Dark Phoenix: The Representation of Black Woman in Je Suis Martiniquais by Mayotte Capecia and Mon Examen De Blanc by Jacqueline Manicom

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DARK PHOENIX: THE REPRESENTATION OF BLACK WOMAN
IN JE SUIS MARTINIQUAISE BY MAYOTTE CAPECIA AND
MON EXAMEN DE BLANC BY JACQUELINE MANICOM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and
Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of French and Italian

by

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MANUSCRIPT THESES

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Abstract

Black women writers in the French West Indies were conspicuously absent from the literary canon during the negritude movement in the 1940's. Mayotte Capécia was one of the few who managed to write during this time. Capécia was criticized severely for her novel *Je suis Martiniquaise* by Frantz Fanon and accused of betraying her race because of the inter-racial love affair between her heroine and a French soldier. Jacqueline Manicom, her literary descendant who wrote *Mon Examen de Blanc* in 1972, was ostracized from the medical profession for her political beliefs concerning women’s rights.

This dissertation examines images and representation in *Je suis Martiniquaise* by Mayotte Capécia and *Mon Examen de Blanc* by Jacqueline Manicom. Chapter One explores the subject of autobiography and how one person’s story can represent a collective consciousness through the use of the autobiographical first person.
Chapter two discusses Capécia’s *Je suis Martiniquaise* and how she employs the autobiographical first person to subvert stereotypes found in the historical travelogues, specifically those of Lafcadio Hearn in *Two Years in the West Indies*. Amazingly, Capécia plucked characters and text straight from Hearn to create an autobiography not of herself, but of a sort of “everywoman.” It could have been any Martinican woman and she uses this to slyly criticize postcolonialism. She did it so well, that it has taken her critics over fifty years to scratch the surface and understand what she intended to do.

Chapter three focuses on Jacqueline Manicom’s *Mon Examen de Blanc*. She also employs the autobiographical first person, but in a more overtly militant novel. Her graphic images of the female body in the context of a gynecological wing of a hospital serve to promote her agenda of contraceptive rights for the women of her country.
Chapter 1

The Caribbean She-Male

Phoenix (mythology), legendary bird that lived in Arabia. According to tradition, the phoenix consumed itself by fire every 500 years, and a new young phoenix sprang from its ashes. In the mythology of ancient Egypt, the phoenix represented the sun, which dies at night and is reborn in the morning. Early Christian tradition adopted the phoenix as a symbol of both immortality and resurrection.¹

The phoenix is a mythological creature, but the symbolism it evokes is extremely powerful, especially in regards to black women. This image is the most noble, and the most romantic. Black women are tragic heroines of epic proportions. Having to overcome the burdens of class, race, and gender, black women often find themselves in untenable situations. Black women were victims of the slavery system where their sexuality was not their own, their womb brought profit to a master, and a hard life for themselves. Toiling for a pittance and raising children with little or no help did not leave much time for creative endeavors.

such as writing. A few writers, such as Mayotte Capécia managed to write during the negritude movement in the 1940's. She served as a predecessor to other writers such as Jacqueline Manicom, Simone Schwarz-Bart and Maryse Condé. Capécia was harshly criticized by Frantz Fanon for her novel *Je suis Martiniquaise*. He accused her of betraying her race and advocating the bleaching of her race. He totally ignores her as a critical theorist who denigrates the colonial system by subverting a master text. She re-envisions Lafcadio Hearn’s “Martinique Sketches” and uses the autobiographical first person narrative to break the silence of black women in the Caribbean. She presents the undereducated, underestimated, but undaunted “mule” of the Caribbean and emphasizes that she manages to transform herself and continue on in spite of adversity. In the myth of the Phoenix, there is death and rebirth. Death is also a metaphor for change. Whenever black women are faced with obstacles such as racism, sexism and classicism, they may suffer from a
figurative "death," where their lives may be altered, such as an unexpected pregnancy out of wedlock, economic woes, etc.

Death is an integral part of daily life. Washerwomen doing the laundry in the sometimes dangerous currents of the river risk being swept away or catching a deadly chill in the freezing waters. It is present in the folklore and the superstitions, i.e. zombis. Dying in childbirth and infant mortality are certainly nothing new. The analogy of the Phoenix and black women is valid, especially when Capécia, as a literary ancestor, was consumed by the fire of criticism, the black women writers did not die out forever. Descendants such as Jacqueline Manicom sprang from the ashes later on to continue the tradition.

In this dissertation, I will examine images and representation in *Je suis Martiniquaise* by Mayotte Capécia and *Mon Examen de Blanc* by Jacqueline Manicom. Because a person's history correlates directly with how one expresses oneself, Chapter 1 will explore the
subject of autobiography. Chapter 2 will discuss Capécia's *Je suis Martiniquaise*.² Capécia uses the technique of the autobiographical first person, which is a common technique used by West Indian women writers³, to subvert stereotypes found in the traditional travelogues depicting Martinique. One such travelogue writer, Lafcadio Hearn, gave Capécia plenty of fertile ground for her pen as she plucked characters and even some text verbatim from his 1890 travelogue, *Two Years in the West Indies*.⁴ Capécia subtly revises his master text, puts her own jazz spin on it, thereby reclaiming it. Chapter 3 will focus on *Mon Examen de Blanc*. Jacqueline Manicom also employs the autobiographical first person in her more overtly militant novel about a Guadeloupean woman doctor struggling to find her identity. Manicom uses the


⁴ Hearn, Lafcadio, *Two Years in the French West Indies*
concept of writing the body and adapts it to promote her political agenda of women’s rights and contraceptive freedom.

The Caribbean is defined geographically as a set of tropical island communities located in the archipelago which curves from the Greater Antilles and the Bahamas in the north to Trinidad and the Dutch Leeward Islands off the Venezuelan coast in the south, along with the continental coastal strip of the Guianas. My research will be limited to the scope of the French Caribbean islands, Martinique and Guadeloupe, to be exact. The region’s unique historical evolution from French colony to a French department is paramount to understanding its authors.

The region is very distinctive culturally, having its own social forms, ethnic groups, political institutions and values which distinguish it from the neighboring communities. All of the members of the Caribbean community have been molded and shaped by the same forces of conquest, colonization, and slavery. Even though each society bears the distinctive imprint
of whatever nationality colonized them, they still share characteristic problems which exist to this day—poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment, economic dependency, ethnic and social animosities, weak personal and social identity and political fragmentation.

Martinique, of volcanic origin and primarily mountainous, is the largest of the Windward Islands in the eastern Caribbean. In 1502, Christopher Columbus landed on Martinique. In 1635 the first settlers, who were French, arrived. With the introduction of sugarcane soon thereafter, African slaves were brought to work on the sugar plantations. Subsequently, control of the island alternated between the French and British, until 1814, when the French gained permanent control. In 1946, Martinique was granted department status.

Guadeloupe consists of a group of eight islands in the Lesser Antilles chain in the eastern Caribbean Sea and was also colonized by the French, who(in 1635)
instituted the slave system on their sugarcane plantations. Despite several periods of British occupation in the late 1700's and early 1800's, the islands were confirmed as French possessions in 1815.

An interesting feature that Caribbean communities share is the fact that European colonial powers created these communities from virtually virgin territories, that is after they exploited the indigenous Indian population into extinction. The new colonies were peopled by newcomers: ranging from the colonizer to the slave, the indentured servant to the sugar planter, or the Asiatic worker to the merchant. The colonizer blithely ignored the existence of any pre-Columbian tradition and custom to impose their culture on the colonized people, who lost whatever history they had had as well.\(^5\)

The Caribbean society was also a slave society until the abolitionist movement was successful in the

19th century. At the heart of this system was the production of sugarcane, an endeavor which required heavy capital investment and cheap labor (the West Indian planter and the imported African slave). One must note that black slave labor was preceded by white servitude, either unfree or contracted indentured labor. The "poor white," the "Red leg," dominated the socioeconomic history for most of the 16th and some of the 17th century, and the contracted Asian immigrant dominated a large part of the 19th century. But for more than three centuries, the labor force that served to form the present-day social dichotomy was the white master-black worker nexus. In those three centuries, approximately ten million Africans were captured and taken to the New World, with between 13-33% of them dying during transportation. From this point the black person became identified with the Caribbean economy, and the groundwork for the
The stigma felt by oppressed peoples which would become a significant aspect in the psyche of present day blacks in the Caribbean, was laid out.

The typical plantation ran along the military lines of an armed camp and was based on the psychology of terror. The danger of rebellion was ever present. In this society based on fear, the master did not attain this position through earned affection or inherited custom as in societies based on traditional feudalism—but by power of ownership alone. The slave, in turn, was legally an item of capital equipment only, not a laborer with personal status arising out of contract. Consequently, any sense of community based on shared values was impossible.⁶

The European conviction of the racial superiority of whites led to the institutionalization of racial prejudice in the Caribbean. Blacks were portrayed as lazy, sexually aggressive, lying, mentally and biologically stunted.

The white planter was characterized, on the other hand,

as the magnanimous master who rescued the poor wretch of humanity (the black slave) from the heathenish hell of Africa to the American heaven.

Therefore it is not surprising that those Caribbean societies that were least marked by the psychological scars of inadequacy and low self-esteem aggravated by poor national identity are those communities, such as the Cuban and the Haitian, which fought against their colonial oppressors.  

It is in these parameters that the black Caribbean woman writer finds herself. Doubly marginalized, doubly oppressed, doubly silent. Odds that are very difficult to overcome, but little by little, Caribbean women are healing this imposed laryngitis and flexing their newly found vocal chords to express their experiences from their point of view.

The number of black female Francophone writers has most certainly increased, along with all third world  

\[\text{Ibid, p. 8.}\]
female writers, with the advent of the feminist movement. This provokes questions surrounding the word "representation." What is representation? Can representation be wholly objective or does it depend on subjective interpretation? Does representation actually depict reality, or is it merely a reflection of reality, as in abstract painting; or is it a reflection of reality as a dominant culture would like it to be? If representation is a reflection of what is real, it is a reflection of what the representor is perceiving, thus it can and will vary. If the representation can and will vary, which representation is a true representation?

Societal norms may privilege one representation over the other, whether it is valid or not, leaving the less popular representation with a definite stigma, engendering perhaps an identity crisis on the part of the oppressed people.
Until recently, I had never really thought of race and color as being different. When I thought of "black," I included all of the various gradations of black skin, even though I was conscious of the differing attitudes towards lighter-skinned blacks and darker-skinned blacks. The discrimination that one observes within the black race underscores the identity crisis which is running rampant and causes blacks to be oppressive vis-à-vis other blacks regarding skin color. It is tragic to see someone's worth measured on the lightness or darkness of one's skin tone, for there are factions on both extremes.

How do I perceive myself, a member of the female gender and a member of the black race, in western society? This perception becomes problematic when personal factors are taken into consideration. First of all, I was born into a family where education and the work ethic are very important. My father and mother were the first from their respective families to finish
high school and college. My father enlisted in the army and was accepted into flight school in the early 1960's at a time in America's history when blacks were not in leadership positions. He was a spectator at Kennedy's inauguration; he was in Berlin in 1961 when the wall went up and he served two tours in Vietnam as a pilot. I grew up with adages such as "Do the best that you can, as long as you try, that's all anyone can ask of you;" "The head leads the tail, Sybil; You don't want to be the tail;" "Read anything that you want, but be sure you can separate reality from fiction." My father, a strict military disciplinarian, had a proverb for every situation. He instilled in me, along with my other siblings, the importance of setting goals and seeing them to fruition. There was nothing that we could not do if we tried hard enough.

Interestingly enough, I never gave much thought to racial differences as a small child, because I went to
a private school in Baton Rouge, La. (Southern University Laboratory School) where 99% of the students were black. I only had one white teacher in my eight years at the school, so naturally I assumed in my youthful logic that white people were in the minority. In my little microcosm they were indeed a minority. Of course, I was exposed to white people through the media and in limited social contexts in Baton Rouge, but distinguishing racial differences was not high on my priority list at the time. I wanted to be a doctor and I had an overwhelming passion for reading. Peer pressure barely touched me because I had had my own literary world to which I could escape, and because I was terribly intimidated by the mere thought of my father's reaction should I succumb to any kind of peer pressure.

Nevertheless, I do remember that some of my fellow students were light-skinned and some were dark-skinned, and that hair textures varied. I suppose that is the
reason I was not overly shocked on seeing a white person up close for the first time. My sixth grade teacher, Mr. Brown, was rather young then, thirtyish with dark blond hair and a beard. Apart from his blue eyes, his appearance was of no real consequence to me. A person has one of two reactions: either he is fascinated by that which is different or he is afraid. When one does not understand that which is different, instead of accepting the difference, one tends to make that difference inferior somehow. Such is the case of race relations in Western society. This problem is by no means one-sided. Each race develops its own preconceived notions, stereotypes, myths, etc. about the other. The falsity of such stereotypes does not prevent them from entrenching themselves into an entire nation's psyche. The stereotypes are perpetuated in the media, and the public usually sees only one facet of a diverse race.

And as we shall see later in my dissertation, it is also the case for gender relations.
Middle school was my first experience with a more integrated school because I attended public school for the first time. This junior high school had a reputation for being "rough," and I suffered the first pangs of isolation and alienation. I never experienced any problems of a racial nature, but it was readily apparent, to myself and to my peers, that I was different. I was dubbed "the smart girl" who talked "proper." I had no idea that I sounded pretentious to my fellow blacks; I had merely adopted the speech patterns of my parents. As a consequence, teachers loved me, insuring alienation from my peers and long solitary hours in the school library.

I attended Baton Rouge Magnet High School from 1979-1983, during which time the court ordered that all schools in the parish be integrated. It is amazing when I look back in retrospect, because the integration of schools which started in the 1950's in Arkansas took two decades to finally make it to Baton Rouge.
Consequently, many black students were accepted at Baton Rouge High over other students who may have already been on the school's notoriously long waiting list. Still the ratio was 80% white and 20% black (Of that 20%, most of the students were female). Perhaps one reason for the low black ratio was the fact that BRHS had no organized sports teams. I do not mean to imply that Blacks are better athletically than academically, but that was the overwhelming response of my black and white friends when asked why they did not attend magnet schools.

I continued to be the "smart girl" who talked "proper," but there was a larger group of girls with whom I could relate.

