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THE VOICE OF THE HABITATION IN PERE LABAT'S VOYAGE AUX ILES FRANÇAISES DE L'AMERIQUE

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Abstract

Composed between 1716 and 1722, Père Jean-Baptiste Labat's Nouveau Voyage aux îles françaises de l'Amérique orchestrates a chronicle dedicated to the life of the habitation in the Antilles at the dawn of the century. Behind the voice of the slaves, depicted as characters lacking in any psychological depth, and the picaresque voice of a chronicler involved in numerous adventures, another voice can be heard: this is the voice of a habitation society, as it establishes itself as an autonomous economic and social unit. It is this curious polyphony, in which the voices of the slaves, the master and the habitation are intermingled, that this article proposes to consider. While Père Labat normally turns a deaf ear to the slaves' speech, every now and then he lends a more attentive ear to his slaves and hints at an unexpected additional voice, that of a new society.

Keywords: Chronicle, ethos, habitation, Jean-Baptiste Labat, slaves' speech

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1. Introduction

Having left the port of La Rochelle on 29 November 1693, the Dominican missionary priest Jean-Baptiste Labat, known as *Père Labat*, arrived at Saint-Pierre in Martinique, on 29 January 1694, to replace his brothers who had died of yellow fever. Both erudite and a shrewd strategist, he held several positions. He was a simple priest in the parish of Macouba, then the architect of the construction of a water mill in Guadeloupe; he also held successive posts in Martinique as procurator-general of the estate of Fonds-Saint-Jacques, Superior of the Dominicans at Saint-Pierre and Apostolic Vice-Prefect, while also accepting occasional missions for his order to Grenada and Santo Domingo.

Following a conflict with the Governor-General of Martinique, Charles-François de Machault de Bellemont, about a *contre-nature* [unnatural] marriage between a couple who were not only first cousins, but protestant at that, in 1705 he went to France to inform his superiors of the situation. He was prevented from returning to the colonies, and a little later was sent to Italy (Rennard, 1979). The *Nouveau Voyage aux îles françaises de l'Amérique*[i][New Voyage to the French Islands of America] (1831) was written between 1716 and 1722 and owes much to the model of the literary travel chronicle, as much for the references to other authors such as Du Tertre, Biet and Rochefort (Prudent, 1999) as for the careful and often detailed depiction of his story[ii].

From the reading of a narrative that is quick to silence anything that does not produce surprises and entertaining digressions (Ouellet, 2015, p. 7), we deduce that the dearth of comments on the authentic parlance of the slaves, and even more so on the languages used, indicates a certain indifference to these questions. Such disinterest for the linguistic content in the colonies is observed elsewhere in many of the 18th-century chronicles and is explained by the marked preference of Europeans for the Amerindian languages[iii], the absence of economic importance of the slaves' languages[iv], and the apparent simplicity of the languages spoken by the slaves, in which the absence of a discernible syntax deprives them of any epistemological interest[v]. While he may not pay close and detailed attention to the slaves' actual parlance, to which he could have borne witness in the same way as other chroniclers of his era[vi], Père Labat nevertheless often evokes the slaves' language which he has no reservations about depicting (Thibault, 2018). These mentions occur during the exchanges between the missionary and his slaves, from whom he gathers information, or asks for help, or to whom he gives an order. The depiction of the slaves' parlance, while they exchange between themselves or with the narrator, return to the images of an owner and his slaves, of which it suits him to demonstrate all the facets.

In bringing together in his chronicle the details of a colonial life whose authenticity is unconfirmed[vii], Père Labat is clearly seeking to give a clearer picture of the accomplishment of his missions within the context of a society entirely regulated by *l'Édit du Roi Concernant la discipline, l'État et la qualité des nègres esclaves aux Isles de l'amérique Du mois de mars 1685*[viii] [The Edict of the King Concerning the Discipline, the State and Quality of Negro Slaves in the American Islands of the Month of March 1685], while offering the image of a prudent, virtuous and compassionate author[ix] with his entourage, in the spirit of the rhetorical tradition (Aristotle, 1931) in which his religious training had mainly educated him. His narrative is thus intended to inspire confidence in the whole picture he paints of the colony. The missionary's character traits, as they appear throughout the chronicle, need to denote Christian values and cardinal legalities.

