

Louis Bertrand's *Le Sang des Races* (1899):

A New Historicist Reading

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Abstract: *Le Sang des Races* (1899) has been considered as the first realist novel of the French colonial fiction written by Louis Bertrand. The present paper aims to reveal the close relationship between the novel and its historical context by applying two concepts which are part of New Historicism: they are namely *Historicity of Texts* and *Textuality of History*. The former stresses that a literary work is a product and a functional component of the historical and political conditions of its time. It is a reaction and an opposition to the *Fin de Siècle* ethos of the decadent movement characterizing France. It is also the embodiment of the *Latin myth* which is itself conceived as an outlet of the crisis. *Textuality of History* means that the novel is subject to the process of historical change and a constituent of that historical change. *Le Sang des Races* is a discourse which chronicles and records the shift from a military into a civilian regime and the transformation of Algeria into a *colonie de peuplement*, also the one which embodies the spirit of assimilation as stipulated by such segregationist laws as the *Warnier project* and the *Senatus-consulte*.

Key words: Latin Myth, Colonial Discourse, New Historicism, Textuality of History, Historicity of text.

الملخص: تعتبر رواية 'دم/الأعراف' للأديب الفرنسي لويس برتراند الرواية الرائدة في ميدان الأدب الاستعماري الفرنسي الواقعي . هذا المقال يهدف إلى تسليط الضوء على العلاقة بين الرواية و الفترة التاريخية التي مهدت , بلورت , و ساهمت في بوتقة الحكمة و نسج خيوطها أو بالأحرى كيف أن أحداث الرواية ماهي إلا انعكاس لما سمته فرنسا الاستعمارية بالجزائر الفرنسية' وما ميزها في فتره نهاية القرن التاسع عشر. لدراسة هذه الإشكالية نظرية 'التاريخ الجديد' neW Historicism كان لها دور كبير في تبيان هذه العلاقة التكافئية و التفاعلية بين النص و التاريخ و أهمية كل منهما للأخر. المبدأ الأول الذي استعنت به هو 'تاريخية النص' historicity of text والذي أفضي إلى أن الرواية كنتاج فكري تعتبر كردة فعل لما ميز فرنسا خاصة إبان أواخر القرن التاسع عشر من انحطاط و تدهور في شتى المجالات السياسية الاقتصادية والفكرية و ظهور ما يسمى ب'مذهب الانحطاط' لكنها أيضا وعلى وجه الخصوص تجسيد للفكر الإيجابي الرامي للخروج من أزمة ما يسمى ب'نهاية القرن'. الرواية تعتبر أيضا تجسيد للفكر الاستعماري الذي يرمي إلى تبرير الاستعمار عن طريق إيديولوجيات مختلفة مثل إيديولوجية 'إفريقيا اللاتينية' التي اتخذت من التاريخ وسيلة وأداة أولت واستخدمت لأغراض المستعمر. اما فيما يخص المبدأ الثاني ألا وهو 'نصوصية التاريخ' textuality of history فلقد توصلت إلى النتيجة أن رواية 'دم/الأعراف' إنما هي نص يؤرخ للتحويلات التي شهدتها الجزائر في أواخر القرن التاسع عشر وتحولها إلي مستعمرة استيطانية وما كرسته القوانين الجائرة مثل 'قانون واريبي' من المزيد من انتهاك الأراضي لصالح المعمرين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: 'تاريخية النص'، 'نصوص التاريخية', الخطاب الكولونيالي, افريقيا اللاتينية .