The event that served to establish my "Otherness" was, strangely enough, supposed to laud my outstanding academic achievement. In high school, students take a battery of achievement tests to determine their aptitude and suitability for college. I took the PSAT
and the SAT and scored relatively high. I was named a National Merit Scholarship semifinalist and finalist. Naturally I was proud of this distinction until I realized that there were separate categories for whites and blacks. I was recognized as an Outstanding Negro student and the scores needed to qualify for the National Merit semifinalist were lowered for the black students. My ego, understandably, suffered a blow. Feelings of insecurity and inadequacy surfaced subconsciously. Was I really good, or was someone doing me a favor to make up for 300 years of slavery? Is this why educated Blacks must work twice as hard at everything they do, to prove, if only to themselves, that they are worthy of all the accolades they receive? Even though I am normally a self-confident person, aware of my good qualities as well as the bad, it is difficult to remain 100% confident when society does not expect you to be as good as the next guy because of your race or your sex.
Woe unto the educated black woman in the South.
The American educational dream. Get a degree. Get a
good job. Get a career. What price do you pay for all this? Isolation. This isolation can be racial, sexual,
and economic. In my chosen discipline of French
literature, the number of black American male
academicians is small. I attended a predominantly white
institution of higher learning, in a department where I
was the only black graduate student for five years. I
love my department and I have had absolutely no
problems adjusting and succeeding in the department but
I must admit to moments of bone-numbing insecurity
which I gradually realized were experienced by every
graduate student. Isolation. All of my immediate
colleagues are white. I associate with the people from
my department because we have similar experiences,
though I have numerous social contacts outside of
academia. I hate the looks I sometimes get from other
Blacks who might assume that I am "sucking up to
whitey" and looking down on them as inferior. I am sick to death of explaining my motivations to other people for the company I keep. It galls me to let what other people think make me question my own motivations for whom I date, or whom I have for friends. I hate the "stick to your own kind" mentality so prevalent in the South. I am sick of being marginalized because of the way I speak. You cannot imagine how many times I have been asked where I was from when meeting people for the first time. "You can't be from here, not the way you talk." (Although I have lived in the South for over twenty-five years). I have even been accused of not being black enough by well-intentioned though misguided whites, especially those in pedagogy, who feel so guilty over the oppression caused by their ancestors that they overcompensate by aping so-called "black vernacular" and commiserating over life in the ghetto. Being raised in a middle-class two-parent family, with my father being a lawyer and my mother a teacher, I
shattered a lot of people's preconceptions of "black people." While I enjoy shattering stereotypes immensely, it is fatiguing. I have found that one cannot change attitudes overnight. For the most part, I am deemed an exception to the rule.

It is discouraging that some people feel that they have to "explain" me. "Sybil is very intelligent" or "She is different, she is smart." I often feel a sentiment akin to that of Frantz Fanon when someone gave as an explanation for him: "Oh he's not Black, he's Brown." Being black is still equated with being bad, evil or lacking intellectually. It is indeed a sad testament when a person is not given the benefit of the doubt; intelligent until proven unintelligent. But as a white friend staunchly submitted, I have the right to be average or even below average without it reflecting badly on my worth as human being in society.

Why do I have to be extremely intelligent to achieve even a modicum of acceptability?

Love is Blind; Color Blind, That is...

It is funny how we live in the land of the free and the home of the brave, but we are not free to love as we please in this society. At least, not without repercussions of some sort. It never ceases to amaze me how total strangers feel the need to judge my personal life, or my motivations. What happened to that great melting pot? That veritable gumbo of cultures? It is fine as long as the roux does not get too dark, eh cher!?

Oh, I did not set out to be the interracial spokesperson or anything like that, but it was not until I found myself faced with the reality of liking a person of another race that I saw the stupidity of negative attitudes and the futility of one person trying to change them. The day I realized that I had romantic feelings for a man of another race was indeed
disconcerting. He was not my type, or what I thought was my type. He was handsome, but I had always envisioned “tall and dark” to go with this profile. So imagine my surprise when I discovered my redhead. He was articulate, intelligent, deep, moody and funny. He is still today a very good friend and I have never regretted crossing the racial barrier to get to know this person.

The problem? We were just dating and our families immediately went into a frenzy. Oh my God! Are you going to get married? What about the children? What will they be? On and on... Our relationship ended because it could not bear the brunt of certain realities: careers, commitment and the stress of being in an interracial relationship. Nevertheless, I learned something important about myself; I could weather the storm of intolerance. For me, love is blind (color blind that is) and I vowed to admire and enjoy all that mankind had to offer.
There are, of course, numerous parallels between the black American woman's experience and that of her Caribbean sister.

So many negative images to overcome: promiscuous, lazy, inarticulate, unsuccessful, etc. Even in the 1990's, it is painfully obvious that negative perceptions are hard to overcome. The media has helped as well as hindered our perceptions of minorities. Even the minorities themselves start to believe the propaganda... Why people are still surprised when they meet me and find that I am intelligent, multilingual, well-read, etc. I have black women friends in widely divergent fields who are just as accomplished: Angela, my irreverent, shoot-from-the-hip friend who sings opera. She makes no apologies for who she is or whom she loves and voices many things that even I hesitate to...

Michelle, my oldest friend who succeeds in corporate America. She knows what it is like to be underestimated
because of race, gender, size, age etc. and the triumph of proving everyone wrong.

Symil, my baby sister. Raised in the shadow of two older sisters, she nonetheless emerged a strong confident young woman who embraces her cultural heritage, but respects the differences in others. Mom, who grew up in a time when intelligent black women could only be nurses or teachers. She faces life with a quiet, elegant strength and dignity. She has been married to the same man for 36 years and gleefully contradicts the stereotypical representation of the crumbling black family.

Susan, my sister, the chemical engineer, who succeeds in a male-dominated profession, blithely wreaking havoc on preconceived notions.

Robin, whose funky ethnicity suits her so well. She is a poet, playwright, actress and a kindred soul. She taught theater at the University of Illinois at
Champaign, Urbana and is currently lighting up New York with her spiritual and political passion. She vents her emotions in her poetry, and after a strangely unsettling racial incident that I had one Halloween, she captured my rage and sadness perfectly.

For someone who was raised in the South, I had never really faced an overtly racial situation. In the South, we know that there is racism, but we are oh so polite about it. Must be part of that Southern hospitality. They only hurl racial epithets behind your back.

On this particular Halloween 1991, I was preparing to celebrate an anniversary with a boyfriend. We had had our first meeting at a Halloween gathering 2 years prior and I was going to be a black Southern Belle again (what delicious irony), complete with parasol, long white gloves, dress, hat, etc. We decided to meet at a local bar in town famous for their Halloween block parties. Louisiana was experiencing some tense times
because a former Ku Klux Klan member, David Duke, was running for Congress. Previous hidden prejudices began to manifest themselves more publicly. Anyway, there I was, resplendent in my antebellum costume expecting to have a great time and alone in a sea of white faces, when out of the crowd comes a man in a white sheet! This was not Casper the friendly ghost, but Kenny from the KKK!! It all became surreal after that. To my right, a man dressed in a Nazi Gestapo uniform. To my left, a group of white men dressed in black face and garbed as Tarzan-movie rejects. To say that I was shocked and appalled is the height of euphemism. The sea of white faces suddenly made me feel alone and defenseless. I started to brazen the whole thing out with my typical aplomb when I heard two drunken frat-rats exclaim "Look, there's a real live nigger there!" Now, I cannot even begin to explain the pain I felt at this moment, having never been called a "nigger" to my face. These people did not know me from
Adam; my background, my character, my personality, nothing. Nevertheless they sought to reduce me to something hardly worth considering; and all because of the color of my skin. I was sorely tempted to violence that evening, but my principles (and my high-heeled shoes and lack of reinforcements) stopped me. As I could not find my boyfriend in the crowd, I decided to make a strategic retreat. That incident still rankles... Robin was so perturbed about the prejudices that come out when people are "masked" that she wrote the following poem:

Halloween on the Bayou
(For Sybil)

All Hallows Eve
The jackal's reprieve
A gleesome gruesome night

A black woman jaunts
Into a redneck haunt
And beholds a fearsome sight

Whites in black face
Besieging and base
And a smiling white-sheeted knight
One drunken patron sneers
"There's a real live nigger here!"
And hides his true appetite

For in truth he lusts
After her, the unjust
Though he guffaws at the sight

Of a pretty black face
her bust teasingly traced
In a bodice a little too tight

A black southern belle
Never can tell
What demons she might excite

As her eyes scan the crowd
She remains proud
Though the riffraff are spoiling for a fight

"Where is he?" She thinks
And "Boy, does this stink."
Bearing up with all her might

"Where is he?" says she
"Where can he be?"
Her love lost in this pack impolite

Clicking her heels out the door
Tolerating it no more
She beats a hasty retreat. She's bright

All Hallow's Eve
The demons conceive
The evil of man and a flight
Straight into hell
The racists will sail
To pay for the sins of this night.

—Robin Small-McCarthy—

Racial prejudice is not confined to whites, mind you. There is an intricate hierarchy of discrimination within the black race in the United States. Because the dominant beauty ideal is light skin, thin bodies, straight hair, narrow hips and little noses, Blacks who came as close as possible to this ideal were privileged over their darker-hued brethren. They usually only socialized with and married their “own kind,” even going so far as to design tests to screen out the undesirables from their elite clique.

In the “paper bag test”, a person was allowed to join a certain elite social club only if their skin was

as light or lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, a person had to pass a fine-toothed comb easily through their hair to gain membership to a particular club.

This practice left an indelible mark on the race. The message was crystal clear: You are inferior if you cannot pass for white. Even today, lighter skinned blacks are more likely to be on magazine covers, television and in the movies. Dark skin, big behinds, and flatter noses are hidden from the dominant culture and relegated to "black" magazines. That is why there is tension and intolerance. The media gives few positive role models. When they do, it always comes across as an exceptional person overcoming his/her natural inferiority to become a productive member of society. Blacks are obligated to be bi-cultural if they want to function in the dominant culture, but whites are not.
Being a linguist, I can see the beauty in something different, but American society is notoriously ethnocentric.

Films have treated the identity crisis of Blacks in some notable films such as *Pinky* and *Imitation of Life*. The latter film was originally made in 1934 with Claudette Colbert and later in 1959 with Lana Turner. While the main story line revolved around a white woman and her daughter, the most compelling and tragic side story involved the black maid and her daughter. The daughter was so light-skinned that she was always mistaken for white, then heckled and shunned when her black heritage was discovered. Needless to say, the daughter grew up ashamed of her mother and her race. She rejects both to pass for white at a Northern college and to pursue relationships with white men. This filial rejection ultimately destroyed the mother’s will to live.
The daughter realized too late her love for her mother during the final funeral scene. Nothing was really resolved in the movie. One never finds out if the daughter continues to pass for white somewhere else or if she accepts her lot in life as a black woman, but the movie is remarkable for dealing with such an inflammatory topic. Even today, the question of identity is still a volatile issue among African-Americans. I only use the expression "African-American" because it is the politically correct thing to say. I agree that the use of certain phrases and language can and will be insulting to particular groups, be they racial, religious or ethnic. Nevertheless, our society has, in my opinion, taken a good thing and gone over the edge. Of course I understand the insulting connotations of "nigger" and "colored" (which makes one feel like a crayon), but I have problems with African-American. For me an African-American is a person born in Africa but who
became a naturalized American citizen. To call myself an African-American would exclude everything else in my family tree. Blacks in America cannot escape the fact that they are likely to have white ancestors in their family trees, as well as others such as Native American, Asian, etc. No other ethnic group is as discernibly different as blacks are; the obvious skin color difference makes it most difficult to blend into the melting pot. Anyone can see that I have African ancestry by looking at me. Culturally, I am no more African than David Duke. I am an American who is black. People are so afraid of offending one another that they do not communicate, so they cannot learn to accept one another’s differences. We spend too much time labeling each other and reducing each other into trendy buzz words and catch phrases that we forget to explore the depths and examine each other’s character. Yes, we are different, but therein lies the beauty.
Seeking to render everything transparent obviously has not gotten us very far, so why not give opacity\textsuperscript{11} a chance?

Before launching into a discussion of the representation of black woman, the complexities of the word "representation" need to be considered. Representation may be defined as:

(1) the action of rendering something logical by way of a figure, a symbol, or a sign.
(2) an image, figure, symbol or sign which represents a phenomenon or an idea.
(3) the action of reproduction by means of art, action of evoking something through language.

These definitions from Webster's dictionary provoke questions that need to be addressed before a viable treatment of the subject can commence.

First of all, if the action of rendering something logical is representation, then by what criteria is Glissant, Edouard, Poetique de la Relation, Paris, Gallimard, 1990.

\textsuperscript{11}
something deemed logical? And does it follow that all representation is logical or based solely on factual information? The concept of representation appears to be quite arbitrary, dependent upon the subject’s viewpoint. Therefore, are there different types of representation? For the sake of discussion, I posit that there are at least three: Positive, Negative and Objective. It is evident that any representation tends to be biased in some way and finding “objectivity” in any representation is difficult at best. No matter how objective we want to be, human beings bring all the emotional, psychological, physical, educational baggage to any and all representations. Even saying that a representation is positive or negative provokes debate. What is considered positive for an individual or group may be negative for another. Keeping this in mind, it would stand to reason that a particular group of people would best articulate a realistic representation of themselves. For example, one would expect black people
to depict themselves and their experience in the most realistic fashion. There are problems with this assertion. A particular group may not be able to depict themselves realistically due to self-deception and an unconscious belief in the representations imposed on them by another group. In the case of female representation, the predominance of men in the literary canon serves to suppress the voices of a significant portion of a people and therefore there is no distinct and clear-cut image of the female from her own perspective. Representations themselves are constantly perpetuated. There are numerous representations of women in French Caribbean literature: the mother, the ancestor, the militant, the peasant, the lover, etc. It does not matter who writes about a particular representation, since the representation itself remains the same. What does change, however, is the writer's treatment of said representation.
How is the black woman reflected through representations? Is she the superwoman who maintains her strength of character no matter what the circumstances are? Is she, who is at the same time nurturer to children and men, breadwinner (or at least co-breadwinner) and domestic goddess extraordinaire, the glue that holds her culture together? There is no one definitive image of black woman, nevertheless the above are just some of the more typical representations imposed on the black woman historically and culturally. She is forced to accept a set of representations imposed by a male-dominated society as a guideline for her behavior. Whether she adheres to these representations is irrelevant, because she is ultimately judged by them.

I feel that some representations from both the Caribbean and European societies synthesized to form what are now common representations of the black woman.
The dominant image of the black woman in general has been that of a strong, solid and enduring bundle of femininity. Traditional female roles emphasize the importance of family, whether it be African, Caribbean or black American families. Childbearing and child rearing fall into the woman's realm and she reigns supreme.

Western society labels the black woman as being doubly inferior as she belongs to two worlds which have always been perceived as, according to the Western value system, historically inferior: The black race and the female gender. In this value system blackness connotes that which is evil and negative. Therefore black woman connotes a certain lewdness and perverse sexuality that tends to intimidate and yet, strangely enough, titillate. Representation is a complex concept, as there seems to be a thin line between what is positive and what is negative.
I would like to posit that the occidental tendency to view as evil, negative, blank, and void anything that is black is opposed dramatically in Caribbean literature.

Unfortunately, the Caribbean has been inundated with its colonizers’ preconceived representations of the “Other’s” so-called inferiority, so that the black cannot help but be fundamentally affected. He constantly strives, for better or for worse, to achieve success through “whiteness.” By this “whiteness” I mean utilizing avenues traditionally open only to those whose skin was actually white, such as education.

Nevertheless, representations of black characters in Caribbean literature, male and female, maintain a certain dignity and hope not found in representations by Occidental writers.

