe in the customs of their forefathers. Djouma, René Maran's little animal character, says of the Negroes of French Equatorial Africa:

"Qu'ils se nourrissent encore de chair humaine, les hommes noirs, depuis que le monde est monde, ont toujours eu même fonds d'usages, de croyances, d'habitudes et de coutumes. Ce fonds commun n'a jamais cessé de leur appartenir en propre, immuablement, malgré les tatouages compliqués, véritables travaux en cuir repoussé qu'ils exécutent sur eux-mêmes pour se différencier de tribu à tribu, et malgré la sourde insistance du temps, qui peu à peu dégrade les races dans leurs générations."

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2 Djouma, Chien de brousse, p. 67.
CONCLUSION

When René Maran, fresh from his studies at Bordeaux, left France for Africa, he realized that this was to be one of the greatest adventures of his life. Nevertheless, he was frightened by the thought of leaving France for a new continent filled with people who were absolute strangers to him. Even though on his arrival he found the work hard and the hours long, he did not let these obstacles prevent his making a contribution to the literary world. He immediately began his poetry and collecting notes on African culture.

After eight years of writing and re-writing, his first novel, Batouala, was finished. What Maran calls the definitive edition of this novel was not completed until 1938. He chose the novel as a means of bringing his message to the people. This work told the world of the mistreatment the natives of French West Africa were receiving at the hands of French colonial officials and asked the help of other writers in bringing the subject before the public. Other novels, not quite so violent in their criticism of the white man, have been written by René Maran, but none has caused as much discussion.

This study has dealt with René Maran's portrayal of the physical, social and moral characteristics of the Negro in his most important novels: Batouala, Djouma, Chien de brousse, Le Journal sans date and Le Livre de la brousse. This portrayal does not entirely follow the eighteenth century picture of the Negro. René Maran's characters resemble the "bon sauvage", as he is now called, in physical appearance, in skill in the use of weapons and in their ability to perform unusual tasks. The men are handsome, strong and tall and the women, as they are described by the male characters, are beautiful and graceful. The laziness, dirt, love for drink, intense jealousy, only a few of the characteristics René Maran has given them, prevent their being "good savages". Maran, then, does not give a
one-sided view of the Negro but he has made his characters more human and
more realistic than those of the eighteenth century.

Some phases of the Negro's social characteristics are scarcely touched
by the novelist while others are more completely presented. Such important
items as marriage and education are merely mentioned while descriptions of
folk dances, songs, religion and ceremonies are more adequately treated.
Though the actual ceremony is not described, René Maran gives a complete
picture of the home life of the Negro after marriage. The bride's dowry
was paid to her father and she immediately began the numerous duties which
she performed with the other wives of the household. She cooked the food
which consisted mainly of native produce. She had to help with the farming
and care for the old people and children. Those husbands who did not farm
were either hunters or worked on the large rubber plantations for their
living.

Religion played a great part in the life of the Africans René Maran
describes in his novels. They worshipped many gods and firmly believed
in the powers of their deities.

Religious ceremonies were placed in the background, however, for more
festive occasions. The most important of these were the ga'anza -- a
ceremony of initiation which often resulted in crime because the people would
work themselves into an emotional frenzy -- and a more serious occasion,
the burning of the brush, which was a means of hunting. The most serious
ceremony was that for burial of the dead. The rite lasted eight days and
after the body had been placed in the grave, the person was forgotten and
life moved on as though nothing had happened. The ceremony lasted so long
because of age-old custom and also because they were afraid that the person
might not be dead. This shows that tradition and superstition were also a
part of that African culture which René Maran presents.
Monsieur Maran has shown the good and bad in both the white man and the Negro. However, as he has brought out in his Preface to Batouala, the Negro will remain in his present condition as long as he is mistreated and as long as some of the officials sent to govern the natives are without education and without morals. Many of these conditions are being corrected today and much of the credit for this must go to René Maran and his novel, Batouala.
BATOUALA

Batouala, chief of his tribe, has eight wives. His favorite, Yassiguindja, is greatly envied by the other wives because of her popularity and because she is favored by the attentions of Bissibingui, the most popular man in the tribe. At an annual tribal gathering Batouala obtains proof of his wife's unfaithfulness. He is immediately overcome with jealousy and resolves to do away with his rival. Bissibingui, realizing his danger, plots to kill Batouala before he is harmed himself. He plans a brush fire, a sure way to kill without leaving any traces, for many died every year in the brush. He therefore sets it afire. The frightened animals become angry and stampede. Batouala is attacked by one of these animals and is seriously wounded. He is deserted by his companions and left alone for quite a while. He dies slowly while Yassiguindja and Bissibingui await his death so happily that even in the last moments of his life, they are in each others' arms. Without waiting for him to die, they abandon him in the silence of the night.
Djouma, Chien de brousse, written in 1927, is one of the most important of René Maran's animal stories. The characters of Batouala remain in Djouma's life, which is centered around that of Batouala.