Introduction

Human knowledge was reshaped and refashioned in all its aspect by colonialism. In fact, no branch, no discipline was left unaffected by the colonial experience and practice. This is especially true of imperialist culture and history which knew a constant and an ongoing change that resulted in remarkable borrowings and deflations. The French imperialism generated a

bulk of writings which sought to legitimize the intrusion of the colonizer through discourses that leaned or rather sought incessantly to make of colonialism an act of legitimacy and rightness. This paper proposes a New Historicist interpretation of one representative texts of the French colonial literature. Louis Bertrand's major novel part of his *Cycle Algérien* -Algerian Cycle- is the targeted text. By using *Le Sang des Races* (1899), the questions I ask and which I try to answer, in this paper, are: first, how the text can be read as the one which mediates and shapes the time of its production? Second, what are the historical, political and ideological implications of the text? What are the factual situations considered in the narrative? To what extent can we read the novel as both a representation and a constituent of the imperialist discourse of the 1890's? To answer these questions, I propose to analyse Bertrand's novel under the theoretical auspices of new historicism.

Theoretical Framework

New Historicism involves the conception that identities are fictions which are formulated and adapted through narratives and performances, and they are formulated and adapted in response to and as a way of interacting with prevailing historical conditions (Brannigan, 1998, p. 61). Furthermore, it treats history not as a background context but as the very subject and form in which literature is enmeshed and involves a parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts that the author might have consulted at the time of writing. Therefore, new historicism treats every text as a discourse which reflects factual situation. Besides, the literary work is conceived as a verbal entity of the cultural products associated with particular time. Indeed, this approach of criticism of considering a literary text as a historical process is appropriated and vindicated by Louis Montrose as, "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (in Veaser, 1989, p.

37). He explains that to recognize the historicity of text is to specify the cultural and historical differences at work in both the literary and the critical text, and to recognize the textuality of history is to assume that nothing exists outside language, outside representations.

The precursor of New Historicism, Stephen Greenblatt, assumes that texts of all kinds are both products and functional components of social and political formations. For him: “the written word is self consciously embedded in specific communities, life situations, structures of power” (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 7). In his essay entitled “Resonance and Wonder”, the theorist maintains that a text is a reflection on the period and the condition of its production and consumption. The link between text and historical circumstances can be situated in an opaque network of various social and political forces. He adds that: “The idea is not to find outside the work of art some rock onto which literary interpretation can be securely chained but rather to situate the work in relation to other representational practices operative in the culture at a given moment in both history and our own” (1990, p. 170).

This mode of New historicism discards from Formalism and New Criticism which ignore the extrinsic factors of the literary text such as the biographical, social and political circumstances of its production. It also, considers texts as aspects of culture rather than something that is related to culture and places texts within the totality of socio-cultural institutions and practices that make the history and culture milieu a particular moment of time and place. Therefore, literature is considered as both a product and producer of social and cultural conventions and codes as it plays an active part in producing and acting within that world, “texts constitute patterns of

behavior, the value of symbols and organize understanding” (Colebrook, 1997, p. 23).

1-The Historicity of Bertrand’s Text

Instead of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicists attend primarily to “the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meanings, its effects, and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations” (Abrams, 1999, p. 182-183). Hence, a literary text has its historicity and the author’s life is an important part of it. Louis Bertrand (1866-1941) was born and spent his childhood in a Lorraine shrouded by the dark consequences of the Franco-Prussian War. References to the strong consciousness of his French nationality instilled in the child Louis when France was bolstering her morale after the defeat of 1871 and to trips made by him during that period into German occupied territory reflect these growing considerations. The near presence of the German enemy was felt as a constant threat. This fact made him to develop this *sens de l’ennemi* –Sense of the Enemy-which is a kind of emotional aversion to whatever is not French. The influence of Lorrain is maintained in one of his later works where he states:

Tout en me croyant devenu un bon Africain, j’étais resté, au fond, l’homme de ma province: un Lorrain très Lorrain. En ma qualité d’homme de la frontière—et la frontière la plus menacée de France—j’avais plus que les autres Français le sens de l’ennemi. Je ne pouvais tarder à voir l’indigène algérien sous cet angle. Dès le lendemain de mon arrivée, je sentais en lui l’Ennemi, un ennemi qui n’a rien oublié, rien pardonné et qui ne désarme pas. (Bertrand, 1936, pp. 71-72)