En réalité, dans les couches populaires de la société antillaise, la femme possède un statut
particulier qui merite d’être souligné. Un proverbe antillais déclare: La femme est une chataigne, l’homme est un fruit à pain.¹²

Equating human beings metaphorically with nature and its elements is a common technique among Caribbean writers, who feel an undeniable connection with the earth and its rhythms. In the previous citation the woman is a chestnut and the man is a breadfruit, natural representations which reflect the tropical world of the Antilles. The chestnut tree and the breadfruit tree resemble one another, and their respective fruits are somewhat similar. But when the chestnut comes to maturity, it falls from the tree and delivers a great number of little fruits with hard skins, while the breadfruit, which does not contain any fruit, transforms itself into a yellowish puree which the sun renders foul-smelling. This powerful metaphor highlights the respective roles of men and women in

Caribbean society, privileging the resilience of the woman over the man. The Caribbean woman is admired for her capacity for resistance, for her ability to get out of the most difficult situations and turn them to her advantage.

She had an unmistakable faith in life. When things went wrong she would say nothing, no one, would ever wear out the soul God had chosen out for her and put in her body.\textsuperscript{13}

There is very little information on the black Francophone woman’s role in literature or her struggles for identity, while extensive research has been conducted on her male counterpart. Initially, research was concentrated on French-speaking African women and men. In the last ten years, there has been more interest in the French West Indian Women writers. The reason for this phenomenon of silence and absence is

due largely to the role which women play in the Caribbean society. Women traditionally did not enter into literary arenas because it took too much time away from their families. Nevertheless, the Caribbean woman is no stranger to working outside the home. In fact, she has always been groomed to take on the responsibility for providing for her family, emotionally as well as financially, due to the instability of the man's employment. This work history has given the Caribbean woman access to money, served to increase her now mythic independence, as well as increase her power and standing in the community. Unfortunately, the influences of colonialism create conflict in the relationships between the Caribbean man and woman. While the Caribbean woman is in many cases the sole financial support of the family, the image of the man as breadwinner still persists. The Western concept of the nuclear family exists in the Caribbean, but it is not the norm.
Marriage is still seen as the ideal situation, but common law unions and visiting relationships are more prevalent.

The European concept of the nuclear family with its ideology of patriarchy and male dominance, the woman centered matriarchal type, and the extended family type, legacies from African and East Indian cultures respectively, all exist simultaneously in the region. Single parent families and female-headed households are realities for many women at all levels of Caribbean society. Family members do not all necessarily reside in the same household, and the concept of family often goes beyond blood relations and kin to include close friends and neighbors.  

Problems of representation clearly arise in terms of male-female relations. Women are taught to be self-sufficient and independent from a very young age, regardless of a male presence in their lives. Nevertheless, it is not only desirable, but important

to have a male partner. Contradictorily enough, in the male-female relationship the man is dominant and the heretofore independent woman is not free to do as she wishes, but must defer to her mate. On the other hand, marriage is believed to give women added independence, status and responsibility.

Young men are placed in an equally conflicting situation. For the most part, the boys are not socialized in the same manner as the girls. Therefore, they are forced to depend on the mothers and other female relatives for the survival strategies that they lack. Unfortunately, they have internalized the concept of male dominance, which is perhaps a legacy from the colonial period. It is not uncommon that the man may harbor a deep resentment towards women for that dependence. This resentment can easily erupt into violence as the Caribbean man and woman struggle to adapt to their conflicting roles. This cycle of confusion and conflicting expectations perpetuates
itself in the next generation, ensuring damaged self-images in the Caribbean woman as well as the man. These double standards and ambivalent attitudes inevitably affect the self-image and sense of worth of the Caribbean woman.\textsuperscript{15}

Now the image of the woman as a chestnut and the man as a breadfruit becomes even more significant. The black woman and the black man are at first similar, equally oppressed and subjugated. As the black woman nears maturity, she is capable of bearing fruit with "hard skins." This represents her ability to produce children who have what it takes to endure the hardships they will face in life due to their skin color and to perhaps surpass their present poverty and oppression to achieve some sort of racial harmony; the black woman has the ability to manufacture hope for the future of her people.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, p. 8.
The black man, on the other hand, enters maturity without the ability to bear fruit in the most literal sense, feeling a certain bitterness towards the woman for attaining such an illustrious position.

For all her independence and enduring spirit, the black woman falls victim to a lack of self-esteem due in part to the contradictory nature of her relationships with men. Self-sufficient by economic necessity, she is, nonetheless, taught to defer to her man in everything. Evidently, social, political and economic factors of Caribbean society impede the development of the black woman's identity, and the representation of these impediments through the representation of black women in Caribbean literature will provide an interesting discussion. In Caribbean literature there are representations of women as interpreted by male writers. It would be a futile gesture to privilege one interpretation over the other, for they are both simply images, and are by nature
subjective. What will be important to note, is the
difference, if any, between the two interpretations,
and what the implications are relative to a better
understanding between the sexes. In novels written by
black Caribbean women, the representation of woman is
in place and it tends to be problematic for the female
writer. Representations are explored and commented
upon. Male writers have, of course, representations of
woman in place, be it positive or negative, but they
are not problematic in the storyline.

Caribbean literature frequently explores the
themes of alienation and exile in reference to the
Caribbean man, who is cut off from his history due to
slavery, and who is experiencing the oppression of the
colonizers. We are shown the tragic results of this
oppression, be it political, economic, or
psychological, through the Civil Rights Movement in the
United States, the Anti-apartheid Movement in South
Africa, etc.
Violence seems to be his only recourse, however futile, to the intolerable oppression. This violence can be directed either at the oppressor or at a loved one.

Throughout all of this, the image of black Caribbean woman endures, but at what cost to her own identity? The black woman seems to go through periods where she is relatively self-assured and confident. Then she suffers traumatic misfortunes so great that she "dies" spiritually. After an adjustment period, this black phoenix rises from the smoldering ashes of her grief and pain, attaining a new level of self-awareness and ready to endure any obstacle set before her.

However tall trouble is, man must make himself taller still, even if it means making stilts... My little ember, she'd whisper, if you ever get on a horse, keep good hold of the reins so that it's not the horse that rides you...Behind one pain there is another.
Sorrow is a wave without end. But the horse mustn’t ride you, you must ride it.¹⁶

This rejuvenating quality of the black woman seems to be the result of, ironically, Western socialization. Women are allowed to be sensitive, with the societal freedom to exorcise her pain through tears or whatever weapon she has in her emotional arsenal. Man, on the other hand, has to maintain a semblance of machismo at all costs. His feelings of frustration at not being able to heal himself spiritually are usually acted on loved ones, resulting in wife beating, rape, etc. The man further aggravates this interior anguish and perpetuates the cycle of poverty by drinking excessively in the unsuccessful attempt to suppress his inner pain.

The black woman seems to find solace in nature, and she is frequently described in literature as having a close connection with the Earth. Woman and Earth are Schwarz-Bart, Simone Bridge of Beyond, p. 72.
analogous in the sense that they endure no matter how much they are mistreated. Of course there are limits to their endurance, and occasionally they will go through periods of dormancy while they heal themselves. Eventually though, they reappear as good as new. The mysteries of the Earth are similar to those of women. Mysteries of life and death which exclude the man. Man has spent too much time trying to understand the differences of woman, which cause him to suffer bouts of insecurity. When he is insecure, he lashes out at the woman, who true to form, patiently endures. Naturally the question that comes to my mind is what does the man do when the woman no longer wants to patiently endure, despite any physical disadvantage she may have? This only enrages the man further and he must eventually leave and find other women whom he can outwardly control. Even if he controls the body of the woman, he never truly controls the soul, a soul that, even if destroyed by men's weaknesses, can rise from
the ashes of its destruction and live again. Thus the black woman herself serves as a synecdoche for the entire black race, probably due to her principal role in the reproduction of her race. Her ability to beat the overwhelming odds bodes well for the survival of her people.

Though there has been much research on the black man's struggle for identity in the Caribbean, the Caribbean woman's voice has been silent. There is a need to give the American public greater exposure to these women, especially as the Caribbean woman's struggle reflects the struggles of black women everywhere as well as paralleling that of any oppressed group.

The journey towards self-awareness is difficult for the black woman as she must face and deal with all the preconceived notions of her gender as well as her race. The white woman in the plantation system was not a practical role model, as this woman was supposed to
be delicate, fragile, generally incapable, as well as sexually innocent. This image of physical and mental helplessness was a luxury that black women could ill-afford. Nevertheless, this reflection of "womanhood" invades the black woman's subconscious, preying on her psyche and eventually affecting her self-esteem.

Being a black woman requires a lot of inner strength because life entails a continual effort to ascertain one's role in Western society. Are black women exotic, mysterious, evil, voluptuous sex goddesses who lead men astray with the sensuous undulations of massive hips, or are they the backbone of their race, compassionate and dedicated to childbearing and child rearing while at the same time working full-time to secure some sort of financial security for their families? Through all of this, she must contend with the
resentment and even the violent behavior of her male counterpart whose identity has been threatened by the usurpations of his rightful place in society by the white colonizer.

The black woman bears, in my opinion, too much of the blame for the man’s "emasculaton" in western society. Black women have often been accused of attaining their supposed strength and independence at the expense of black men. Many black women do what they have to in order to protect their families and their motivations are almost always family-oriented. If she knows nothing else, she knows how to survive. She can suffer abject humiliation, physical violence, mental cruelty, only to emerge eventually hopeful and optimistic. Why? Some irrepressible spark of hope that things will be better for the children.
"Telumée, little crystal glass, what have you got inside that body of yours to make an old Negress's heart dance like this?"¹⁷

I do not wish in any way to belittle the black man's experience, as it stands in direct relation to that of the black woman. Nevertheless, literary works done by male writers have been given the most attention. It is natural for male writers to have more fleshed out, three dimensional male characters, while resorting to stock generalizations for the female ones. They are drawing from their own personal experiences and these experiences are valid.

Female writers do the same thing, but there are not enough French Caribbean women stepping forward to describe themselves. In addition, women who would put their experiences down on paper are hampered by the everyday responsibilities of home and family. This is changing, of course, and while some representations of

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 45.
black women occur, this is not always the case. In fact, one can safely assert that the very representation of black woman is a representation. An image superimposed on her and to which she is constantly comparing herself or striving desperately to emulate.

In order to preserve some vestige of self-esteem, many black men have to perceive themselves as the dominant one in their relationships with black women. After all the black man is dominant over the black woman, so many black men, themselves victims of the imaginary, feel that they will be less of a man if they do not prove their "dominance." Economic dominance not being a viable alternative to most black men, they frequently turn to their greater physical strength to dominate black women.

A feminist reading of Caribbean literature is feasible except for the fact that I feel obligated to qualify "feminist." Feminist theory was established
without taking the black woman’s perspective into
consideration, which is ironic due to the history of
independence and dominance (in limited areas) under
their belts. Alice Walker’s term “womanism” tends to be
more indicative of what I propose to do. A womanist is
a “black feminist, or feminist of color...committed to
survival and wholeness of entire people, male
and female...[but who] loves herself. Regardless.”¹⁸

Negritude, Oppression and the Whispered Revolution

Take, for example, the negritude movement, whose
objective was to present a more honest depiction of
black people and to dispel long-standing stereotypes.
Pioneers such as Leopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire
sought to develop a renewed awareness concerning the
state of being black as well as the acceptance of one’s
destiny, history, culture, and a sense of

responsibility towards the past. Is the state of being a Negro an inherent attribute which one is born with, a characteristic that singles out specific chromosomes arbitrarily or is it an attribute which is imposed on one group of people by another? Physiologically, we know that the pigmentation in black skin was an adaptation to the hot climate in which they lived. By the same token, the deformation of the blood cell (sickle cell trait) saved the black man from diseases such as yellow fever and malaria.

But from a psychological aspect, the question of "negritude" demands elaboration. Is it limited to the color of one's skin, or is it a condition which can manifest itself in any oppressed group?

The concept of negritude is inextricably linked to the Martinican writer/poet Aimé Césaire, although he was not the only person to conceptualize the word.
The word was created from a latinization of a derogatory word for black (nègre) with a positive suffix. This word appeared for the first time, in his Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal:

Ma negritude n’est pas une pierre, sa surdité ruée contre la clameur du jour.
Ma negritude n’est pas une taie d’eau morte sur l’oeil mort de la terre
Ma negritude n’est ni une tour ni une cathedrale.  

Negritude, according to Césaire, is a response to the perennial problem of the alienated position of blacks in history. At one time, blacks lived on their own land, their own country. Then historical events made slaves or colonized people of blacks. Consequently they were without a present, without a future, without even their own language.

Being "un nègre" is not necessarily restricted to skin color. It is the recognition of occupying an inferior status: that of an exploited second class citizen. In the colonized society people live with the constant fear of losing all that they can call their own: their religion, their language, their very identity.²⁰

This fear of identity loss is merely one of the characteristics of colonized peoples. Oppression, in general, is marked by feelings of desperation and impotence, where one sees oneself as stagnant, limited and replaceable. People become oppressed when they have been forced, whether subtly or with apparent malice, to finally succumb to the insidious process which continually saps one's hope and which reverses the desire to become something. This process, which often perpetuates itself as well as reinforces itself,

²⁰ Vallières, Pierre, Les Nègres Blancs d'Amérique, describes an ethnic group in danger of losing its cultural identity, and the violent extremes to which the author went to preserve his birthright.
creates human beings who have learned to see themselves and their world as foreign. The ultimate result in such a situation is a group of individuals who are in fact alienated from a society in which they remain, though marginally, a member. They live in parallel but non-reciprocal universes.

Oppression, in a nutshell, is a condition of being in which the past and the future meet in the present and stop there. It is having the feeling that one has been surpassed and forgotten since birth. The very identity of these oppressed peoples is dependent on exterior forces who can conjure up at best an approximate and mediocre image of the oppressed group.\textsuperscript{21}

Once the oppressed group becomes conscious of its minority status, there are of course some psychological consequences. The term cultural fatigue is used by anthropologists to describe symptoms suffered by the

oppressed such as auto-punition, masochism, auto-devaluation, depression, lack of enthusiasm and vigor. Cultural fatigue was first applied to the situation of the French Canadians, but it has far reaching applications. This type of cultural fatigue manifests itself in any group which can be construed as an oppressed group, whether by race, gender, or ethnic background.

Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, presents the reader with a Negro psyche warped by the “superior” white culture. Fanon begins with the concept of blackness, and the fact that black men consider themselves superior. Next, he explores the modern negro and his attitudes in the black world drawing on his own experiences and observations as a negro and a psychiatrist in the Antilles. Even though the book argues passionately against a system where the black man experiences such a deep inferiority complex, and is overcome by the desire to be black, one cannot help but
be troubled by Fanon's hypocritical hostility towards black women. The black Antillean woman is as much affected by the white man's perception of black as the black man. White is privileged over black. White is the color of success and survival. Black women are drawn to white men in Fanon's society for the exact reason that black men are drawn to white women: self-affirmation. If the white man loves a black woman, then the black woman feels herself to be a valid entity; she gains acceptance, if only vicariously. If a white woman can love a black man in spite of the "hideous" black skin, then he can find salvation. Blacks subconsciously incorporate all the pejorative conceptions of their race, seek to escape them, and will even transfer these prejudices on members of their own race.