By deliberately silencing the direct speech of the slaves, of whose lexical and syntactic manifestations we are only partially aware, and which are often confined to the narration of anecdotal events, the strident and ever-present voice of the chronicler hints at the call of the religious and colonialist values which codify life within the habitation[x]. In this game of chiaroscuro, in which relegating the slaves' speech to the shadows only serves to highlight that of the master, brings into relief that of the habitation, which has established itself as an autonomous economic and

social unit. It is this curious polyphony, in which the voices of the slaves, the master and the habitation are intermingled, that this article proposes to consider. While Père Labat normally turns a deaf ear to the slaves' speech, every now and then he lends a more attentive ear to his slaves and hints at an unexpected additional voice, that of a new society.

1. Turning a Deaf Ear

Paying little attention to the words of his slaves, Père Labat transcribes in essence the orders he gives them, describing what is important in understanding how his days unfolded in the habitation and which he narrates in great detail. The slaves are reduced to simple recipients of the message, as witnessed particularly in five extracts, in which the missionary addresses them to transmit in most cases a religious message. This constitutes his teaching ("On Sunday 7 February, I said Mass in our chapel and taught the catechism to our negroes"; p. 19), ritual practices such as confession ("The following day I was going to hear the confession of a negro of M. Roy's habitation", p. 37) and communion ("On Saturday 17 April, I completed the instruction of fourteen white children of both sexes, and eight or ten negroes", p. 50), and the Church year ("I took all this week and a part of the next week in taking the negroes through Easter", p. 49). On only one occasion does he return to the organisation of everyday tasks:

> On the eighth day in the evening, I ordered two negroes that I had brought with me from our habitation, to get my horse ready for the following day, three hours before dawn, and to buy two or three roast fowl with some bread and wine for them and for me (p. 106)[xi].

The slave is thus presented as either a Christian receiving the word of the priest and guided in the accomplishment of his spiritual life, or as an employee carrying out domestic chores. The transcription of Père Labat's words has the sole aim of legitimising his roles of priest and proprietor, personally accomplishing the missions assigned to him[xii].

When they do speak, are the slaves really content simply to relay the orders of the one on whom they depend? When Père Martelli and Père Labat, having left Saint-Pierre for Fonds Saint-Jacques, arrive at the home of the parish priest of the Grande-Anse, it is still the master's words, reproduced by those of the slave, free of any additions, which make themselves heard:

> His negro, that he had left, told us that his master knew we would be arriving and that he had ordered him to offer us food and drink, if we had need, and at the same time to beg us to go somewhere else because he could not offer us a bed (p. 14-15).

Because he was being attacked by ants, Père Labat decided to leave the habitation of Saint-Pierre:

> This incommodity [of ants] not being found at our home [at Fonds Saint-Jacques], I had resolved to return there, and to avoid any confrontation with the doctors or my confrère, I wished to leave without saying goodbye to anyone. My negroes came to wake me at three o'clock in the morning (p. 155)[xiii].

This purely descriptive detail of his sleep being interrupted at the expected hour by alert domestic staff, and the mention of the slave's words, without any real interruption of the narrative, highlights the continuing action.

Taking account of the lack of interest shown by Père Labat in the slaves' parlance, the passages in which the author does grant them more importance, especially in reporting the content of their speech and accompanying this with a modalisation, give food for thought[xiv]. One passage bears witness to the author's particular attention to what he hears by the length of the passage and the way it connects to the narrative. The priest succeeds in describing the origin of a quarrel with the Saint-Aubin sugar plant, whose owner, furious at the loss of slaves struck down by ill fate, had participated in the spreading of a rumour that evil spells cast from Père Labat's property might have

been responsible for this event at his own property. This rumour was then relayed by the members of the habitation:

> The little negro that was following me, having heard these words, reported them to our negroes. The latter, to avenge themselves against this false accusation, waited for those of the neighbour, the following Sunday, and beat them to a pulp (p. 83).

Père Labat's slaves, who henceforth carried neither "knives" nor "cudgels" at the request of their master, fearing an escalation of the violence after the preceding clashes with the neighbouring habitations, were then attacked by those of the Saint-Aubin sugar plant. It is very strange that the account of their parlance, which is ordinarily confined to actions presenting so little interest that the narrator makes no detailed mention of it, produces a dramatic effect:

> A few negresses, who had escaped, called for help from the negroes of the neighbouring habitations; they came in droves to the battlefield where our negroes were defending themselves from being stoned (p. 184).[xv]

Occurring as it does in the information transmission chain, the slaves' parlance is well integrated into the construction of the narrative.