The passage evinces the feeling of the enemy which is ever present and is strongly echoed or reverberated in *Le Sang des Races* wherein Bertrand relegated the “natives” into a demeaning position and occluded their presence from the scope of the narrative. This is initially proclaimed in the preface of the novel where he contended that the Arab is a destructive conqueror and a ruthless one who had brought only misery, endemic warfare and barbarism to North Africa (1978:13). The little allusion or reference to the Arab in the novel is made of major stereotypes which carry such a strong and unassailable racially prejudiced discourse. The Arab is depicted as savage, poor, dirty, dishonest and lascivious whose nature is debased and inassimilable. The *Mauresques* or the native women mainly those of the Casbah and the Oulad Nail are associated with depraved temptation and prostitution and seen as a threat to the so called ‘strict code of modesty’ which was maintained governing the behavior of the traditionally-minded Spanish and Italian immigrants.

It is worthy to note that Bertrand’s racism springs and is largely imbued with the ideologies of race which circulated in the works of his contemporaries like Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau whose *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* subsequently defined and extolled inequality as a prime mover of mankind and a keystone of progress. In *la Nouvelle éducation sentimentale*, Bertrand maintained that : « L’inégalité foncière et irréductible des races humaines me parait, comme à Gobineau, un fait incontestable, je dirai même: un fait primordial et sacré [...] L’inégalité est sacrée: elle est la cause du mouvement, du progrès véritable » (1928, p.242). Race, he ascertained, was a reality, a product of climate, environment, education and blood. Its nature was irreducible and original. Like Gobineau, he believed that miscegenation was deleterious and detrimental to races that were

unequal in their moral and intellectual standards and value of their civilization.

The title of his novel, *le Sang des Races* 1899 reveals at an early time the trend and direction of Bertrand's thinking although there was already mention of race two years before in his doctorate thesis, entitled: *La Fin du Classicism et le Retour a l'Antique dans la Seconde Moitié du XVI siècle et les premières Année du XIX, en France*. The brawling mass of Latin characters who people the Algiers of that first novel are constantly identified by their national origins: Cecco le Piémontais, l'Espagnol de Cathagène, ces Espagnols de Valence et d'Alicante, ceux de Mahon... They are proud of their "bon sang d'Espagnol" and call one another "la race d'Espagnol," for them "le sang ne se renie pas, vois-tu, c'est plus fort que tout" (Bertrand, 1978, p. 38). In other words, for them "race" means and equates "blood", a reality which cannot be denied because it is stronger than anything else.

In *Idées et Portraits*, Bertrand observed that without race literature degenerates into pure dilettantism, producing hybrid and isolated works, which never penetrate the profound life of a people (Bertrand, 1927, p. xxxii). This idea is asserted and made apparent in *le Sang des Races* wherein the writer cleared the ground for the so-called Latin races, whose only common world is that of *latinité*, to be the focal point of the narrative. This racial ideology is initially displayed in the preface of the novel where he carefully introduces the reader to the doctrine of Latin Africa, an attempt to create out of the factual historical discourse a fictive or fictional identity for the "new race" he imagined forming in Algeria in a fusion of the Mediterranean immigrants. Bertrand maintains that: « À travers le Méditerranéen d'aujourd'hui, je reconnus le Latin de tous les temps. L'Afrique latine ressuscitait dans les nécropoles païennes et les catacombes

chrétiennes les ruines des colonies et des municipales dont Rome avait jalonné son sol » (Bertrand, 1978, p. 16).