Fanon criticizes Mayotte Capécia's *Je suis Martiniquaise* as being "cut-rate merchandise, a sermon
in praise of corruption."²² He also accuses the Martinican women of trying to whiten the race in order to save it. Success is measured in the lightness of the skin of the woman's chosen mate.

The number of sayings, proverbs, petty rules of conduct that govern the choice of a lover in the Antilles is astounding. It is always essential to avoid falling back into the pit of niggerhood, and every woman in the Antilles, whether in a casual flirtation or in a serious affair, is determined to select the least black of men. (47)

Looking towards white men or anyone for that matter for self-valorization is rather pathetic, but typical among blacks as they are constantly bombarded by "evidence" that they are inferior. Nevertheless, it is necessary to reproach Fanon's total condemnation of the black woman, when the black man is guilty of the same crime.

Fanon himself admits to wanting to become suddenly "white," i.e. worthy, good, clean, etc; Who better than a white woman to prove that a black man is worthy of white love? It seems as if Fanon rationalizes the black

man's relationship with the white woman as a victory over the oppressor. The black man is darkening the white man's race with his involvement with the white woman. While the black man becomes a sort of warrior in the fight against the white man, the black woman is designated a prostitute and a traitor.

It is no wonder that Fanon seems to be sending mixed signals. In order to succeed in Western society, the black person constantly faces a peculiar dilemma: In order to succeed, it is necessary to assimilate. It is impossible for obvious reasons to assimilate completely, and therein explains the continuation of racism. Nevertheless, it is possible to assimilate intellectually and eventually economically. Do educated blacks lose their ethnic identity? Must they "sell out" in order to succeed? By selling out, I mean parroting so-called characteristics of the established society. The notion of someone selling out their race merely by educating oneself and striving for success is sheer
lunacy. It would mean subscribing to the stereotype that one race is inferior to another and that all members of a particular race act in a certain way. "You have nothing in common with real negroes. You are not black, you are 'extremely brown.'"(69)

Unfortunately, these stereotypes are so ingrained into the minds of black people that they believe in them subconsciously or consciously. This makes them as prejudiced, if not more so against those blacks who refuse to conform to a stereotype based on the fears of people who condemn that which they do not understand.

Ketu H. Katrak points out Fanon's failure to consider the double oppression of the colonized woman, and that his limited analysis is generalized from the experiences of bourgeois women and neglected the characteristics of the peasant working-class woman.

Although Fanon's advocacy of a violent decolonization that breaks economic and cultural ties to the colonizer should lead to a healthier post-colonial society than one that continues to endure political and
cultural imperialism, he does not analyze the double oppression—racist and sexist—of the colonized woman. She has to struggle against her own men's patriarchal attitudes as well as male colonizers sexual and economic exploitation. Although Fanon acknowledges that colonialist racism leads to alienation and inferiority among natives in general, he is much more critical of the native black woman who aimed at "whitening the race" through marriage or cohabitation.  

Fanon's notion that colonialism is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence is interesting to consider as it concerns women. Imagine that man is the colonizer and woman is the native. For Fanon, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon. The colonizer utilizes physical, cultural and psychic violence in order to create the native in the image of a brute (or a comparable representation in terms of woman).

Once this dehumanization is established, treating natives as brutes (or the comparable representation in terms of woman) is a logical albeit devastating corollary.

The only way a woman can escape or at least rectify the representations which govern her destiny is through the use of violence.

Given the colonizer’s initial violence, the native in the decolonization process must use violence in order to establish his human identity. The native creates himself/herself through violence. Decolonization brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men and with it a new language and a new humanity.\(^\text{24}\)

This violence does not necessarily have to be physical. It could simply be a matter of the woman inserting her own language into the mainstream, violently thrusting her voice into the phallocentric economy which constrains her.

\(^{24}\) Ibid, p. 162.
Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido qualify the concept of voicelessness in *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*:

a. the historical absence of the woman writer's text: the absence of a specifically female position on major issues such as slavery, colonialism, women's rights, decolonization and more direct social and cultural issues.

b. silence: the inability to express a position in the language of the "master" as well as the textual construction of woman as silent.

c. articulation that goes unheard; characterized by lack of access to the media as well as exclusion from the critical dialogue.²⁵

The Caribbean woman finds her voice in literature mainly by creating a forum that is uniquely her own. Historically, physical bodily expression by women is acceptable, as is storytelling. That is when it is used as a private familial form of creativity and genealogical connection. Nevertheless, women are denied

access to such oral forms as calypso and reggae. Therefore, with the advent of the feminist/womanist movement, the woman seeks to transform her rage at being marginalized into words and contrives to distance herself from the traditional linear male text. The result is a combination of a number of forms within one communication. This narrative voice is part history, part autobiography and part poetry. It is a fragmented form which includes prose poetry, letters and female history. In this form, the woman presents a catalogue "of her experiences, a selection of images, a setting down of memories as they flow into the consciousness, all with the female self as center."(5)

In many Caribbean women's works, first person narrative predominates. The autobiographical first person is particularly suited to the woman's introspective journey, where landscape is as prominent as the self. The autobiographical first person narrative should not be confused with autobiographical writing. It is a structural means for women writers to reject the traditional linear narrative mode of
storytelling. The insertion of history serves to bind the fragmented text with the storytelling text, creating a new women's text which becomes a "locus for the reinscription of the woman's story in history." (6)

At first glance one might think that the seemingly positive images, in terms of her strength, of the black woman in twentieth-century French Caribbean literature would engender a positive narrative on the part of the French Caribbean black woman writer. Unfortunately, this is not generally the case. With rare exceptions, the woman's journey towards self-affirmation has tragic consequences. She is usually more alienated and isolated at the end of her journey. Her rite of passage becomes a passage of rights. She is left without a country, without an identity in a society where she counts for very little. The sexual politics of the black Caribbean woman raises the inevitable moral question. Is she lacking in morals because she uses her physical attractiveness to escape her economic and social despair? Is she prostituting herself to get ahead or is she utilizing the only weapon she has in a
male-dominated society where other opportunities for self improvement are denied to her. The objective is not to condone or condemn the woman’s actions, but to consider the reasoning behind them. The woman’s resources are very limited in the Caribbean. She is culturally barred from many aspects of society such as politics, education, and even some types of music. Therefore, the woman had to steer her path in life according to that which she had some control over: her body and her emotions. When the time came to violently revolt against established dogma, the woman developed a form which she could use to infiltrate a male-centered medium.

Some common themes that will be explored in the two novels include:

1) the foregrounding of women

2) the use of the perspective of the girl/child adolescent and the importance of mothering.

3) the quest for identity.

4) the underlying taboo on expressing female sexuality.
5) the journey motif and the relationship with the Mother country.

6) the alienating effects of schooling and how the colonial ideology is perpetuated through the educational systems.\textsuperscript{26}

Certain literary forms mentioned in Evelyn O'Callaghan's \textit{Woman Version} are directly applicable to the novels being treated in this dissertation and will be expounded upon in greater detail later on:

1) Difficulty in expressing their experience in the language of the oppressor. It is more advantageous to use creole instead of the master's tongue to gain their voice as well as continue their oral tradition, albeit in the written form.

2) Drawing on allusions from the Bible, folktales, proverbs and songs.

3) Tendency to use the autobiographical first person narrator.

4) Inherently subversive nature of the writing as a means of resistance.

\textsuperscript{26} O'Callaghan, Evelyn, \textit{Woman Version}, pp. 3-4.
In both novels, the protagonists are female and the experiences of being a woman in the French West Indies are explored through their eyes. Capécia separates her novel into two sections; one emphasizing her childhood and adolescence and the other her womanhood. The search for identity for Capécia’s fictional Mayotte included her cultural identity (Martinican vs. French), and her class and racial identity. Manicom’s Madévie had similar conflicts. Was she French or Guadeloupean? Was she black or Hindu? Both novels treated the subject of black female sexuality. Capécia subverted it to prove that black women are not so much immoral as pragmatic. Manicom uses the female body to promote her ideas that women need to reclaim their right to decide not to get pregnant. Both heroines traveled to the mother country to gain better opportunities and both were ultimately disappointed.

Capécia and Manicom were effective in illustrating how the colonial ideology was further ingrained in their respective societies through the educational systems. In Je suis Martiniquaise, the kids in the
schools were only exposed to the white French history and had no positive black role models to emulate. In *Mon Examen de Blanc*, Madévie was little more than an oddity in medical school in Paris. No effort was made to understand her or her culture. She had to become bi-cultural, and she was forced to suppress her cultural identity and assimilate into the "civilized" world if she had any hopes of achieving success. This success would require economic independence, which would require education in the French educational system. A system which would ultimately damage their self-esteem and cultural identity.

Whenever the subject of the female writer is broached, the existence of a "feminine writing" is invariably questioned. Nevertheless, it would be entirely too simplistic to narrow the field to female writers in the discussion of feminine writing. Of course, a female writer has, as a woman, particular experiences and insights from which to draw. As a consequence, her female characters may seem to be more realistic, three-dimensional portrayals. The male's image of the woman should not be, however, summarily
ignored, for it directly affects the woman's own self-image. Whether she likes it or not, the woman lives in a society where the man dictates the value systems.

Feminine writing needs first of all, to be qualified and distinguished from feminist writing. Feminist writing tends to privilege the woman (and for the most part, the white woman), while lambasting the phallocentric economy in which they exist. For example, consider the attitude of white woman towards her black counterpart. Not the surface intellectual, politically correct attitudes, but basic, instinctive attitudes which have developed over a long period of time. In terms of race, the white woman is, in general, economically, socially and politically superior to the black woman. She is superior according to a value system that the society (male-dominated) has dictated. In terms of gender, the white woman is equally as downtrodden as the black woman. The problems of self-esteem and identity are indigenous to both groups, but the black woman is not deluded by a sense of superiority. The black woman has developed a thicker skin and has long been employing coping
mechanisms which accounts for her strength and independence. White women are socialized to believe that they are delicate, fragile, intellectually "innocent" creatures who cannot survive without the guiding male hand. Even the advent of feminism, and the many accomplishments of females everywhere, these images still persist to this day. Women are struggling to cultivate their own literature, but can one really speak of a feminine writing today? The wording itself, "feminine writing", provokes several interpretations.

1. Is there a feminine "writing" linguistically inscribed in the language?

2. Is there a feminine writing, in the sense that there is literature written by women centering on representations of women, be they positive or negative?

3. Is there a feminine writing, in the sense that there is literature written by men centering on representations of women, be they positive or negative? (If such a literature exists)

Feminism presents a problem because of its failure from the outset to consider the role of the nonwhite woman in its schema, which only underlines the
unconscious influences that the western visions have on oppressed members within their society who seek "equality." In the western hierarchy, white is privileged above all, and male is privileged above female. Therefore, the white female holds an interesting position of superiority, even though they are relegated to a subordinate position because of their gender. Feminism is their method of transcending their gender for the benefit of one single group, white women.

Still, by the same token, there is an interdependence of ideals between the two, with the so-called feminist writing being more closely linked to the principles of radical feminism, whereas feminine writing can be construed as a more moderate, conciliatory approach. For better or for worse, there is a very negative stigma attached to the image of feminism, i.e. radical feminism. The supposition that all feminists are androgynous, lesbian, man-hating, aggressive (in male terms) beings prevails in our society. No matter how much progress has been made,
women are often reluctant to be classified as any type of feminist for fear of alienating the male population as a whole. This tactic is so effective that the woman is suppressed, deprived of her literary voice. If she is courageous enough to break this silence she will be brushed aside by critics who will undoubtedly label her hysterical, not intellectual or literary enough, using sources that "just will not do." Literature is a subjective endeavor, and having a literary critic analyze, dissect, deconstruct or otherwise reduce an author's attempt to find a voice, and then declaring it unliterary or unworthy of academic pursuit, seems to be one person denigrating something he does not or will not understand. Edouard Glissant has a theory of opacity\textsuperscript{27} which discusses man's tendency to try to make that which is unknown or "other" transparent so that he feels comfortable with this difference or to render the difference more familiar. For example, suppressing the culture, language, religion, etc. of the black Africans in order to "civilize" them. What Glissant asserts is

that true harmony will not be attained until we are to live with the opacity of others. In other words, the day when we can accept another's difference without necessarily understanding it. This principle as it applies to women is indeed challenging. Yes, there are distinct differences between men and women: some due to anatomy, some due to socialization. Nevertheless, they are both rational, free thinking beings who have the right to achieve all that they would like and are able to in life.

So why don't women write or why is their writing not as good or serious as the writings of men. What is the reason for their silence? Thought provoking and inflammatory questions to be sure. Feminists critics have been pondering these questions and discovering some unpopular facts.

Dale Spender in *The Writing or the Sex? or why you don't have to read women's writing to know it's no good*²⁸, presents a compelling case on the so-called

²⁸ Spender, Dale, *The Writing or the Sex? Or why you don’t have to read women’s writing to know it’s no good,*
"talkative sex" and on how male linguists/critics have undermined the literary endeavors of female writers throughout history. How does Spender account for the lack of women writers in literary canon? Why are they not represented more in literature courses and why is their work not viewed as favorably as their male counterparts? How does this impact on the works of Manicom and Capécia?

Spender states that the basic issue is power. Men established literary criticism, the rules, and the criteria. They had the power to determine what was good and what was bad. They are using their power to keep the women out. It was fear of being usurped that made the men use various tactics to discourage women from writing. As the men felt that women should not write, they often transformed the idea into "women could not write." Often women were intimidated into giving up the pen to pursue their "womanly" obligations. They were made to feel like failures as women and chastised for trying to undertake the masculine endeavor of writing. Nevertheless, the two
subjects of this dissertation, Capécia and Manicom, undertook the endeavor of writing and of establishing a female voice in French Caribbean literature. In spite of the obstacles they faced, they persevered.
Chapter 2

Mayotte or not Mayotte?