As a pure testimony of an action in which the slaves are generally excluded, the slaves' speech most often functions as a decorative element in a narrative essentially centred on the figure of Père Labat. This recognition of the slaves' speech provides a good opportunity for a discussion of the apparently robust divide between Père Labat and his slave labour.

2. The Listening Ear

Even though the content of these exchanges between the slaves does not really interest Père Labat, at least in terms of what he re-transcribes, it is paradoxically through these that the priest paints a portrait of these domestic staff, whose manner of speaking reveals their identity. The narrator's comments are tinged with irony, when it is a matter of describing

> The custom of the negroes to give to the animals bought by their master the name of the vendor. This Pierre Roy had bought a donkey from a sergeant farmer called *Durand*, and the negroes lost no time in giving the donkey the name of *Durand* (p. 146).[xvi]

Operating through prolepsis – the reader is waiting for the situation to turn into a dramatic storyline - the mention of the double attribution of the name of Durand to the sergeant as well as the donkey hints at the pursuit of the poor sergeant believing his life to be in danger, while the slaves, buoyed up by the shouts of Pierre Roy calling them to catch the runaway donkey, arm themselves with sticks:

> This Durand, the donkey, who one day was tethered near the mill, broke his tether and ran away into the savannah […]. He [the master Pierre Roy] shouted to the negroes who were at the stoves, to run after *Durand*, to arm themselves and to give him a hundred blows […]. It just so happened that, at the very moment the master was giving this order that Durand, the sergeant, was in the savannah on his way to Pierre Roy's home […]. Hearing his name, he thought the order concerned him, and was left in no doubt when he saw three or four negroes coming out armed with sticks, and running towards him, because *Durand*, the donkey, was also on that side (our emphasis). He was terrified that they were out to kill him, and ran away as fast as his legs could carry him. *Durand*, the donkey, did the same thing (our emphasis), and the negroes who were shouting as they ran after him scared both of them (our emphasis) so much that Durand, the sergeant, ran almost half a league without daring to look behind him (p. 147).[xvii]

Mockery is also evident through the description of the lies told by the slaves:

> But when they have to deal with people who know them, their last resort is to say that it is the devil who tricked them; *and as the devil is not always present, nor are they minded to admit to their alleged misdemeanour,* they are punished for the larceny or for the lie (p. 177).

The irony lies in using the pen to efface the presupposed abnormality of a crime committed under the influence of the devil, while completely discrediting the slaves who were more guilty of malice than superstition.

A game of mirrors is in play through how Père Labat portrays himself in his writing and the image of the slaves that he reveals when he lets them speak[xviii]. By deliberately painting a portrait of his enslaved servants, who are respectful of the moral values of a good Christian, he participates in the construction of his authorial ethos, fully legitimising his discourse. In a passage dedicated to various considerations of the slaves' shortcomings, the missionary brings out their moralistic character and their tendency to generalise based on a single situation:

> When they see one of their own who swears, who gets drunk, or who does something bad, they always take the opportunity to say: ''Only a wretch swears like a white man, gets drunk like a white man, or steals like a white man'' (p. 178).

Behind this factual observation of a shortcoming of the slaves – their holier-than-thou tone – there is a negative image which makes the portrait of Père Labat doubly flattering. The exemplary ethos of the priest can be sensed: Père Labat presents himself as the one who pardons and educates. On the one hand, his indulgence responds to the intolerance of the slave[xix]. On the other hand, the condemnation of the slaves' bad behaviour brings to the fore the voice of the education they have received from him. The passage describes the role of the educator fulfilled by the priest, who not only teaches the slaves the desire for good behaviour[xx] – they must not swear, or get drunk, or steal – but also invites us through his narrative to understand the desire for moderation and the rejection of easy generalisation.