The quote reveals Bertrand's unshaken belief that the Roman occupation of North Africa had irrevocably and fundamentally Latinized it. The French colonizer and the subsequent wave of Immigrants from the Mediterranean shores were not conceived invaders or usurpers but were rather considered as rightful grandsons who came to reclaim their forefathers' possession of the land. In the opening chapter of *Le Sang des Races*, the writer purposefully underlines the fact that those who came to Algeria were 'at home'. The Spanish characters such as Ramon, Cinto, Cagnéte, and Pascualéte represent the first generation of settlers. They are made to live in Algeria, to behave, and to feel as in their native land, a thing we notice when the narrator commented on their daily lives and habits which are typical to those they used to have in Spain. In Bertrand's words they are "des nouveaux débarqués" (new debarkers), who had left San-Vicente near Alicante with the other peasants heading to Algeria: " ils étaient venus chercher le pain blanc et la joie sur cette terre d'Afrique, ou la vieille haine de leur race appréhendait toujours les maléfices sacrilèges et les trahisons du Maure. Ils s'y étaient établis comme chez eux ; ils y avaient retrouvé leur pays" (Ibid p. 21) (emphasis mine). The narrator incessantly refers to the Spanish or the colon's existence as a legitimate one to the extent that the reader has the impression that Algeria is no more than an extension of their home land. The characters are set in an environment which is not hostile to their presence but everything seems to welcome and to greet them. The natives are of 'too little importance' to hinder the new comers who established themselves in this "nouvelle terre promise" where everything

“leur rendaient tous à la terre natal” (Ibid p. 20). Such impression is reinforced by the following passage:

Le paysage de la montagne, du Faubourg et de la mer était donc pour eux une habitude très ancienne. Descendre de la carrière à la tombée de la nuit leur semblait une chose aussi nécessaire que, l'année d'avant, de ramener à leur l'attelage paternel sur la route d'Alcoy ou de Muchamiel (Ibid).

The excerpt illustrates and consolidates the rhetoric of regaining a past possession or an 'abandoned' heritage which is made obvious throughout the novel. For Bertrand, the ruins and vestiges of ancient Rome stand as an undeniable proof for the ultimate Latinized North Africa. Once Latin is forever Latin, he believed that these immigrants of Languedoc, Provence, Spain, Italy, Corsica, Sicily and Malta are entitled by the right of Latinity to settle and to people the land. Bertrand claims: “Nous sommes venus reprendre l'œuvre de Rome en ce pays, que leur constitution géographique, leur voisinage et leur passé semblent placer naturellement sous l'hégémonie latine” (1938, p. 8). Undoubtedly, the geographical nearness and the common cultural legacy constitute traits of union, for the writer, to put Algeria under the Latin hegemony. It is not difficult thus to guess why the narrator in *Le Sang des Races* insists on the fact and puts no avail to make the characters feel and confess that 'they are at their home country'.

Bertrand's creed is further displayed through the way he shapes Rafael, the protagonist of the novel. The character is depicted as the embodiment of his race. His parents Ramon and Rosa are among the immigrants who landed in Algiers driven by hunger from their native village in the South of Spain. His father is the example of that hard working Spanish

whose strength is made to appear 'légendère' (legendary) and 'herculéene' (Herculian). The narrator describes him as an extraordinary person full of energy and exuberance : "dévorer par sa rage de travail [...] son endurance et sa force, ses veilles et ses fatigues, la crainte qu'il inspirait aux autres, tout cela donnait à Rafael l'idée d'un être extraordinaire" (1978, p. 40). Moreover, his mother, Rosa, is the epitome of the fertile women who would perpetuate the Latin race. She is the empodiment of : " les grandes mères antiques [...], elle enfantait avec une sorte de fureur, elle était fière de sa fécondité" (Ibid, p. 40). The signifier of women's fertility is evidently activated and used to account for France's need of sources of regeneration to face its demographic decline. The young Rafael is henceforth portrayed as an individual who inherited the characteristic features of 'la race Latine'. All through the novel his vigour and macho vitality are accentuated and made apparent mainly in his several trips across the Algerian land. More significantly, Bertrand ingrained the hero with the features of "the Latin ancestors" and forged for him a mythical and an epic investiture. From the outset, Rafael 'le roulier' (the carter) is conceived as a special being whose adventures in the Algerian interior towns such as Laghouat, Médea stressed his courage and energy and made him to an extent 'a reincarnation' of the Latin heroes like Ulysses. Bertrand confessed several times in his writings his admiration of the caravan drivers that he considered as the cornerstones of "la mission civilisatrice," what follows is an illustration:

L'aventure, la route me tentèrent. Le roulier qui cheminait sans crainte et sans maître, pendant

des lieues et des lieues, des jours et des jours, à travers les stéppes des hauts-plateau, les sables

pleins de surprises et de mirages des régions sahariennes, —qui ravitaillait les villages, les

fermes, les postes perdues du désert, qui charriait les villages, les fermes, les postes perdues du

désert, qui charriait les engins du civilisé par- delà les ultimes confins de la barbarie, les

matériaux et les outils qui serviraient à construire les voies nouvelles, les forteresses et les villes

futures, — le Roulier m'apparut presque comme un héros, un être de liberté, de gloire et de joie

(Ibid, p. 14).

The passage underscores the importance the writer gave to the wagoners on whom, he thought, the building of the future of the colony and the glory of the empire depend greatly. They are perceived as modern heroes whose ebullience and enthusiasm are guarantees of the national renaissance.

Taking the example of his father, Rafael followed his vocation as a carter not for other reasons but as “il a ça dans le sang”, as one of his fellow carters later came to notice because of this over-enthusiasm and endurance he showed in facing the perils of his several trips. The narrator puts stress on the hot-blooded and pioneering spirit of Rafael which soon gained him fame and respect among the old carters: “en plein épanouissement d'adolescence, le sang frais dans les veines, toute l'ivresse de sa jeune force au cerveau, il acceptais avec enthousiasme les dures corvées” (Ibid, p. 41). The narrator again and again emphasizes the qualities of Rafael as a brave and vigorous young man ready for the most difficult tasks.

What is worth mentioning is that Bertrand took the material of his novels from his own trips across Algeria. Starting with a trip to Médea then in 1892 he went to Ain Oussera in company of the long-distance cart-drivers; “les *rouliers*”. He then undertook a journey to Laghouat in 1894 and went to Tipaza in 1895. In summer 1897, he went back to Laghouat to complete his documentation for *Le Sang des Races*; and in 1898, he visited Berrouaghia and Guelt-es-Stel. Bertrand kept visiting Algeria frequently even when he left it; he was to return in 1903, 1911, 1914... (Dunwoodie, 1998, p. 193).

To consider the historicity of *Le Sang des Races* is also to conceive it as a part of the process of historical change and a constituent of that historical change. It is also to specify the cultural and historical differences at work in the literary text. Louis Bertrand' novel is indeed the outcome of its time of production which coincided with what is known as *la fin de siècle*. This term suggests, two contexts, one is the specific cultural movement that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century, and the other the chronologically-defined end of any century. The former is closely associated and is embedded with notions of decadence, neurosis and the artificial. The second covers not only the works of literature produced at the end-of -century but also the notions of crisis, apocalypse, renewal and change. It is the turning point between one set of established values and their replacement by another which is as yet unknown (Simons, 2000, p. 200)

Bertrand wrote in a period which highly influenced his world's view and shaped his outlook. In fact, his intellectual stamina was formed and informed by the prevailing the atmosphere of decadence and pessimism resulting from the French loss of the Alsace at the hands of the German. The 1870 defeat and the Paris Commune were also great traumas in the lives of the French and were to influence them to a great extent. The response was