*Je suis Martiniquaise* was published in 1948, so she was practically the only woman writing in French during the negritude movement. She had no audience of her peers, so she pandered to the white male audience which was the only game in town. Capécia was ridiculed and patronized literarily because most critics failed to see her work in the proper light. They failed to notice her subtle irony and subversion of the travelogue tradition, where black women were vessels for the European male's lustful exotic fantasies. Exotic black women who were slaves to their own venal impulses surrounded by lush tropical landscapes, over ripened fruits of many varieties, and hot sticky, steamy temperatures. Capécia is engaged in her own style of feminine writing as she takes the psychological ideas developed by writers such as Lafcadio Hearn, Father Labat, and Father DuTetre and subverts them. She turns the tables on Hearn's stereotypical travelogues by using those very same
stereotypes of Martinican women and Martinican society and using them to repossess her identity and that of her people. Her critics, for the most part, accepted her technique of the autobiographical narrative at face value. There are numerous conflicts factually and chronologically between the novel and Capécia’s life which lead me to agree with Pauletta Richard’s belief that Capécia purposely took some of Lafcadio Hearn’s sketches on the West Indies and used the autobiographical motif to snub her nose at the stereotypes.¹

Much has been debated concerning Capécia’s life. Is she the basis for her character Mayotte in Je suis Martiniquaise? Some biographies say she was born in 1928, died in 1953, was educated in Fort de France and spent her later years in France², but Beatrice Stith-Clark learned that Mayotte Capécia’s actual name at


birth was Lucette Ceranus. She was the daughter of Clémencia Ceranus and Eugène Combette. She was born on February 17, 1916 in Carbet and died of cancer in Paris on November 24, 1955. Lucette did have a twin sister named Reine.³

This finding by Stith-Clark pokes holes in Pauletta Richards′ account of chronological discrepancies, because Mayotte the author would have been twenty-three years old in 1939 at the beginning of World War II and twenty-six years old in 1942, during her character′s affair with André. Richards information told her that Capécia was born in 1928, which would have made Capécia only eleven years old in 1939 at the beginning of World War II and fourteen years old at the time of her affair with André. In the novel, Mayotte is obviously at least in her late teens to early twenties. In spite of the birthdate discrepancy, however, Richards′ other suppositions are still telling indications that the Mayotte in Je suis Martiniquaise is indeed fictional. The real Mayotte did not have a sister named Francette, but she had a

³ Stith-Clark, Beatrice, "Who was Mayotte Capécia? An Update", CLA Journal 39, no. 4, p. 454-457.
twin named Reine, to whom she dedicates her other novel, *La Negresse Blanche*. The fictional Mayotte is intelligent but has no literary desires. She drops out of school a couple of years after her mother’s death, but the novel is written in very good literary French. The fictional Mayotte speaks with a noticeable Creole accent as she grew up in a rural village with no opportunities to learn to speak standard French. It is doubtful that such a woman could have written this novel. Some of Capécia’s critics bought into her autobiographical deception so completely that they questioned the identity of the true author, thinking that someone else had ghostwritten her life. This only lends more credence to the notion that Capécia deliberately manipulated the genre of autobiography to showcase her opinions on racism, sexism and colonialism. She frequently incorporated Lafcadio Hearn’s text almost verbatim in her novel. She was very much aware of her audience and of the literary tradition she was writing within and ultimately against. With the works of Father DuTertre, Father Labat and Lafcadio Hearn casting a major shadow on the
western perceptions of Martinique and specifically Martinican women, Capécia’s ironic interpretations of Hearn in Je suis Martiniquaise were her subtle way of deconstructing the travelogue genre. She used Hearn’s master dialectic, with its exoticized descriptions of the landscape and of the Martinican woman, to subvert it, revise it and to reappropriate it. Capécia uses the creole dialogue frequently in Je suis Martiniquaise, many times echoing dialogue found in Hearn’s Martinican sketches.

(Capécia)
Bonjou Fifi! Comment ou yé, ché?... Toute douce, ché, et té, Youte... Tu vini pouend ou bain?...

(Hearn)
Coument ou yé, ché... Eh Pascaline!... Bonjou’, Youtte!-Dédé!-Fifi!-Henrilla Tottt douce, ché Ou vini pou pouend yon bain?

Hearn’s 1890 description of the quaint, uncivilized Martinique and its people seem so patronizing, not unlike early descriptions of the Native American. The noble savage image is very

4 Je suis Martiniquaise, p. 11
5 Hearn, Lafacdiio, Two Years in the French West Indies, p. 255.
prevalent in Hearn's writings. In "Les Porteuses," women are often likened to thoroughbred horses, pack mules and other beasts of burden. He is very generous in his praise of the physical attributes which enable them to eke out their meager living. He also justifies the class system where the darker skinned blacks performed the menial and physically demanding jobs, and the lighter skinned blacks performed less strenuous tasks. Sexual imagery and connotations abound, no doubt whetting his audience's appetite for titillation. This sexual imagery in conjunction with the animal imagery lends a bestial air to his narrative.

Now, the creole porteuse, or female carrier, is certainly one of the most remarkable physical types in the world; and whatever artistic enthusiasm her graceful port, lithe walk, or half savage beauty may inspire you with, you can form no idea, if a total stranger, what a really wonderful being she is. (Hearn, 100)

...and all, whether ugly or attractive as to feature, are finely shapen as to body and limb. Brought into existence by extraordinary necessities of environment, the type is a peculiarly local one, -a type of human thorough-bred representing the true secret of grace: economy of
force. ...all are built lightly and firmly as racers. (101)

In every season, in almost every weather, the porteuse makes her journey, -never heeding rain; -her goods being protected by double and triple water-proof coverings well bound down over her trait. Yet these tropical rains, coming suddenly with a cold wind upon her heated and almost naked body, are to be feared. To any European or unacclimated white such a wetting, while the pores are all open during profuse perspiration, would probably prove fatal: even for white natives the result is always a serious and protracted illness. But the porteuse seldom suffers in consequences: She seems proof against fevers, rheumatism, and ordinary colds. When she does break down, however, the malady is a frightful one, -a pneumonia that carries off the victim within forty-eight hours. Happily, among her class, these fatalities are very rare. (108)

One of the girls in “Les Porteuses” is named Maiyotte and it is a clever ploy for Capécia to retain Mayotte as the name of her heroine in Je suis Martiniquaise because it sets up such a delicious ambiguity.
She can create a seemingly autobiographical tale about a Creole girl driven apparently by greed to take her first steps to flout Hearn’s exotic stereotype and inject her own subtle criticism of postcolonial society.

...Oh Maiyotte, how plaintive that pretty sphinx face of yours, now turned in profile;—as if you knew you looked beautiful thus,—with the great gold circlets of your ears glittering and swaying as you bend! And why are you so long, so long untying that poor little canvas purse?—fumbling and fingering it?—is it because you want me to think of the weight of that trait and the sixty kilometres you must walk, and the heat, and the dust and all the disappoints? Ah, you are cunning! No, I do not want the change!(114-115)

All of the descriptions in Hearn’s sketches lead to the objectification of the black woman as a base creature with no values, and whose craven, compulsive sexual desires are impossible to resist. The white male has no choice but to fall prey to the mysteries of the “dark continent,” of the “deep, dark bush country.” She is seductive as a siren’s song in Greek mythology, but inherently evil.
Hearn's apparently unconscious preoccupation with the black woman's sexuality is evident in his highly detailed descriptions of everyday Martinican life. He frequently mentions in "Les Blanchisseuses" how attractive some of the girls are and manages to make this backbreaking activity of pounding out dirty laundry in a freezing cold water seem romantic and erotic.

It is one of the sights of St. Pierre, this daily scene at the River of the Washerwomen: everybody likes to watch it; the men, because among the blanchisseuses there are not a few decidedly handsome girls; the women, probably because a woman feels interested in woman's work. (253)

Hearn goes on to describe the traits of the best blanchisseuse as if he were describing a particularly interesting species of animal on the Discovery Channel. This detachment is very startling to the reader now, but perhaps not so much in 1890.

You might also observe, if you watch long enough, that among the blanchisseuses there are few sufficiently light of color to be classed as bright mulatresses; the majority are black or of that dark copper-red race which is perhaps superior to the black creole in 91
strength and bulk; for it requires a skin insensible to sun as well as the toughest of constitutions to be a blanchisseuse...The blanchisseuse is the hardest worker among the whole population; her daily labor is rarely less than thirteen hours; and during the greater part of the time she is working in the sun and standing up to her knees in water that descends quite cold from the mountain peaks. Her labor makes her sweat profusely; and she can never venture to cool herself by further immersion without serious danger of pleurisy. The trade is said to kill all who continue at it beyond a certain number of years ...

...No feeble or light-skinned person can attempt to do a single day's work of this kind without danger. (254-55)

His description of how a girl became a professional blanchisseuse evokes vocabulary with a double entendre, sure to conjure up erotic fantasies of a beautiful young Creole girl being initiated into the ways of sex.

If, after one year of instruction, the apprentice fails to prove a good washer, it is not likely she will ever become one; and there are some branches of the trade requiring a longer period of teaching and practice. The young girl first learns simply to soap and wash linen in the river, which operation is called "rubbing" (frotte in Creole);—after she can do this pretty well, she is taught the curious art of whipping it
When Hearn describes “La Guiblesse” or female demon in Martinican folktales, he does not give her a name. This failure to give the woman “other” any subjectivity undoubtedly prompted Capécia to name two of her characters from the list of female names that the Martinican man in the Hearn’s sketch, Fafa, enumerates while trying to identify the female demon (Maiyotte and Loulouze). Once again the reader can see Hearn’s overt sensuality in his description of the Martinican woman. He uses vocabulary which evokes sexual connotations, such as serpentine, sinuous, long, full, undulation, oscillate, and swaying. Combine this with bare feet and scant garments and the Martinican woman is transformed into an exotic creature or as Hearn puts it, a “mountain-griffone.” She is at once erotic and dangerous.

There is something superb in the port of a tall young mountain-griffone, or negress, who is comely: it is a black poem of artless dignity, primitive grace, savage exultation of movement... And in her
walk there is also a serpentine
elegance, a sinuous charm: the
shoulders do not swing; the cambered
torso seems immobile; but
alternately from waist to heel, and
from heel to waist, with each long
full stride, an indescribable
undulation seems to pass; while the
folds of her loose robe oscillate to
right and left behind her, in
perfect libration, with the free
swaying of the hips.

With us, only a finely trained
dancer could attempt such a walk;—
with the Martinique woman of color
it is natural as the tint of her
skin; and this allurement of motion
unrestrained is most marked in those
who have never worn shoes and are
clad lightly as the women of
antiquity. (200)

In “Les Guiablesses”, Hearn writes of the female demon
who bewitches the men with the allurement of her
motion, by the black flame of her gaze and her savage
melodies which eventually lead them to their doom.
Contrarily, Capécia’s two characters, Mayotte and
Loulouze, are lured by white men with the allurement of
their promises, by the blue flames of their gazes and
by the savage melody of colonization. Mayotte and
Loulouze are both led to their doom: ostracism from
their peers and exclusion from the bonds of matrimony.
Capécia’s novel suggests that the women of Mayotte’s village were not as indifferent to out-of-wedlock pregnancies as Hearn would have the readers believe. Loulouze was ostracized from the village when her pregnancy was discovered. The women who seemed so friendly at the river doing the laundry, abandoned her in her time of need. Capécia’s description of Loulouze mirrors Hearn’s typically exotic descriptions of Martinican women and she also adds a slight lesbian twist that is never realized in the story, but makes the reader wonder.

Les mouvements de Loulouze me causaient une sorte d’émotion. Parfois aussi, elle se baignait avec nous. Elle avait une peau dorée qui tenait de l’orange et de la banane, de longs cheveux noirs qu’elle roulait en tresses et qui n’étaient crépus qu’à la base, un nez assez épaté et des levres épaisses, mais le visage d’une forme telle qu’elle devait avoir des blancs assez proches dans son ascendance. (Capécia, 12)

She describes Loulouze as some sort of exotic fruit, echoing Hearn’s pattern, and she mimics his descriptions of the porteuses by discussing their natural grace, but also establishing an animal-like
quality by having them relieve themselves on their route. She even includes superstitions by mentioning that the porteuses never travel alone for fear of the zombis. She borrows liberally here from Hearn's sketches.

Elle avaient dans leurs mouvements une fierté et une grâce naturelle, ce qui m'empêchait pas que, parfois, l'une s'arrêtait, écartait les jambes et satisfaisait un besoin sur la route même; après quoi elle s'essuyait sans façon avec sa jupe et repartait.

Elles voyageaient de jour et jamais seules de peur des zombis et des moun-mos, et aussi afin de n'être pas attaquées. Une femme seule dans la montagne est suspecte. (Capécia, 15)

Capécia's "fille de couleur", her fictional Mayotte, once again paralleled Hearn's descriptions of the "sang-mêlé". She became an exotic fantasy; a beautiful, childish woman who would satisfy every physical need and ask nothing in return.

Even when totally uneducated, she had a peculiar charm, -that charm of childishness which has the power to win sympathy from the rudest natures. One could not fell attracted towards this naïf being, docile as an infant, and as easily
pleased or as easily pained... - willing to give her youth, her beauty, her caresses to some one in exchange for the promise to love her...(Hearn, 345)

She bore him children—such beautiful children!—whom he rarely acknowledged, and was never asked to legitimatize;—and she did not ask perpetual affection notwithstanding,—regarded the relation as a necessarily temporary one, to be sooner or later dissolved by the marriage of her children’s father. (346)

While there is still some debate over Capécia’s biographical information, Je suis Martiniquaise still holds up as an autobiographical novel. West Indian women’s writing tends to take personal history as a means of expressing a collective history. As her story evokes a collective consciousness and garners empathy from anyone who has experienced the slightest bit of what her heroine does, it is safe to say that Capécia is successful. Anyone who has ever felt ostracized for whatever reason will have a reaction of some sort to her work. Admittedly, without knowing Capécia’s agenda of subverting a stereotypical text, it would be difficult to like the seemingly clueless Mayotte as she
longs for a white man to liberate her from her misery. Further readings help the reader see beyond the superficial and see the complicated workings of Mayotte’s psyche.

Je Suis Martiniquaise

Je suis Martiniquaise, by Mayotte Capécia, is an autobiographically fictional story of a Martinican woman of color trying to survive independently in the world. The theme which haunts the story is the fact that life is difficult for a woman, especially for a black woman.  

The following critical works have been published on Je suis Martiniquaise:


—“Who was Mayotte Capécia? An Update,” CLA Journal 39, no. 4, p. 454-57, June 1996.


Buck, Claire, ed., The Bloomsbury Guide to Women’s
...la vie est difficile pour une femme, tu veux, Mayotte, surtout pour une femme de couleur...\textsuperscript{7}

The book is divided in two parts: the first part focuses on Mayotte’s childhood and adolescence and the second part focuses on her initial experiences as an independent young woman.

In the story Mayotte lives with her parents in the village of Carbet.

Notre village de Carbet, qui faisait partie du district de la Grande Anse, s’étirait le long d’une route unique qui longeait la mer. Il se composait de belles maisons de pierres à l’européenne, habitées par des gens riches, des blancs,-mais nous appelions blancs aussi certains sangs mêlés qui avaient de l’argent, à condition que leur teint fut assez clair,- et des bicoques en bois où vivaient les paysans et les pêcheurs.Ces habitations, assez distantes les unes des autres, étaient enfouies sous des palmiers géants auxquels le soleil donnait de


\textsuperscript{7} Capécia, Mayotte, \textit{Je suis Martiniquaise}, p. 20

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beaux tons fauves et qui, lorsque le vent du large les secouait, remuiaient comme des animaux vivants. (23-24)

She has a twin sister, Francette, who is being raised by her mother’s affluent sister. It is never really clear to the reader why only one twin is sent away. Obviously the aunt is childless and Mayotte’s family is poor, but why separate the twins? Was it a random choice or was Francette chosen for a reason? This must have plagued Mayotte’s psyche considerably, and may have contributed to her inferiority complex. With all of her advantages, Francette was very restricted in her aunt’s household.