Mbimé, Batouala's dog, had three puppies. Soon after they were born, sadness came to Mbimé, for one of her puppies was stolen by a large jungle bird and lost before his mother knew he was gone. The two remaining pups were named Djouma and Yavrr. These two had no chores to do; life for them consisted of eating, sleeping and playing all day. When they were old enough, Batouala gave Yavrr to his sweetheart, Yassiguindja, and Djouma was left alone. As he grew up, Djouma learned that certain things and certain people were to be feared, among these were the native sous-commandants who were so cruel to him.

He often went with Batouala through the forest, on hunts. Sometimes he would get lost but he would find his way home. He was always faithful to his master even though Batouala and his friends were often cruel to him.

But Djouma was not to be happy always, for one day Batouala was attacked by a jungle beast and mortally wounded. With the death of Batouala, Djouma's troubles began, for immediately those people who had been his friends and his masters' friends had chased him out of the village. Djouma, frightened, ran as quickly as he could to the governmental station. The commandant there was very kind to him and once more he was happy for the treatment he received from the white people was infinitely kinder than that of the Negroes with whom he had lived the greater part of his life.

One day he went back to the village with the commandant. The burning brush reminded him of Batouala and his former life. He thought of his mother, Mbimé and Yavrr whom he had not seen for so long. From the brush he thought he heard a call. Attempting to find the voice he was trapped
in the fire. An onrush of frightened animals tramped him, making it impossible for him to get up. Little Djouma was burned to death. René Maran says in closing the novel:

"Quand ils s'envolèrent aux rouges lueurs du soleil couchant, de tout ce qui avait été Djouma, chien, fils de chien, rien ne demeurait que des ossements sans nom.
La brousse s'était vengée. Son enfant l'avait fuie. Mais, à sa façon, elle avait repris son enfant."\(^1\)

\(^1\) *Djouma, Chien de brousse*, p. 253.
The *Journal sans date*, a novel written in the form of a diary, is in two parts. The action begins in Bordeaux. Jean Veneuse, a young Negro who has just received an appointment to a new position in Africa, is being told goodbye by his white friends. It is not a happy parting for Jean is leaving the girl he loves in France. On the boat he meets an old friend, M. Deviande, who introduces him to a Mme Demours, a white woman who is going to Africa to meet her husband. During the voyage he becomes very friendly with Mme Demours. However, Jean does not forget his love for Andrée Marielle, the girl he has left behind. Andrée Marielle also is white and Jean feels that marriage with her is impossible. This worries him very much. His friends try to persuade him to marry her by telling him that love pays no attention to color. After weighing the advice of his white friends and after receiving several encouraging letters from Andrée, he returns to Paris. Upon failing to find Andrée at her apartment, he immediately becomes disillusioned. He goes to her father's home, finds her awaiting him and they are married.
LE LIVRE DE LA BROUSSE

Kossi, son of Doutomikoh and Yamanga, and Yassi, Krôbédjé's daughter had grown up together. In childhood they had resolved to marry. Since then, Kossi had become one of the most respected young men in the village. His powers as a sorcerer were known far and wide. His only rival for Yassi's hand in marriage was Tougoumali, another young man of the village. When Kossi has to leave for the "gan'za", a ceremony of initiation into manhood, Yassi promises to wait for his return and to bring him his food.

When he does return, he finds that his father and Tougoumali have had a quarrel and that Doutomikoh has been seriously wounded. Kossi is able to cure him with his many dances and chants. Krôbédjé consents to Kossi's marriage to Yassi for he knows that this is a young man who will likely pay a large dowry. For a while Kossi and Yassi are very happy but soon people began to feel that trouble was coming. Yassi learns that she it to have a child and is very happy. For a time all goes well, but trouble starts in the village. Doutomikoh dies and Kossi accuses Tougoumali of being the direct cause of his death. Kossi pleads his father's cause well and Tougoumali is put to death. People began to feel that they had done the wrong thing in killing a man on Kossi's word alone. N'Gakoura did not seem pleased and Kossi had always had an evil eye. He was avoided in the village and only Yassi and Doutomikoh's three wives remained his friends.