one of profound loss of confidence in the French leaders and obsession with political, social and intellectual decadence. There emerged a literary and an aesthetic movement known as *décadentisme* which began around the time of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) to flourish in the late 1890s. It was characterized by artificiality, skepticism, and sarcasm and contempt for middle-class values and norms. Essentially, the Decadents opposed the standards of morality in their society and cultivated an attitude of anti virtue, anti civilization. Joris-Karl Huysmans's *A rebours* (1884) is the defining work of the Decadent Movement. It contains a series of tableaux-like chapters where a member of the French aristocracy, Des Esseintes, the last of his line, pale and feeble, attempts to re-kindle an enthusiasm for life and living by working through the senses' pleasure, until, finally, he ended broken and ill. Thus, many of the themes and motifs of his book such as the egotism, perversity, artificial sensations, finding beauty in 'le mal', the sense of ennui and fatigue were not without exercising influence on Bertrand: "the literary sensation Huysman's book caused could not have escaped the notice of the young Bertrand" (Lorcin, 2000, p. 184). Such a vision is displayed in *Le Sang des Races* wherein the characters are the embodiment of profuse vitality, ebullience and the direct opposite of all what came to be associated with 'la fin de siècle' in general and Des Esseintes in particular.

The world-weariness or 'le mal de siècle' and the decadent atmosphere that is characterized by pessimism, melancholia, and apathy were to be opposed by Bertrand and his fellows like Maurice Barrès (1862-1923), Georges Sorel (1847-1922), Paul Déroulède (1846-1914) and others. The intellectuals of the age sought for sources of regeneration and revival that Bertrand found in Algeria. The emphasis his novels made on the cult of energy and vigorous youth is undoubtedly Bertrand's response to the anxiety

in France. The Mediterranean heroes and heroines—Ramon, Raphael, Rosa, Pascualète and others incarnate the values that were direly needed to invigorate the elements that had been sapped. The néo-Français (New French) in *le Sang des Races* are portrayed as hard-working, instinctive, violent, rude, passionate, unrefined and athletic and are seen as the potential guarantee of the future: “Je pensais [...] que la France, fatiguée par des siècles de civilisation, pouvait se rajeunir au contact de cette apparent et vigoureuse barbarie...” (Bertrand, 1978, p. 15). The author hailed and applauded the *colons* who were the focus of his works, as we read in what follows:

Le Latin d’Afrique me révélait au naturel et directement l’homme instinctif et passionné [...] Qu’il s’agit de simples manœuvres, d’ouvriers, de colons, de commerçants, ou d’administrateurs, je retrouvais l’homme méditerranéen, l’homme des époques et des œuvres classiques, non énervé et amolli par une civilisation bourgeoise française de ce temps là, du fonctionnaire bridé et gourmé. Ah ! Comme ces êtres de chaire et de sang, de violence et de passion me changeaient des petits bourgeois provinciaux ou parisiens d’une Anatole France ! (1936, pp. 61-62).

The passage highlights once again Bertrand’s veneration and respect of the unsophisticated and unrefined Latins of Africa who would, owing to their vigorous and untarnished nature, be a font of creativity and a source of vitality to the wallowing France of the *fin de siècle*.

The portrayal of the characters or even the title *Le Sang des Races* is thus not at random. All through the novel, Bertrand activated the signifiers ‘blood’ and ‘race’ to mean action, energy, youth, vigour, vitality which carried in themselves special historical implications and were the era’s most acclaimed values. For Bertrand these unintellectual but vigorous and

resourceful men and women who 'inhabit' his novel are the guarantees of the French rejuvenation and subsequently the outlets of its crisis.

2-The Textuality of History of the Novel

New Historicism, as already mentioned, is interested in history as represented and recorded in written documents, in history-as-text. Historical events as such, it would argue are irrevocably lost. Since history was mostly recorded in the form of narration, historians could access history in the form of textuality as well; as it were, the word of the past replaces the world of the past. History could thus be accessed through the text that is considered to be a part of the process of historical change and a constituent of that historical change. The issues with which new historicists concerned themselves are the role historical context in interpreting literary texts and the role of literary rhetoric in mediating history (Brannigan in Wolfreys, 2001, p. 170).