Elle était sévère avec elle, elle l’obligeait à se confesser fréquemment, à ne pas manquer une messe, à être toujours exagérément propre, correcte et ordonnée... (76)

Mayotte, even as a young child, relished her freedom and dreaded restraint with a passion. She constantly strived for independence.

Moi, dont les ancêtres avaient été des esclaves, j’avais décidé d’être independante; et aujourd’hui encore bien que je n’aie pas toujours pu en jouir comme j’aurais
She was the tomboy of the two, always running around barefooted, leading a motley crue of local children on adventurous expeditions near the river.

Francette, her mirror image only in the physical sense, is the epitome of the well-behaved dutiful daughter. Prim, proper, and never soiled, Francette is raised in a nice home, tutored privately, and has every advantage while Mayotte is raised by her parents in a poor fishing village. Francette is the symbol of the perfection that Mayotte thinks she should attain. Francette seems to be more gifted at everything and Mayotte, at nothing.

Moi, par exemple, je n'ai jamais été très douée, j'appris à marcher beaucoup plus tard que Francette. Ma mère suspendait devant ma bouche un régime de bananes.

Je cherchais alors à les attraper, car je les adorais. Je crois bien que c'est par gourmandise que j'ai appris à marcher.
As a consequence, Mayotte has an inferiority complex where her sister is concerned and the reader gets the first inkling of the love/hate dichotomy that exists between the sisters, at least on Mayotte's part. While Mayotte insists that there is no jealousy on her part, it does not quite ring true with the reader.

In the last sentence of the above quotation, we returned to the theme of the difficult life for the "filles de couleur". She seems to discount Francette from the category of "fille de couleur" because she is well-dressed, well-raised and carefree. Is Francette considered more than black because of her advantages? If so, then Mayotte is equating economic freedom to whiteness, and being black to poverty. This would explain Mayotte’s fascination with whites, first with
the curé and later with André. Nevertheless, despite criticisms from Fanon, Mayotte does not literally want to be white, she just wants the freedom and independence that it signifies.

Mayotte’s father is a tall, strong, handsome man who talked a lot in a distinctive voice that served him well later in his political aspirations. He was in the war (WWII) in France, and he loved to talk of his adventures whenever possible. Having lost his parents at an early age, he became an apprentice to a cabinet maker; from there he became a fisherman.

He was very successful with the ladies and became a specialist in cockfighting because he needed the money to maintain his pursuit of pleasure. He soon abandoned fishing in favor of selling oranges and vanilla between Fort-de-France and Trinidad. Even though this was lucrative, his profits were squandered on games and women. Succumbing to wanderlust, he abandoned this commerce and left for America. He was not very happy with his stay.

Je n’avais jamais app’is un métier sé’ieux, disait-il, en Amé’ique le t’avail ne cou’ pas les rues et les Amé’icains ne sont pas aimables pou’ un homme de couleu’. Le peu d’a’gent que j’avais appo’té ne ta’da, pas à
filer de mes mains. Enfin, après de nombreuses démarches, je suis
pa\'venu à me caser dans un magasin comme vendeur, et j\'ai pu ramasser
quelques sous pour payer mon voyage et regagner ma té natale. Je
rentrai donc à Ca\’bet et le peu d\'argent que j\’avais gagné me s\’vit
à acheter cette petite maison de bois blanc.(34)

He soon began a career in the local political scene. He belonged to the extreme left party and he succeeded in being elected mayor of his community.

Once a year on election day, Mayotte\’s father gave a lavish banquet for members of his party which sometimes surpassed 50 guests. His constituents were poor and uneducated black and white men. This man who usually watched all of his pennies carefully, on this day, threw caution to the winds. Mayotte\’s mother, who is described as a fine and cultured woman with a delicate constitution, was not at all thrilled with this annual event. Nevertheless, she could do nothing except acquiesce to the wishes of her husband.

Ma mère, économiste sans être avare, discutait, rappelait que son compte n\’était pas réglé à la boutique du village, qu’elle avait des enfants à éléver et qu’il ne fallait pas gaspiller l’argent du ménage. Mais mon Père soutenait avec force qu’il fallait tout faire "pou’ p’end les
Her father took great pains to seem like a wealthy man of the world; to put on airs in front of other people to further his career in his party. So Mayotte's mother took out their best Baccarat crystal, which invariably was broken during the banquet and cooked delectable dish after dish, served exquisitely on fine linens, etc.

Mayotte's mother was a devout Catholic woman who still retained some superstitions from her ancestry. There was always a perception on Mayotte's part that perhaps her mother had married beneath herself. Her mother was a mulatto with a white mother and black father. It was important to Mayotte that her grandmother was white. She felt special somehow knowing that her white grandmother loved a black man, although she did not really understand it. From an early age, Mayotte considered the white man as an ideal symbol of freedom and independence. She even fantasizes about her mother marrying a white man instead of her father, which would have made her "almost white" and therefore more desirable in the eyes of her society.
it that they decided to stay. Mayotte’s grandmother fell in love with a black man, but her parents did not approve of a marriage between the two. They paid him to leave the city and he did. This caused great anguish to Mayotte’s grandmother. Several years later she married another black man whom her parents accepted and their children were Mayotte’s mother and her aunt, who were brought up alongside white children. Apparently, Mayotte’s grandmother, with all of the things she had to suffer through, died shortly thereafter.

Mayotte is convinced at a young age that nothing but heartache and the imprisonment of poverty could come from loving a black man and she vows to only love a white man; more specifically, a blond Frenchman with blue eyes:

Je songeais aussi à cette grand’mère que je n’avais pas connue et qui était morte parce qu’elle avait aimé un homme de couleur, martiniquais. Comment une Canadienne pouvait-elle aimer un Martiniquais? Moi, qui pensais toujours à Monsieur le Curé, je décidai que je ne pourrais aimer qu’un blanc, un blond avec des yeux bleus, un Français.(59)

Interestingly enough, I find that I did not empathize with Mayotte at first. I think Mayotte is not racist in terms of color itself, but she is indeed
Interestingly enough, I find that I did not empathize with Mayotte at first. I think Mayotte is not racist in terms of color itself, but she is indeed racist in economic terms. To attain her precious independence, she will go to any length. She has great compassion and love, but this is always overshadowed by her insatiable need to succeed. In spite of herself, she is happy when those around her fail. This less than noble attribute and her obvious aloofness to her people makes it easier to understand Fanon’s denigration of Capeceia’s work. Nevertheless, it is too simplistic to lump Capeceia into a certain category, to accuse her of advocating the lactification of the black race. It is much more complex. Capecia is merely reacting to a universal perception of whiteness being the ideal for beauty, success, affluence, power and love. Fanon himself was not immune to this perception, and the reason for his intensely hostile reaction to Capecia’s work is perhaps his uncomfortable recognition of ideals that he himself had suppressed deep in his own psyche. It is indeed devastating to realize that one has bought
into the stereotypes about one's own race. It is insidious, this subliminal conditioning and one fights it, so much so that when confronted with such a blatant depiction such as Capecia's, one reacts or overreacts very strongly. When everything is color, we fail to see people. When everything is color, we fail to see human strengths as well as human foibles. Color is the most obvious of differences. If color were taken out of the picture, humans would only zero in on something else, imperfect creatures that we are.

Mayotte's obsession for the white man started in her childhood before her first communion. Mayotte never cared for academics, and she really did not like catechism very much. Nevertheless she developed a crush on the curé which motivated her to study more.

Je m'entêtai alors à suivre le catéchisme et, en réalité, j'y pris goût non seulement parce que je m'y trouvais avec des garçons et des filles qui combinaient quantité de farces mais parce que j'étais tombée amoureuse du nouveau curé. Jeune, grand, très blond, très beau, il faisait tourbillonner dans ma tête d'enfant mille petits papillons. Je ne pensais plus à Paul, je ne portais plus son bracelet de bois.(22)
The curé is the only person that can make her feel ashamed of her hoydenish ways..."Lui seul pouvait me rendre honteuse."(26) Not even the desire to please her mother ever entirely curbed her zest for tomboyish adventures, but this handsome blond made her totally forget her first little boyfriend Paul and callously stop wearing his wooden bracelet. She associates his blondness with purity, perfection and beauty and she thinks of him as an earth angel. She may even think that Whites are closer to God, because she has been taught that God was white, with blond hair and blue eyes. She even thinks that the angels are all white as well.

Mayotte, cria-t-il, tu as l’ai’ d’un ange! Je ne pus lui repondre, je savais que le blanc m’allait bien et j’aurais pu m’imaginer avoir des joues roses comme un ange, si je n’avais pas vu mes mains rendues plus noires par l’éclatante blancheur de ma robe.(65)

So convinced of the veracity of her beliefs in the whiteness of God and all of his angels, she was appalled to see an American film depicting God and his angels as black.

J’ai vu, depuis au cinema, le film des Verts Pâturages dans lequel les anges et Dieu lui-même sont noirs,
et cela m'a terriblement choquée. Comment imaginer Dieu sous les traits d'un nègre? Non, ce n'est pas ainsi que je me représente le Paradis. Mais après tout, il ne s'agissait que d'un film américain. Nous sommes plus évolués à la Martinique. Certes, le Dieu que le Père Labbat révélait à mes ancêtres, est aussi le dieu des gens de couleur, mais il est blanc. (65)

The occasion of her first communion had a profound effect on how Mayotte thought of herself. She became very conscious of her newfound maturity and dignity as well as the spiritual implications. Initially she went through all of that studying to please her beloved curé, but in the end she was glad to do this to please her mother, who had never been so proud. Two years after this highlight of her childhood, Mayotte’s mother dies suddenly from a heart ailment. The eruption of Mt. Pelée serves as a backdrop to the mother’s death, and a fitting consequence to the loss of someone so important to Mayotte. It was as if the Earth was voicing her displeasure at the tragic loss. Mayotte moved through her mother’s wake as if seeing it from a distance, not quite believing that her mother was really gone. She felt a solitary anguish but could not cry, feeling like a soulless body. Mayotte had the impression that this
type of tragedy never comes alone. She was awakened in
the night by the spectacle of flames leaping from the
mountains and the stifling hot air that was menacingly
indicative of a volcanic eruption. Mayotte was not in
the least surprised, in her grief over her mother; she
merely thought it an inevitable consequence of her
mother’s death.

Je ne m’étonnai de rien. Ce
spectacle de fin du monde me
semblait être la conséquence
inévitable de la mort de ma mère.
Mais, bientôt, à la terrible lueur
des flammes, je percus l’agitation
du village...Je reconnus mon Père.
Il criait plus fort que les autres.
J’entendis les mots:
“...Montagne...Pelée...Eruption.”

(71)

Her father takes her hand, intending to return to the
village, only to be rapidly surrounded by a cloud of
ashes. The villagers were reminded of the terrible
eruption of Mt. Pelée in 1902 which destroyed St.
Pierre and killed the entire population there. The
villagers in St. Pierre, fearing for their lives, fled
to Mayotte’s village as their town was once again in
danger of succumbing to nature’s wrath, bringing
unsubstantiated tales of destruction and innumerable
deaths. Mayotte’s family found themselves in front of
her aunt's house watching nature's fury unfurl with sentiments ranging from abject terror to childlike fascination. At one point the torrential rain of ashes was so thick that it limited visibility to two meters, and a bridge that gave access to Fort-de-France collapsed.

But the most dangerous part of the disaster had passed and little by little the temperature abated, the visibility improved, allowing them to return to their homes.

Obviously, the eruption was the main topic of conversation the next day. Several houses in St. Pierre were damaged but the museum which housed souvenirs of the 1902 eruption was spared. Miraculously, there were no deaths as a result of this eruption. The only death was that of Mayotte's mother. Mayotte visits her mother's freshly dug grave, subconsciously hoping for a miracle:

Seule ma mère était morte et depuis la veille, enterrée. Je me rendis au cimetière avant de rentrer à la maison. Je ne sais pourquoi j'avais espéré en un miracle. La tombe était fraîche et intacte. Maman était toujours morte, Maman était morte pour toujours. (73)
Ironically, out of this emotional devastation came a certain independence for Mayotte. She was now the mistress of the house, and her father depended heavily on her to help him. So it was easy to avoid falling into the clutches of her aunt who had offered to take her in. Mayotte felt that her aunt disliked her independent ways and sought to stamp them out. After that period when neighbors help out with the cleaning, cooking, etc., or when a death in the family occurs, Mayotte was basically left to her own devices in the household. Her father was easy to please, as long as the house was clean and the meals were cooked, he did not interfere with Mayotte. The only problem was that her avaricious father never gave her enough money to run the household. Mayotte asserts that he was not mean to her, he just controlled everything with an avarice that revolted her. She understood at this point the cause of the tell-tale sadness of her mother. The recurring sense of injustice for her lot in life is a prevalent theme in the story. Mayotte feels this injustice, but she does not fight against it. She accepts it complacently, "comme le font toutes les filles de couleur."(77) Centuries of colonization seem
to have taken root in her psyche, and if she is representative of her people, in the psyche of a culture. Mayotte is an interesting contradiction. She yearns to be an independent woman, but she acknowledges the likelihood of failure as a consequence of her gender and her color.

Mayotte’s father gave up his vocation as a politician for cockfighting. Her father became so obsessed with money and victory that one day he fixed one of his cockfights. Unfortunately for him, his machinations were discovered and he was soundly beaten. His adversary took him to court to seek restitution for his dead animal, but his political connections as former mayor got him off the hook. His enemy, dissatisfied with the legal system, visited the quimboiseau for a more Creole sort of retribution. Mayotte, being a little more superstitious, tried to warn her father, who merely scoffed derisively at the idea. Nevertheless, he found a voodoo doll in a bottle and his curiosity pushed him to examine it. Of course he pricked himself and a month later he fell ill mysteriously and took to his bed for 4 months. Mayotte felt that she was victimized. Her father became
extremely demanding, and Mayotte cared for and
nourished her father, who gave her less and less money
to run the household. Mayotte learned the hard way the
value, importance and power of money. She felt enslaved
by her father and despaired of ever being happy and
independent.

"...le sentiment de l'injustice, qui
était né en moi, augmentait.
Aurais-je jamais de l'argent? Me
marierais-je? Serais-je heureuse?
Déjà, je répondais négativement à
ces questions. Pourtant, je devenais
très jolie. Je le savais car tout le
monde me le disait. Et puis, je
n'avais qu'à regarder Francette." (82-83)

The reader gets the impression that Mayotte is not
adverse to using her physical beauty to get what she
wants the most: independence. Independence for Mayotte
is money. There are those who would argue that
Mayotte's strategy is as old as time. Each of us is
given a gift of some sort which will attract a mate. Be
it physical attractiveness, compassion or money, the
complicated dynamics of male-female relationships have
been provoking discussion for centuries. Why should she
not use her assets to get a better life? Why should a
man not do the same? It is interesting to note that
when a man uses his assets methodically to succeed in life, he is lauded for shrewdness. A woman doing the same thing is labeled a shrew or worse.