The divergence between the character of the one who reports the fact, Père Labat, and the one whose words he reports, the slave, is paused during an episode of the account of a curious suicide:

> The other negro noticed one day that this little boy was eating dirt; he alerted me. I did everything I could to stop him doing this, but in vain; it was melancholia that had led him to this excess. The negroes of Mine are very prone to this; they hang themselves in the firm belief that after their death they will return to their home country. I only knew about the chagrin of my negro when it was too late to remedy it. He had a brother who belonged to one of my neighbours. My negro died first; his brother followed him a few days later. When I was asking him why he wanted to die like this, he started weeping; he said that he loved me but that he wanted to return to his father. I had instructed and baptised him; but I was never able to dissuade him of this fantasy (p. 71)[xxi].

On first reading, the passage is marked by quite a clear opposition between the priest reporting a fact, which he condemns without giving an explicit reason, and the "young boy". The suicide, of which Père Labat admits that he was incapable of disabusing his young slave of his strong desire to kill himself, is qualified as a "fantasy", which must be understood in 18th-century terms as being a "whim". The staging of the passage – of which the almost ethnographic description reinforces the likelihood[xxii] – the colourless neutral tone, with hardly a trace of feelings and the contrast with the violence of the related fact, the suicide of a slave[xxiii]. The divergence is thereby made clear between the ethos of the priest, rational and pre-emptive towards the poor unfortunate in the face of risky behaviour, and that of the slave, irrational and disobliging toward the one offering to help him. Nevertheless, the length of the passage and the close details on the stages of life of the slave – already "instructed and baptised" before "dying"[xxiv], conjure up an alternative interpretation to the sole disqualifying aim of the passage.

This negative image of the priest's character, firm in his faith without being too pious, and careful to educate his slaves, whose naiveté distresses him as an unmoderated taste for the irrational,

and of which the consequences prove to be fatal. By disqualifying the aspirations of inferior beings, Père Labat constructs a modelising ethos. In granting only a congruent place to his slaves, that he fashions as incomplete copies of himself, Père Labat produces other voices as a mere counterpoint to his own. By sticking closely to a detailed account of his efforts to ensure the development of the colonisation, Père Labat submits to a still more powerful voice, that of the habitation. From the mouths of the slaves to that of the missionary there is only one and the same parlance which erases any ontological features between master and slaves in favour of the expression of new identity values. It is in the manifestation of this voice which is simultaneously plural – because it comes to life in the mouth of Père Labat and his slaves – and unique – in that it reflects the establishment of a habitation in a new form of social and economic unit – that our interest lies.

3. Paying Lip Service, the Voice of the Habitation[xxv]

The examination of the common mechanisms of the missionary's speech and that of his subservient slaves reveals the degree to which one and the same voice runs through the chronicle. On several occasions, the narrative provides a consistency of tone in the passages of direct reported speech, with three being of particular interest in terms of single-use terms. In the first two cases this is represented by recourse to words directly borrowed from the slaves' speech, and in the third by a slave's formulation of a word clearly taken from the missionary.

The rare mentions of the slaves' *baragouin*, emphasised by the use of italics in the wider context of reported speech, attest to the listening powers of Père Labat, who seeks to transcribe what he hears through his own francophone phonological filter[xxvi]. Going beyond simple ethnographic interest, the transcription of a form of *corrupted*[xxvii] language demonstrates the narrator's interest, which is made clear during short citations supportive of the slaves' parlance. When Père Labat is *en route* to Fonds Saint-Jacques, an unexpectedly rainy night forces him to find refuge in Monsieur de Verpré's *savannah*; he takes to the road again in the early morning and engages in an exchange with a slave:

> While on the road I took it into my head to ask the negro who was driving me, if there were snakes along the way; he answered me straightaway in his *baragouin*: *tenir mouchè*[xxviii]; I thought he was saying that they were numerous, which heightened terribly my existing fear of these animals (p. 15).

A similar perspective is observed a little later on, when Père Labat reports the words of a slave, in defending some young children that the priest had directed to his cook for correction, to deliver them from depravity. The slave's rationale rests on an analogous relationship: just as he had entrusted the cooper slaves with teaching coopering to the apprentices, it would be worth leaving the children to discover their own body together:

> This negro asked me if it were not true that I had put a certain negro, whose name he gave to me, with the cooper to learn how to make barrels. I told him the reason; but he told me once again that I was stupid. And why? I asked him. *Because*, he responded, *when the children are grown up, you will marry them off, and you will want them to make 'hiches', which means children, as soon as possible, and how do you think they will make them if they have not gradually learnt how to do it when they were young*? Look at M. B****, (one of our neighbours who had no children), he has not had one child, because he did not learn to do it when he was little. I wanted to make my haranguer see sense, but it was not possible; he kept repeating that all occupations must be learnt from one's youth, because otherwise one is never a good worker (p. 176-177).