When applied to *Le Sang des Races*, it can be stated that the novel is a text which reveals the peculiar history of French-Algeria in the 1880s. The most important event, which was the byproduct of the French loss of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany, was the flocking down of immigrants from the Mediterranean countries and the transformation of Algeria to a "*colonie de peuplement*" (colony of settlement). The colonial property was offered to French settlers from the two lost towns but also to settlers from Spain, Italy, Malta, Minorca... This strategy aimed to increase the number of Europeans which slowed down considerably. According to the 1891 census, there were 271, 100 French, 218, 301 Europeans, 47, 564 Jews and 3,554, 067 Arabs and Berbers (Gourdon et al., 1998, p. 44). In 1884, naturalization law was adopted granting French citizenship to all persons born in Algeria to foreign parents creating thus the so called "French-Algerian community". This goes without

saying that the characters of Bertrand's novel mediate and embody this new conceived identity to the settlers and their children who enjoyed the rights of political citizenship at the detriment of the local population who were relegated and undermined to an inferior position in the colonial hierarchy.

The special identity forged for the settlers is what gave Rafael and his fellows young men this special sense of belonging to French-Algeria. The reader gets the impression that the characters that merge in the novel are there because they would not and could not be elsewhere. An imminent instance of this strong attachment to Algeria is when the protagonist Rafael is set in a visit to the Spanish land on a pretext to attend the "bulls' race" and to be acquainted with his cousins. Once there, he felt little leaning towards the ancestral homeland and even less communion towards his relatives, soon his "préventions contre l'Espagne s'en fortifièrent. Il était de plus en plus convaincu qu'il s'enfonçait dans la sauvagerie" (Bertrand, 1978, p. 231). Life among his kinsmen displeased and made him feel in quite a strange land but also to speak and to boast of French-Algeria as his real country: " je suis plus Français que vous" he proudly asserted. Rafael left Spain feeling no regret to leave it, even more than this, he shunned any possible return to it.

What is also worth mentioning is that Bertand's novel constitutes a text among others which elaborated and circulated the discourse of *Latinité*. The notion of "Latins of Africa" had seen the anthropological light of day in France as early as 1873 and gained wider acceptance in the works on Algeria of that time. In 1886 Octave Houdas published an ethnography of Algeria which included the *Algériens* as one of the major ethnographical elements of the colony. In *Ethnographie de l'Algérie*, he claimed that the *Algériens* were

a new race whose defining traits were formed from the merging together of characteristics specific to the various Latin peoples residing in Algeria with the exclusion of the indigenous population (in Sternhell, 1985, p. 41). Another study, that of Paul Monceaux , entitled *Les Africains* (1894) glorified the French conquest of Algeria and saw in it a recuperation of a previously Roman province: "Roman Africa has, in large part, become French territory" (in Lorcin,1999, p. 197). These anthropological and ethnographic theories alongside the widespread circulation of the popular beliefs about the irredeemable primitive nature of the indigenous populations were the two factors which helped Louis Bertrand's ideas to achieve the importance they did. As maintained by Patricia Lorcin: "He articulated, in a way few settlers were able to do, the intellectual ramifications and significance of being *Algérien* in nineteenth-century Algeria" (Ibid).

Moreover, the event of 1871 which consisted of the great uprising of El Mokrani and the issuing shift from a military regime to a civilian one has its echoes in the Bertrandian text. We can say that the novel is the outcome and the chronicle of such change. Before 1871, ethnography as a mode of knowledge was predominant in colonial Algeria, but after, there was a need not only to rethink the reality that Algeria was inhabited by Arabs and Berbers but also to make a historical place for the settlers. In other words, what became important for the civilian administrators and scholars was history as the means of generating a new understanding to account for the new colonial situation. *La Société archéologique de Constantine* founded in 1853 is an example of such institutions which aimed to excavate history so as to forge for the settlers legitimacy and a new existence. Its motto was *Collecter, Préserver, Décrire* (to gather, to preserve, to describe) (Hannoum, 2008, p. 94). But what it aimed to collect, preserve and describe were the