Time passed for Mayotte without her really noticing, preoccupied as she was with the housekeeping and school. She started to change her tomboyish ways, becoming more "feminine," even developing a bosom. She notes that her father is nicer to her than in the past, treating her like a young lady. She reveled in newfound freedom, because her father stayed out late every night. She soon learned from some neighbors that her father had found himself a girlfriend who was not much older than Mayotte, only 16 years old.

Cette nouvelle me causa d’abord un choc terrible. Et d’abord, je la niai. Cela n’est pas possible, me dis-je, cela ne ressemble pas à mon Père et je ne puis laisser dire une pareille méchanceté. Mais je réfléchis, je réfléchis des heures et des heures. Le fait que mon Père pût ne pas rester fidèle au souvenir de ma mère me découvrait un nouvel aspect de la vie.(88)

Mayotte attempts to cover her shock and pain by flippantly announcing it to Francette. Mayotte resented Francette's carefree existence and took pleasure in bursting her happy little bubble. In response to
Francette’s scandalized expectation of a marriage between their father and his new paramour, Mayotte informs her of the custom of common law marriage or “mariage de derrière la porte,” where the marriage is not recognized by the Church. Partly to seem more worldly than the naive Francette and partly, perhaps, because she is thinking of a future liaison with a white man, Mayotte suddenly becomes a proponent of this sort of domestic arrangement.

- Et tu fe’ais cela, toi?
- Si je recont’ais un homme qui me plaise pou’quoi pas! Cela fe’ait des économies, on n’achète’ait pas d’alliance. C’oi-tu que Monsieur le Mai’ et Monsieur le Cu’é soient si nécessai’ (88-89)

Shortly thereafter the father moves his new love, Rénélise, into the house where he showers her with attention, clothes, jewelry, etc. Mayotte is eaten up with jealousy and envy. She mentions a love of her own, a young man named Horace, almost as an afterthought. The reader is left wondering how this “pure love” came to be so quickly. Mayotte gives little detail on the origins of this relationship. Mayotte tries to accept the woman her father has chosen, even finding some traits to admire. Unfortunately, she reaches a point
when she can no longer tolerate seeing all of her father’s attention and money being funneled to Rénelise. Finally they have an ugly little confrontation where Mayotte accuses her of being a gold digger, not really loving her father, and of being without scruples. Rénelise taunts Mayotte, accusing her of being jealous of her youth and beauty and implying that Mayotte acted in a similar fashion with her boyfriend Horace. Mayotte was extremely bothered by Rénelise’s supposition:

-Non, Madame, m’écriai-je, not’ amou’ est pu’ et sans tache! Il est jeune et malg’é not’ éloignement nos deux coeu’ restent unis... Tandis que vous... Ne dites pas que vous aimez mon Pè’, vous n’êtes ici que pou’ p’ofiter de ce qu’il vous donne... C’øyez-vous qu’il va vous épouser? (98)

Mayotte obviously had an idealistic view of her “pure” love for Horace. Contrary to her earlier views to marry only a white man, she dreams of wedded and familial bliss with her beloved Horace. So intense was her feeling that she convinced her father to let her go to the city to do the shopping. She made a detour to her hometown for a reunion with Horace, but once she got there she was not in a hurry to see him. She visited
with her aunt and Francette for such a long time that she only had enough time to tell Horace hello and make a date for the following week. Oddly enough she does not really miss Horace when he is near by. Only the thought of him in the abstract appeals to her. This "pure" love is merely a romantic fantasy for her. She eventually succumbs to the carnal side of love with Horace. It is very interesting to note that this black man is so completely opposite physically to the type of man she wanted to marry when she was a child. Dark skin, dark eyes, muscular and sensual, Mayotte is completely besotted with the handsome Horace:

Horace était du plus beau type martiniquais. La peau très foncée faisait ressortir ses dents d'un blanc d'émail, ses yeux noirs luisants, avaient des reflets de pierre précieuse. Les levres étaient épaisses et sensuelles. Il était grand et de son short sortaient des jambes bien droites aux muscles prononcés. (103)

Not long after this important event, Mayotte's aunt fell ill and her father declared that she had become crazy and that he was going to have her put in an asylum in Guadeloupe. Mayotte felt sorry for her aunt, but was glad that Francette would be coming home again.
Her father, ever the avaricious one, did not hesitate to take advantage of the situation. He convinced the woman to write a will with Francette as beneficiary. The mental decline of the aunt is rather precipitous as well as inexplicable. The women in that family (i.e. Mayotte's mother, aunt and grandmother) do not seem to live very long lives. They seem to give up. The reader has to wonder if Mayotte is aware of a pattern forming?

Francette painted such an awe-inspiring portrait of Fort-de-France (which they passed through while dropping their poor aunt off in the Guadeloupean asylum) that Mayotte saved her money and secretly set off to explore the big city. She joyously played the tourist until she suddenly found herself face to face with her father with a different woman than Rénelise. In this painfully awkward moment, Mayotte starts off by lying about her presence in the city, then makes a horrible scene to shame her father, to no avail. They trade insults and he orders her back to the house. Mayotte decides not to return and goes instead to her friend Loulouze. Loulouze was her beautiful childhood friend who left the village years before with idealistic aspirations of love and affluence. Loulouze
had become a little heavier and wiser in the ways of the world, with two children of mixed race to care for. Apparently she had not been fortunate in love, given her general opinion of men:

Oh! dit Loulouze, les hommes sont tous des couillons...Pour rien au monde je ne me marie, déclara Loulouze. Pourquoi est-ce que je me marie mais que j'ai des enfants?(118)

Loulouze arranged for Mayotte to get a job at the sewing shop where she worked. Mayotte wasted no time finding her own lodging so as not to inconvenience her friend and also to maintain her precious independence.

Ma vie de citadine commençait bien modestement, mais j'étais heureuse de ne plus dépendre de mon Père, ni même de Loulouze. J'aurais voulu ne plus jamais rien demander à personne.(119)

Being extremely ambitious, Mayotte soon grew tired of earning only enough to nourish herself. She dreamed of being her own boss, to improve her condition economically.

Je ne gagnais que juste de quoi me nourrir. Or, j'aurais voulu avoir un commerce à moi, être tout à fait independante, avec la perspective de gagner davantage.
Therefore Mayotte decides to sell her treasured gold necklace and earrings (a communion gift from her mother) and other jewelry and start her own little business. It seems that Mayotte is trying to apologize in part for her ambition and for her almost obsessive need for independence. It does color her attitude: her secret delight if she feels superior to those around her and the lengths she is willing to go to achieve her goals. The reader gets an inkling of the double standard between the genders to which even Mayotte the writer was not wholly immune. A man with strong ambitions and the single-minded chutzpah necessary for success is considered remarkable and worthy of emulation. A woman such as this, and a black woman to boot, seems particularly intimidating. The reader therefore acquires a somewhat grudging admiration for Mayotte, in spite of her faults.

Mayotte's life changed when she met André, the young French soldier who figures in the second half of
the novel. André has a girlfriend back home in France, and the reader cannot help but wonder if this relationship is merely an exotic dalliance on André’s part. He seems to love her, experience jealousy, etc., but he admits that their union probably will not be permanent. He at least discusses this with Mayotte early in their relationship, even though his penchant for waxing philosophical is sometimes overwhelming for Mayotte.

...je sentais que je ne pourrais jamais l’accompagner dans les hauteurs où se promenait son esprit. (138)

She is quite taken with his intellect, as well as afraid of it. She feels inferior, less civilized than André due to her lack of education. Nevertheless, this makes her desire André far more than she did Horace. André, for Mayotte, is a complicated entity that she will never fully comprehend, but she tries to understand because she does not want to be patronized by him for her ignorance. She wants to be treated as an equal, like he treats his French fiancée, not like a child.
Alors une crainte me prit: ne me traiterait-il pas dorénavant en enfant, comme font en général les blancs qui ont des liasons avec des filles de couleur? Je ne voulais pas; j'aimais mieux essayer de le comprendre et peut-être le comprenais-je déjà un peu, je me sentais devenir autre, tout était si différent avec lui d'avec Horace...(139)

Soon after, Mayotte moved into André's house and assumed her fantasy role as the "wife" of a white French officer. It was a wonderful time for Mayotte. She finally had a sense of independence, due to André's largesse of course. She either did not realize her position or she was in denial. Perhaps she really did believe that André would leave his white French fiancée and marry her, especially if she were such an excellent housekeeper. The reader gets the impression that the reality of her situation is just under the surface, but Mayotte resolutely suppresses it.

Alors commençait pour moi une vie merveilleuse. Je vivais avec un blanc, un officier, qui me traitait comme sa femme. J'étais heureuse de lui montrer comme je savais bien tenir un ménage. Et, si Ophélie me regardait parfois de travers, je n'y faisais pas attention.(144)
The reader finds himself wondering if Mayotte truly loves André or is in love with the notion of being in love with a blond, blue-eyed French soldier because this meant security and independence. Earlier she made such a point of wanting to only marry a white man that her reaction to receiving a gold ring from André is puzzling to say the least. She is reminded of Loulouze and her "golden" bracelet and becomes extremely upset, thinking that André thinks she is with him only out of a desire or money. André, in turn, insists that the ring represents his love for her and refusing it would be refusing his love. It is not clear what brought on Mayotte's sudden attack of conscience. Maybe she does love André or maybe she just does not want to seem like a gold digger. Her initial refusal of the ring could be a clever way of luring André down the road to matrimony. Of course, giving this gold ring to his mistress could be a clever ploy on André's part to mollify her and keep her from talking about marriage for a while.

She even initially paid all of the household expenses, violently refusing at one point when André gave her money for his upkeep.
Mayotte protested vehemently, not wanting to be a kept woman. André, just as vehement, had his own convincing argument.

-Je ne veux pas vivre à tes crochets, dit-il. Tu payes la bonne, le blanchissage, la nourriture. Tu ne voudrais pas aussi payer mon loyer? Je ne vois pas quelle fausse honte tu éprouves à ce que je pourvoie à mon propre entretien! Je me laissai enfin convaincre et après plusieurs allers et retours, les billets restèrent dans mon sac. J'acceptai les comptes mensuels, puisque André m'avait persuadée qu'il n'aurait pas agi autrement si j'avais été sa femme legitime.(148)

It is easy to understand Mayotte's reticence to accepting money from André. Like it or not, money is an important dynamic in a relationship. For Mayotte it represents her cherished independence and accepting money means she must relinquish some of it. It is a testament to her feelings for André that she finally accepted the money. Nevertheless, the balance of power in the relationship has been irrevocably changed. In between his duties as an officer, he plays the Dr. Higgins role to her Eliza Doolittle. He endeavors to broaden her cultural horizons, to "civilize her." What
she would not do for herself or her parents, she jumps to do for André (just as she did for the Curé). She even tried, without much success, to speak with a more standard French accent.

André m'emménait parfois au cinéma ou à un concert au Théâtre Municipal. Il m'expliquait la musique classique. Il avait entrepris mon éducation artistique, littéraire même et je dois dire que je me montrais une élève beaucoup plus appliquée qu'à l'école. Mais c'est en vain au'il s'efforçait de me faire prononcer les r; je ne parvenais pas à perdre mon accent.(149)

When André was not with her, he spent time with his "békè" friends, which made Mayotte feel jealous and left out. The term "beke" refers to the white Europeans who migrated to Martinique and made it their home. She convinced him to take her with him once to mingle with his contemporaries, but it ended very badly. She realized with chagrin that she embarrassed André with her lack of chic and sophistication.

Celles-ci me regardaient avec une indulgence qui me fut insupportable. Je sentais que je m'étais trop fardée, que je n'étais pas habillée comme il fallait, que je ne faisais honneur à André, peut-être simplement à cause de la couleur de ma peau...(150)
Although things went much better later when André asked her to accompany him to a gala at the Municipal Theater, the reader still gets a sense that Mayotte based her own self-worth on the opinions of others. Her image of herself is based on the superficiality of appearance, and not on substance.

...Toutes les têtes se tournèrent vers nous et je vis, dans tous ces yeux d'hommes et de femmes, que j'étais belle.
...Je ne voyais plus que les yeux d'André. Ils rayonnaient de bonheur et de fierté. (152)

Mayotte's life continued happily with André until the day when she passed near her father's home while on a camping trip. She had not had any contact with her father since their earlier confrontation in Fort-de-France over his infidelities. She had continued her correspondence with Francette, but she was unsure of the reception she would get from her estranged parent. What she found on her arrival was at once shocking and ironic. Her philandering father had married yet another young thing who had just given birth. Her father was still chasing other women and had apparently become a mere shadow of the respectable personage that he used to be. Francette, thin and tired, cares for the entire household and must live on
a pittance. Mayotte is now the well-dressed, apparently affluent, happy visitor. Mayotte always envied Francette her happy, wealthy lifestyle, and now she seems to have changed places with her. Ironically, Francette does not seem to be jealous, but genuinely happy for Mayotte's good fortune. Mayotte, on the other hand, seems to have lost her father, who never speaks of her. She seems rather disheartened by the entire visit. It calls to mind two famous quotes, "Be careful of what you wish for" and Thomas Wolfe's "You can't go home again." Mayotte got out of her father's house and achieved her perceived independence, but now she is a stranger in her own home. When she speaks of being happy, she does so sadly, as if realizing that her happiness with André is somehow tainted by her family's plight.

[Francette]-Et toi?...Tu es belle. J'aime bien cette coifu'...Et ton beau lieutenant? Il t'aime toujou'?  

[Mayotte]-Oui Il n'est pas si beau, mais il m'aime toujou'. C'est lui qui m'a ammenée ici.  

[Francette]-Tu as de la chance, me dit-elle, tu es heu'euse!  

[Mayotte]-Oui, répondis-je tristement, je suis heu'euse.(164)
The second World War invades Mayotte's world with André and he is placed on alert. Mayotte was aware of the fact that she was not everything to André. His military obligations would always come before her. In addition to these worries, she had become pregnant, but had not yet realized it.

She attributed her vertigo and nausea to fatigue and sadness after her visit to Carbet.

Enfin, je ne me sentais pas bien: j'avais des vertiges, des nausées. La visite de Carbet m'avait beaucoup attristée. Et peut-être me fatiguais-je trop. (167)

She also considered that maybe her two previous maids had hexed her health out of jealousy. Rumor had it in the neighborhood that Mayotte had placed a love spell on André; Mayotte herself admits to it in the text.

Finally, she realizes that she is indeed pregnant. She was not worried about having an illegitimate child, for the occurrence was so common in her society. She was worried about how André would handle the situation, as their educations and ideals were so different. She resolved to tell him carefully and ended up blurting it out clumsily. André accepted the news very seriously. He wanted the child, because with the probability of eminent warfare, André had obviously come face to face
with his own mortality. It comforted him in some part to know that a part of him would continue if he were to die.

Je ne nie pas l'aspect egoïste de la question telle que je la pose. Mais si je dois être tué, il y aura au moins quelque part, sur la terre, un être né de moi et qui pourra transmettre à d'autres les qualités que j'ai reçues. Et toi, tu auras en lui un morceau de ma chair, un morceau de notre chair et de notre amour. Tu le garderas et tu l'aimeras, comme tu m'as aimé.(170)

It is a rather poignant scene for the reader believes without cynicism that Mayotte loves him for more than her ticket to independence.