Beyond the purely comical tone of the extract, based on the parody of a solemn discourse arising from a specious presupposition – that sexuality may be an art just like coopering – conveyed by a naïve "haranguer", is the more nuanced expression of another of the narrator's sentiments. The slave's reasoning rests on a principle with which it is difficult to argue: mastering an occupation

depends on the quality of one's teaching. It is in these terms of a "good worker" that he appeals to Père Labat on behalf of the *depraved* children. The slave draws his argument from the defence of a certain economic model of the habitation, based on the management of human resources whose maintenance and sustainability it is essential to ensure. Once again, as we have sought to demonstrate throughout this study, the passages including direct speech allow us to hear the slaves' voices without knowing exactly what really comes from the voice of the narrator or that of the slaves.

This ambiguity reaches its climax when Père Labat informs us of his anxiety, as he is approaching the shores of Santo Domingo, where he has decided to spend Easter. He refers to a worrying ship that approaches, while he is sleeping:

> I woke up when the boat turned, and asked the reason for this manœuvre. My negro, terrorised, told me that we (our emphasis) were going to be taken by the *forbans* [bandits] (our emphasis). I arose and saw two big ships with a rowboat[xxix] (p. 244-245).

A subtle game of contamination between the slaves' speech and that of the master casts doubt on the responsibility of the reporter. What is meant by "we"? Who said the word "bandits"? It seems unlikely that this term would be that of the slaves, for the following reasons:

- the word is used several times in the narrative. It is mentioned elsewhere:

> Those who sail the seas without a commission are called *forbans*. This name comes from *forbannis,* an old French term which signifies *bannis* [banned] or *chassés hors de l'état* [chased out of the country] (p. 229).

- a few paragraphs before our passage, the narrator has already used it himself: "We were in no doubt that it was a *forbans*", p. 244. The pronoun encompasses the master and his slaves, leaving little doubt about the attribution of the word "*forbans*" to one of the speakers rather than the other. It is certainly the master who is expressing himself on behalf of his crew! The reader is invited to participate in the account of piracy, of which everyone on the boat is prepared to pay the price. From our point of view, it is this that explains the use of "we".

The reciprocal contamination of the discourse of slaves and master does not arise simply from our perception of a stylistic effect, which ensures a consistent tone to the account. We find it difficult to believe that the reported words are always those of the slaves. All the same, Père Labat, in lending his voice to the slaves, suggests the Christian doctrines which run through the other travel narratives of his era[xxx]. The superposition of voices in the chronicle reveals another unit in the chronicle, that of a habitation society, which fully confirms his authority.

4. Conclusion

In this article we have endeavoured to bring to light the intermingling of the voices of Père Labat, his slaves and the habitation. This account of a slice of colonial life thus reveals three possible readings. On one level, the narrator rarely gives a voice to his slaves[xxxi], which on a second level denies the unity of common tone to the master and the slaves in the passages of directly reported speech, to suggest on a third level the voice of the habitation and the affirmation of its economic, social and ethical values. For this reason, listening to the voices in Père Labat's chronicle bears witness to the gestation of an emergent Caribbean society whose anthropological design is constructed from violence and the negation of a refusal of otherness. The correlation between Père Labat's lack of interest in his slaves' existence and the absence of an extended commentary on the slaves' use of language is certainly far from trivial. Notable among the chronicles which appeared after that of Père Labat, and which afford a far greater presence for the slaves' life and language, is that of Moreau de Saint-Méry. The documentary value of this account of the social, and especially the religious practices of slaves on Santo Domingo, and its acerbic defence of the Creole in respect of Girod-Chantrans (1786) on the occasion of his scurrilous insinuations on the everyday speech of

the slaves and the masters, represents the high point[xxxii].

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[i] We refer to the Cardini edition (1831) available online on the *Gallica* platform of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, which the editor himself declares is consistent with the edition of 1722.