N'Gakoura promises to put an end to the continual rains which have caused disease and famine, if Kossi will give him Yassi in marriage. Although realizing that the strife will continue, Kossi decides he cannot part with Yassi. People blame him for their unhappiness and Kossi and Yassi are abandoned.

On finding Yassi and her unborn child murdered one day, Kossi realizes that he too is in danger. For the first time he is afraid and runs away. He is caught by his enemies and is to be killed when he manages to escape. He runs to the Nioubangui, hoping to cross it to the neighboring village, when a tiger attacks him and he is killed.
Mademoiselle,

... que puis-je vous refuser, puisque pour me faire la demande que vous avez bien voulu m'adresser le 14 novembre dernier, vous avez pris la précaution de vous recommander à...

... Je crains cependant de beaucoup vous décevoir. Je n'aime guère parler de moi et toute publicité me fait horreur. Au surplus, j'ai l'impression que vous trouverez dans la préface du Petit Roi de Chimère et aussi dans le Coeur serré, qu'il n'est qu'une autobiographie à peine romancée, l'essentiel de ce qui me concerne.

Je suis né le 5 novembre à Fort-de-France (Martinique), de parents...

... Mon père, commis des secrétariats généraux des colonies, en service à la Martinique, fut affecté, quand j'eus quatre ans, comme sous-chef de bureau, à la Directeur de l'Intérieur au Gabon. Je ne fis que traverser la France en 1891 et suivis mes parents à Libreville (Gabon).

On me plaça, enfin 1892, comme pensionnaire, au petit lycée de Talence, sorte de filiale que le lycée de Bordeaux possédait -- et possède toujours -- en pleine campagne. C'est au lycée de Talence et à celui de Bordeaux que j'ai mené mes études jusqu'au baccalauréat. Des querelles de famille m'obligèrent à interrompre les dites études. Il m'eût été agréable de les rousser davantage. Faisant contre mauvaise fortune bon cœur, j'entrai dans l'administration coloniale, comme commis des services civils du gouvernement général de l'Afrique Equatoriale Française, le 25 décembre 1909, et en démissionnai en 1925 ou 1926, ayant atteint le grade d'adjoint principal de troisième classe.
Depuis, j'ai collaboré plus ou moins longuement, et moins que plus, à des journaux disparus tels que : La Volonté, La Rumeur, Midi, Le Quotidien, Le Journal du Peuple, La République, la Dépêche Africaine, et collabore toujours mais de façon régulièrement irrégulière, à des périodiques tels que : Les Hommes du Jour, Vendémiaire, Candide, Le Monde Illustré, Œuvres Libres.

Voilà à peu près tout ce que je peux dire de moi. J'ajouta que, bien que très sociable et serviable, j'ai en exécration le monde, les hommages, les compliments, les honneurs ainsi que les distinctions honorifiques. Il est d'autre part hors de doute que la nouvelle version que j'ai faite, il y a deux ans, de mon Batouala, est de beaucoup supérieure à la première, et que mon Livre de la Brousse, mon chef-d'œuvre, est un de ces ouvrages dont les lettres françaises ont le droit d'être fières.

Enfin, peut-être n'est-il pas non plus inutile que vous sachiez que certains passages de mes différents ouvrages sont devenus des morceaux d'anthologie qu'on donne à apprendre aux élèves, en leçons, dans certains lycées et collèges de France. En d'autres termes, la plupart de mes ouvrages, même ceux qui étaient les plus controversés au début, sont en passe de devenir classiques. Voilà qui prouve mieux que tout le libéralisme des masses françaises.

Ceci m'amène à vous dire que je ne fais pas et ne ferai jamais de politique; que je n'ai jamais voté et ne voterai jamais de ma vie; que je ne suis ni communiste, ni réactionnaire, ni royaliste, ni socialiste, ni anti-tout cela, mais que je ne demande à tous ces partis ou à leurs succédés que de me laisser vivre en paix et de ne pas traiter mes congénères comme Hitler traite les siens ou les Polonais.

Voilà ce que peut vous dire l'ancien champion scolaire de fleuret et l'ancien capitaine de la première équipe de rugby du Sport Athlétique.
Bordelais que j'ai été à un moment dans mon jeune temps. Il ne vous reste plus qu'à faire de tous ces renseignements un roman policier.

Je vous prie, Mademoiselle de bien vouloir agréer l'expression de mes plus respectueux hommages.

René Maran
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