Roman characteristics of North Africa rather than the Berber or the Arab ones. It intended thus to make North Africa, historically, a Western or a European territory. Louis Bertrand's novels *le Cycle Algérien* underscore this colonial will to liven up history or to make the dead past speak again but this past was rather distorted and falsified to serve the colonial ends. This is why history became—with the establishment of the civilian regime—an important means by which to build a colonial state. As Bernard Cohn puts it: “the establishment and maintenance of these colonial nation states depended upon determining, codifying, controlling, and representing the past” (Cohn, 1996, p. 3). This assertion is made obvious in Bertrand's belief that: “l'Afrique française d'aujourd'hui c'est l'Afrique romaine qui continue à vivre, qui n'a jamais cessé de vivre, même aux époques les plus troubles et les plus barbares” (Bertrand, 1921, p. 6). In *Le Sang des Races*, the Latin background and character of the immigrants is purposefully accentuated and highlighted. All through the text we are made to witness the narrator's eulogy of the effervescent and profuse physical vitality of Rafael, the hero and paradigm of the young settlers. Rafael incarnates the salient features of a strong, proud, sensual and independent individual considered as typically Latin and seen as the salutary energizers which would save France from decadence and anemia of the *Fin de siècle*.

It is also important to point out that *Le Sang des Races* is also an embodiment of the spirit of French “assimilationist” policy as stipulated by *senatus-consulte* 1860 and *le projet Warnier* 1873. Assimilation as a doctrine and policy was seen in itself as part of France's Latin nature. Arthur Girault affirmed that it was the policy of “nations of Latin race, faithful heirs of the Roman spirit of assimilation” (in Betts, 2005, p. 27) or as contended by

Arnaud and Méray in their *Les Colonies françaises: organization administrative, judiciaire, politique et financière* that assimilation “had been the preference of peoples of Latin origins, thus imitating the methods of Roman civilization” (Ibid). Bertrand’s novel mediates this theory which aimed at assimilating the land but not the people. In other words, it aimed to make legal the dispossession of the Algerian fellah which led to the reinforcement of colonial settlements. *Le Sang des Races* projects and celebrates this political ideal that perceives of the Spaniards, Provençaux, Languedociens, Corsicans, Baltic Islanders, Maltese, Sicilians, and Italians as the potential or the colony’s staff of life and which put no avail to wrench the natives’ land to grant the colonizers the full right of colonized property. As Ageron puts it: “ le but essentiel d’une loi sur la propriété est de livrer au marché français la terre indigène [...] à cette nécessité on sacrifia non seulement la propriété indigène mais aussi l’avenir de la population musulmane” (1968, p. 101). This is especially true of the *senatus-consulte* which expropriated most of the fertile land and the *Warnier Laws* which implemented another spoilation on a massive scale. *Le Sang des Races* incarnates and mediates this colonial strategy of replacing one population by another, the Algerian natives by the European intruders. It is itself a historical document which participated and accompanied colonization. In other words, it is an ideological weapon or rather an ‘invisible bullet’, using Greenblatt’s words, that was not only shaped by but itself shaped the colonial thinking and ideology.

Conclusion:

It derives from the foregoing study that analyzing *Les Sang des Races* in its historical context discloses the relationship between the text and history. The novel like any other works of literature is a 'representation' of the culture from which it emerges. In this sense, it does not imitate but rather mediates and shapes its time of production.

The work was produced during the 1890's, when France sought to find a source of regeneration and energy in its African colonies. Algeria proved to be the haven that soothes her *mal de siècle*. The hero of the text epitomizes the prototype of the "Latin Race Myth", for he is described as an energetic, hard-working, unrefined and passionate character. To some extent, the spirit embodied by Rafael resembles that of the Bertrandian ideal applauded by the intellectuals of the age who opposed *le décadentisme* in all its aspects. It can be deduced also that *Le Sang des Races* chronicles the transformation of Algeria into *une colonie de peuplement* wherein the Mediterranean immigrants flocked down to be given the most fertile Algerian lands. The text itself is an active agent of the colonialist circumambient ideology which conceived of the Europeans, the rightful possessors and the acclaimed inheritors of *Roman Africa*.

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