[ii] Père Labat, who read many travel accounts, translated and adapted in 1732 that of Capucin missionary Cavazzi, who went to the Congo and Angola (Cussac, 2020).

[iii] The navigator Christopher Columbo inaugurated this great linguistic tradition with the indigenous terms he compiled in his notebook, under the watchful eye of his travel companions, Luis Torres, an interpreter who spoke Hebrew, Arabic and Chaldean, and Rodrigue de Jerez, a specialist in African languages (Pottier 1967 cited by Prudent 1999, p. 21). Père Bouton, who accompanied the expedition of Charles Liénard de l'Olive and Jean du Plessis d'Ossonville in 1635 (Régent, 2019), pays great attention to what he would later call the *baragoin* of the Savages in his chronicle *Relation de l'établissement des François, depvis l'an 1635, en l'isle de la Martinique, l'vne des Antilles de l'Amérique. Des mœurs des Savvages de la sitvation & autres singularitez de l'isle* [Relation of the establishment of the French, from the year 1635, in the Island of Martinique, one of the American Antilles. Of the customs of the Savages of the situation & other singularities of the Island], that he published in 1640. It is useful to read Chapter IX "Of the savages of the countries known as the Caribbean Islands" (p. 105-119).

[iv] The interest in the Amerindian languages, on which Père Breton's chronicle (1647) is thought to be the most extensive (Sainton, 2015, p. 69), is explained by the need to negotiate the occupation of the territories. Conversely, the lack of curiosity about slave language is justified by its immediate lack of usefulness. The physical servitude by the use of slave labour in the colony, and the moral servitude by evangelisation necessitated a far less successful practice of vehicular languages on the part of the colonists. Mongin's *Lettre de Saint-Christophe* (Chatillon, 1979) describes the facility with which the French language is imposed on the habitation, and to which the slaves' jargon does not constitute a real obstacle:

> This facility is partly taken from the language which here is none other than the French language because, as this is here the language of the masters, there is almost nobody among all the different tribes who in just a little time has not learnt enough to understand us and to make themselves understood, without the particular beginners' jargon presenting any considerable obstacle. I am at least well assured that the persons of our country could force negroes to learn to speak French (p. 55).

[v] Père Pelleprat gives a glimpse of the reduction of linguistic forms, deprived of inflection. He considers that the simplification of the language entails a crude schematic notion:

> In general, they use the infinitive form of the verbs *Moi prier Dieu*, *Moi aller à l'église*, *Moi pas manger*, meaning *J'ai prié Dieu*, *Je suis allé à l'église*, *Je n'ai pas mangé*. One adds a temporal adverb for the future or the past: *Demain moi manger*, *Hier prier Dieu*, meaning *Je mangerai demain*, *J'ai prié Dieu hier*, and so on (Hazaël-Massieux, 2005, p. 22).

[vi] We refer to the extracts from the accounts of Guy Hazaël-Massieux (1996) on the one hand and Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux on the other (2008).

[vii] Réal Ouellet exposes the literary devices to which an author uninterested in confabulation resorts (2015, p. 7).

[viii] Known as *Code noir* from the 18th century under the supervision of the Colberts (first the father, then the son) at the request of Louis XIV (Niort and Richard, 2010).

[ix] In a chapter dedicated to the "plantation and the good planter" (2020, p. 144-157), Aurélia Michel shows how the purchase of slaves as well as their management – as a detailed study of the rapport between the purchase value and that of the work or even the "liberality" of certain masters such as Père Antonil and Père Labat in allowing a few hours of rest and recreation during the year – constitutes one of the keys to the success of the economic development of the habitation. The paternalistic kindness of Père Labat is clearly seen elsewhere in a passage dedicated to the morality of the slaves, in which he advises the reader "to listen to them with patience if one wishes to be loved by them" (p. 173).

[x] We refer to Robert Chaudenson's (1992) definition of the "habitation society" which is understood to be a basic rural operation. The "habitation society", previously recorded in Canada in about 1645 was implemented in the Antilles in the 17th century. This period is distinguished by two fundamental characteristics: a greater number of Whites than Blacks and a strong interaction between the colonialists and the slaves. On a linguistic level, the slaves, who were in a minority, found themselves faced with a target language, varieties of French – many colonialists speaking the dialects of their own regions – which became permanently imposed on them. The proximity of the master and his slaves – who shared living conditions which were often rudimentary – reduced the social divide and facilitated linguistic exchanges. This particularly explains the appearance of the "beginners' jargon" described by Père Mongin which does nothing to prevent the intercomprehension between the slaves and the masters (see note 4). During the 18th century the "habitation society" gradually gives way to the "plantation society" in which the far greater number of slaves, born on the plantation (the Creoles) or newly arrived (the Bossales) leads to a social and economic restructuring. While the number of Creoles remained lower than that of the Bossales, their role was strengthened. They began to participate in the social integration of the new arrivals. Contact, and especially linguistic contact with the masters diminished. In contrast with the "habitation society", the target language was no longer the language of the colonialists but that of the Creoles, who resorted to approximate varieties of colonial French. Also at work was a process of linguistic autonomisation, which gradually saw the dawn of the Creole language. The first texts in Creole started appearing in the second half of the 18th century (Hazaël-Massieux, 2008, p. 27). For more on this subject, it would be useful to read Georges-Daniel Véronique's (2013) article dedicated to the emergence of French Creoles in connection with the development of colonial social structures.

[xi] In this passage the slaves are described only in terms of their usefulness. They simply facilitate Père Labat's return from his short stay at Saint-Pierre, ruined by high fevers caused by being stung by ants. The details supplied about the conditions of the journey - transport and food – direct all the reader's attention onto the central character, the missionary.

[xii] Regarding the conversion of slaves, Réal Ouellet describes "an undeniable missionary success" made possible notably by the use of the "Negroes' jargon" (2015, p. 107).

[xiii] This passage precedes the one we described earlier in footnote 10.

[xiv] Effectively excluded from this part are therefore the extracts in which the author relates in indirect speech facts which do not include a commentary, such as that of the "account of the terrible accident" in which a pregnant female snake builds her nest in the branches of the tree – and to which are dedicated several pages (166-168) as well as an expansion on the presence of ophidians in the region:

> I was in the forest cutting wood when I saw one of our negroes hurrying away from the foot of a tree where he was cutting lianas. I wanted to know the reason; he told me that there was a big snake nestling in the branches of this tree (p. 166).

[xv] Resorting to parataxis, to which is added the use of the past historic, reinforces this effect of an immediate sequence.

[xvi] The irony comes notably from the use of the past historic whose capacity to detach an event – here the name given to the donkey – draws attention to and reinforces the disconnect between the banality of the situation and its quasi-epic treatment.

[xvii] The passage tips over into the comical with the homonymic confusion clearly maintained by the narrator as evidenced by all the expressions we have emphasised, which provide another example of the reprise of the formula previously used to describe the slaves ("to whom the negroes lost no time in giving the donkey the name of *Durand*") when he brings it to the attention of prospective observers:

> He made sure (our emphasis) to gather witnesses to his flight, people that he met along the way, telling them that Pierre Roy had made his negroes run after him to knock him out by beating him with sticks (p. 147).

[xviii] Dominique Maingueneau's (2020) article briefly summarises the argument during a passage dedicated to Pascal's *Provinciales* (1657):

> Specific problems arise about the ethos when there is reported speech: the discursive ethos of the cited speaker inevitably interacts with that of the citing speaker (para. 1).

[xix] From this moral antagonism between rigidity and liberality we see a hint of the indulgence of the one providing the pardon. Against the hypocrisy of the judgemental slave is set the one who observes without apportioning blame and who pardons the vice.

[xx] See the figure of the "neophyte Negro who has himself [become] a missionary" described by Réal Ouellet (2015, p. 107).

[xxi] In her research on the health conditions in 18th-century habitations on Santo Domingo, Karen Bourdier (2011, para. 9) describes the practice of certain masters of making their slaves wear an iron mask to overcome this.

[xxii] The recourse, sometimes to the present tense of general truth, sometimes to the past historic which "objectively" reports the facts in the propositions and of which the coordination reinforces the effect of brutality, participates in this factual and detached description. Likewise, in the 18th century "melancholia" was understood in medical terms as a dysfunction of the spleen which predisposed the person to sadness.

[xxiii] The extract does not actually specify the age of the slave.

[xxiv] There is here an additional stylistic opposition. The appeal to subordination (relative embedded in the temporal "[*Quand je le reprenais de [ce qu'il se faisait ainsi mourir*]]" (When I was asking him [why he wanted to die like this]) and coordinated completives "*il disait [qu'il m'aimait], mais [qu'il voulait retourner chez son père]*", (he said [that he loved me], but [that he wanted to return to his father]) there is an opposition between the slave's statement and the simple coordination of independents in those of Père Labat ("*[Je l'avais instruit et baptisé] ; mais [je ne pus jamais lui*

ôter cette fantaisie]") ([I had instructed and baptised him]; but [I was never able to dissuade him of this fantasy]). There is an opposition between the complexity of the subordinates that provide details on the slave's way of thinking and the simplicity of the independents that relate the actions of Père Labat, whose efforts had only led to failure.

[xxv] We are no longer defining habitation purely as an economic and social unit but as the adhesion, whether fully accepted by the missionary or imposed for the slaves, to the economic and social values – and now the ethical (Christian and colonialist) values – on which its existence is based.

[xxvi] André Thibault studies Père Labat's metalinguistic testimonies (2018) in the 1724 edition, among which one can see the priest's attempt to chart the forms of proto-Creole that he assimilates even more than the French. The passage describes a court case in which a slave reveals the paternity of a priest:

> The Judge did everything in his power to oblige [a black woman] to *se couper* [contradict herself] without success; she continued to stand firm, & as she was holding her child in her arms, she presented him to Frère *** telling him *toi papa li* (you his papa) & then she showed him to everyone there, claiming that he and Frère *** were like two peas in a pod […] (vol. 1 : 34).

[xxvii] See the analysis of the distribution of terms between "jargon" and "*baragouin*" especially by Guy Hazaël-Massieux (1996).

[xxviii] From the Spanish *tener mucho* "have a lot of" (see Thibault, 2018, footnote 3).

[xxix] From our point of view, the second phrase ("My negro […] *forbans*.") cannot rightly be described as indirect speech, as understood in the grammatical tradition (see Authier-Revuz, 1992 for an informed critique of the concepts) in that it includes that which should be excluded: the personal pronoun of the dialogue (*we*) and above all a strongly modalised term (*forban*). The passage in direct speech is also problematic. We are not able to ascertain that the following statement is a faithful transcription: "*Mon nègre dit : 'Allons-nous être pris par les forbans ?'* " [My negro said: 'Are we going to be taken by bandits?'].

[xxx] See especially the section "A portion of humanity" in which François Régent examines the baptism of slaves at the home of Père Pelleprat (2012, para. 2 et 3).

[xxxi] In this sense Père Labat is participating in establishing a fiction of the "Negro" described by Aurélia Michel (2020, p. 162-164).

[xxxii] The issue of the slaves' own parlance culminates in this famous page that Louis Élie-Médéric Moreau de Saint-Méry (1797) devotes to Creole, as well as the description of the celebrated song *Lisette quitté la plaine* attributed to Duvivier de la Mahautière in about 1757, of which he suggests a translation:

> I must now speak of the language that serves all the negroes living in the French colony of Santo Domingo. It is a corrupted French, into which are mingled several francised Spanish words, and in which marine terms have also found their place. It is easy to conceive that this language, which is only an old jargon, is often unintelligible in the mouth of an old African, and that it is much better spoken when learnt young. This jargon is extremely pleasant, and it is the inflection which provides most of the expression. It also has a certain genius (when one passes on this message to a Creole who believes he does not defile it), and it is certain that a European, no matter how much he practises, and no matter how long he resides in the Islands, will never master the finer points (vol. 1, p. 76).

The author's statement about Justin Girod-Chantrans is particularly acerbic:

> However, I am not ignorant of the fact that the Creole language has given rise to several criticisms. Among these is a very jaundiced one, documented in a work entitled: *Voyage d'un Suisse dans différentes colonies d'Amérique* [A Swiss man's journey to different colonies in the American Islands]. It is true that a surefire method for condemning it is to create a Swiss-Creole, and to conclude from this that the language is miserable. I agree with the author's opinion, but it must be admitted that his *baragouin* would only pass for Creole among our scholars, who introduce something similar into the theatres, and convince the Parisians that it is the true language. The Swiss man's supposed letter was only ever written by himself, or by somebody who wanted to enjoy themselves at the expense of his gullibility (p. 76).