Je me serrai contre lui, pour le protéger de cette mort dont il parlait et je pleurai...Je pleurais beaucoup, depuis que j'étais amoureuse, moi qui, comme enfant, détestais les larmes.(170)

Of course the war interceded on the 8th of May 1942 and dramatically alters Mayotte's life. André was called immediately to help defend Martinique in Fort-de-France. The population was ordered to evacuate Fort-de-France because it was feared that it would be bombarded. Mayotte ignored advice and good sense to go to Fort-de-France to be near André.
The city was like a ghost town and she was not allowed to see him. This is perhaps an allusion to her future with André.

Je compris que je ne pouvais voir André, qu'il ne m'appartenait plus, que je n'avais aucun droit sur lui.(173)

Mayotte spent a few stressful days awaiting André's return or some news of the war. Most of the incidents, fires, and ruptures, were due to bad interpretations of orders or chance. Nevertheless, everyone was waiting tensely on the edge for news of the American bombardier. During this stressful time, Mayotte saw an apparition of her dead mother. She appeared as beautiful as the day of her death, but she did not say anything. She approached Mayotte's bed and placed her hands on her chest. Apparently she stayed this way for a time, then got up and left by way of the door, without saying a word. Mayotte did not understand this strange visit, assuming that such a visit meant that her mother had something important to tell her. The significance of this apparition/dream is open to interpretation. Perhaps it is indicative of some future happening that will require some inner strength or familial support.
The reader can only speculate, but André came home the following evening in a bittersweet mood which did not bode well.

As the due date of her child approached, André received orders to go to Guadeloupe, where he would be assigned to the ship Jeanne d'Arc. He assured the shocked Mayotte that he would immediately see about renting a house where she could join him after the birth.

Mayotte gave birth to a little boy whom she named François as per André's wishes. She telegraphed him with the news and he wrote her that while he was happy at the birth of his son, he was depressed at the events in Guadeloupe. The officers found themselves in a difficult situation because of a revolt and he had not had the time to look for a house. He asked Mayotte to start working on a way to get to Guadeloupe.

She went to the police station with her identity papers to obtain an embarkment permit to Guadeloupe, where she was refused without explanation and treated rather rudely. She wanted to see the Commandant, but being a woman of color, she asked his mestizo mistress to serve as an intermediary. Several days later she obtained an audience with the Commandant. He explained
that passports were only given to merchants at this difficult time, but eventually revealed the government fear of the colored population becoming more and more Gaullist. Mayotte passionately explained her personal reasons for wanting to go to Guadeloupe--her love for André, their child, etc. Even though he was sympathetic, she was a black woman, and an officer must follow his career. The fact that their relationship was too serious was even more of a reason to keep them apart.

Vous oubliez que vous êtes une femme de couleur et qu'un officier doit suivre sa carrière. (181)

Even André was sounding more detached in his letters. Although he told her not to be discouraged, he said that he would never forget and thanked God for their two years together. Mayotte, afraid that he was succumbing to the pressure from his superiors, arranged to get a passport in her twin's (Francette's) name. She engaged a light-skinned domestic to pass for the baby's mother and set out for Guadeloupe. Unfortunately, André's ship was gone, and Mayotte received only hostility and distrust from the
Guadeloupeans. Their hostility towards whites in general was palpable in their derisive looks and comments to Mayotte and her white-looking son. Mayotte decided to seek passage back and fortunately found that the service still functioned to Martinique. She had her first brush with hatred. Years of colonization by whites and the preferential treatment of light skinned blacks was making for a dangerous situation.

As soon as she arrived home, she received a letter from André in which he sends her a check and says good-bye to her forever, albeit poetically. He insists that their love must now pass into the domain of ideas. Then he has the gall to tell her that she will raise their son and tell him what a great guy his father was.

Mayotte obviously was angry at André's arrogant idealism to think that she can live on memories of their love forever or that he can assuage his conscience towards his son with a check. She really hates him for obliging her to keep the check, because now she has to think of her child.

-André croyait-il m'avoir rendue heureuse pour toujours? Croyait-il que je pourrais vivre uniquement de
souvenirs? Se croyait-il quitte
enfin vis-à-vis de cet enfant au'il
ne connaissait pas, mais qui était
le sien, en m'envoyant un chèque?
Ah! si j'avais été seule, avec quel
plaisir je l'aurais déchiré ce
chèque. Je le haissais déjà de
m'obliger à le ramasser.(186)

In the following two years, Mayotte was able to find
André's address. After three of her letters to him
were returned unopened, she learned from one of his
officer friends that André had married in France. She
tried to forget him, but François resembled him too
much.

She could not touch the check from André, preferring to
go back to work, to assure her precious independence.

One day, out of the blue, she received a letter
from her father, proposing that she return for a visit
to Carbet with her son. She quickly settled her
affairs and set out for Carbet. She was shocked to see
her father so sickly, bent and old looking, but joyous
in their reunion. Her son was shocked to see that his
grandfather was black.

Lui qui avait la peau si blanche, il
ne pouvait pas comprendre,
certainement, pourquoi son
grand-père était noir.(188)
The reader wonders if Mayotte has ambivalent feelings toward her race. When her neighbors see her son and make remarks accusing her of betraying her race, Mayotte thinks that perhaps she has betrayed her race, but she is proud of it. The reader wonders why? I do not think her reasoning is as political and insidious as Fanon would have us believe, but emotional. She would not have her beautiful little boy if she had not been with André. With fierce maternal love and pride, she refuses to be ashamed of the love that brought her precious child into the world, no matter how the relationship ended. That redeeming factor saves Mayotte in my eyes.

Mayotte experienced a moment of uncertainty after discovering the hard times which had befallen her father's household. He had to sell a lot of the furniture and most of the land. She wondered if she could live in such a squalid atmosphere after the comfort of Fort-de-France. Fortunately, the love she had for her father and her native land made her soon forget the creature comforts. She was glad that she was once again the principal woman in her father's
life. She becomes the caretaker again, and she readily takes to this image. She redevelops a very close relationship with her father and they share their thoughts on politics, love, loss, birth and André. It was a necessary healing time for both of them.

Il faut que je t'avoue que je n'ai pas mené no plus une vie exemplai'.
Tu as t'ahi ta race, peut-être bien.
Tu es une fille mô', peut-être bien aussi. Mais je veux tout te pa'donner. Et je m'appête à che'i'
mon petit fils.(190)

Francette, more devoutly religious by the day, had a difficult time accepting François. She never kissed him, praying nightly for forgiveness for Mayotte and her sins. She constantly spoke to her father of her intolerable existence in a town where she had to listen to the townspeople denigrate Mayotte and her "white" child.

Mayotte is somewhat arrogant and considers herself above her contemporaries, perhaps because of her lighter skin, having lived with a white man and having such a white-looking son.

-Mon Père n'avait pas, comme moi, vécu avec un blanc.
Mayotte is such a contradiction that the reader cannot totally detest her. Her prejudice against her own people is a product of her colonized society where whiteness is exalted. While this does not prevent her from loving her father and her native land, it colors her choice of men. Even though he is convinced that a white man spells financial independence, she does not legally pursue André for child support. She clings tenaciously like a barnacle to her independence and is proud to be able to care for her son alone.

...j'étais fière et presque heureuse qu'il ne dépendit que de moi seule. Je ne le partagerai avec aucun homme, me disais-je.(192)

After fighting her own inner demons, Francette reconciled herself to François and decided to leave her father's house to become a novitiate. Mayotte concentrated on caring for her deteriorating father and raising her son.
After her father's death, she sold the house and moved back to Fort-de-France, but she could no longer take pleasure in the city where she lived so happily with André. She was indifferent to the officers who knew André and wanted to court her.

She still wanted to be a respectable wife, but she wanted to marry a white man. Oddly enough, she still wanted this even though she knew from experience that a woman of color would never be completely respectable in the eyes of a white man. Of course now, it would be difficult to find a black man who would take on a white man's child (not that Mayotte would have a black man).

Mayotte finally decided to leave her island and go to Paris. The reader can only speculate on what she hopes to accomplish there. Perhaps she hopes to find André or find another "white man." Perhaps she can give her son a chance to succeed in the white world. He seems white enough to pass, if she could procure a good education for him. Eventually though, she would be more of a hindrance than a help to him in the long run. The reader can picture several scenarios, all wrought with hopes, dreams, disappointment, and disillusion.
Mayotte has many facets in this novel: caretaker, lover, mother, daughter, sister, traitor, and dreamer. She has good traits and bad traits. She is neither angel or devil. She is human. Capécia as author uses Mayotte the character to evoke the collective consciousness of her countrywomen and the richness and variety of their personalities. Thumbing her nose at the stereotypes imposed on Martinican women by Hearn’s travelogue, Capécia effectively reappropriates her self-image.

In the second novel treated in this dissertation, Mon Examen de Blanc, Jacqueline Manicom’s character, Madévie struggles to be a good French citizen, i.e. assimilate into the white French culture at the expense of her own cultural identity. The notion of having to juggle two cultures is a problematic one. In order to succeed and to be accepted into the dominant society, she must adopt the “civilized” culture. This cultural double duty spawns resentment, as the dominant culture is not expected to recognize the different cultures around them. In fact they are considered savage and inferior. If our heroine succeeds in her biculturalty, she is scorned and ridiculed by her
peers for betraying her race. Basically it all comes down to the womb. Black men seeking out white women are not seen as much of a betrayal because they are darkening the white race and not lactifying of the black race. Black women are denigrated for trying to control their own bodies, while black men are given free rein. The reader can feel Manicom’s militant fervor and sense of outrage at the continued enslavement of women through their reproductive organs. Manicom continues the technique of the autobiographical first person to advance her political views. She and her husband founded the Guadeloupe Association for Family Planning. She also led a movement to make abortion legal and was co-founder of the group “Choisir” (Choice). It is easy to see how Manicom’s sense of identity was formed from her life experience and why her main character, Madévie suffers from a splintered sense of identity. She does not conjure up a twin as Capécia did, but she has two distinct selves. She has her European-educated doctor self and her Caribbean female self. It remains to be seen how the two will reconcile themselves.
The story is set in a hospital in Guadeloupe. It is apparent early on to the reader that the narrator functions in some medical capacity, perhaps as a doctor (though it is not verified until later) in the gynecological wing of the hospital. The representation of the narrator is very slow in revealing itself to the reader, who receives tidbits here and there on the private life of the narrator. Madévie Ramimoutou is a mulatto doctor from Guadeloupe, educated in France, who is suffering from conflicting identities and divided loyalties. She is a woman in the male-dominated profession of medicine. She is intelligent, competent, 

The following critical works have been published on Mon Examen de Blanc:


cultivated, etc., but she is black, a mulatto to be
exact. Being mulatto means not really belonging
anywhere, not all white and not all black. She is
mulatto not only because of skin color but also
symbolically because of her educational background.
Intentionally or not, she is different from her
uneducated countrymen who work modest jobs and have a
child every year. She is ashamed and horrified with her
people’s refusal to plan their families so they can
afford them, invoking God’s will to explain twenty
children in twenty years. Madévie is thirty years old,
old enough to have a few gray hairs and to be pensive,
sad and occasionally suicidal. From her description of
herself it is apparent that she has suffered
disappointment in her life and as the story progresses,
the reader is made privy to her secret agonies.

The reader is briefly introduced to one of the
nurses, Marie-Dominique, then in more detail to Dr.
Cyril Déman. Marie-Dominique is the angelically blond,
beautiful and pure nurse. The narrator obviously holds
this type to be the ultimate ideal of beauty as imposed
by the dominant culture. The narrator describes
Marie-Dominique as a fairy who only spares her an icy
stare because of the attention that the doctor pays to the narrator. Marie-Dominique is temporarily stationed in Guadeloupe as part of a contract with the Fougères clinic. She spends time in an exotic location, makes a lot of money taking advantage of all the avenues open to her as a white person, then returns happily to Paris. The narrator equates Guadeloupe with some sort of amusement park or a zoo where the blacks are the animals the whites visit. "Quand elle retournera à choisy-le-Roi, dans la banlieue parisienne, à la fin de son contrat avec la clinique des Fougères, elle retrouvera le monde réel, les êtres humains."^2 Marie-Dominique obviously thinks very highly of herself and disdains those she considers beneath her. She merely tolerates Madévie because she is after all a doctor, but she affects her grand airs with the other operating room nurse, Hélène. Hélène is probably a darker skinned black, because of her character’s one-dimensional aspect. The narrator does not directly confirm Hélène’s race but the way Marie-Dominique haughtily demands instruments from her during an operation and Hélène’s reaction of first irritation and

^2 Manicom, Jacqueline, Mon Examen de Blanc, p. 68
then resignation suggests this dynamic of racial hierarchy in the workplace. They probably have the same training and experience, but Marie-Dominique assumes the authoritative stance with all the confidence of a member of the dominant culture.

As for Cyril, the reader gets the impression that the doctor, while efficient and extremely competent, is less than warm in his overall bedside manner. He may be a brilliant doctor, but in his systematic and mechanical demeanor towards his patients, male or female, he eradicates all humanity from his dealings with the patients. One might even speculate that he is disgusted by his patients or at least by their breasts, which causes the reader to immediately assign misogynist tendencies to Cyril.

...son buste se fléchit vers chaque visage, tandis que de sa main grasse il palpe systématiquement chaque poitrine, recherchant semble-t-il des seins. Que ce soit un homme ou une femme, un opéré de l'abdomen ou une fracture de la jambe, un traumatisme crânien ou des hémorroïdes, le docteur Démian répète machinalment son geste comme s'il voulait à tout jamais arracher de l'humanité tout entière ces horribles, ces dégoûtantes mamelles!(11)
The narrator is not quite sure but intimates that Dr. Démian may have a fixation on breasts or some hostility towards women which manifests itself through the unnecessary cesarean sections he performs at the hospital. Whether this preoccupation is positive or negative is not completely clear to the reader or to the narrator for that matter. In the first three pages of the novel, the author establishes a precedent that pervades the entire novel: vivid and graphic images of the female body. A nurse tells the as of yet unnamed narrator that Démian’s “breasts” hang and that he is proud of this fact. He also suggests that he loves to touch breasts.

...Démian, caressant de ses mains gantées de chirurgien un palcenta extrait d’un uterus après césarienne, m’a regardé d’un air entendu en constatant: ‘c’est doux et bon à toucher comme des seins.’ (12).

The complex relationship which unfolds during the course of the novel remains somewhat opaque. The exact nature of the relationship between the narrator and Cyril is not determined in the storyline. One senses the attraction, at least on Cyril’s part, when early in the novel he knocks and enters her small bedroom which the narrator dubs “cube” and places himself in such
proximity to the narrator that she cannot avoid the "soft, sweet" contact of his bust, which she likens to that of the feel of the placenta. The cube represents a society where she is restricted by the rules of its dominant culture. Ironically, she can not totally relax in her own room and be herself, whoever that may be, for Cyril encroaches on this small space. He has appointed himself the narrator's cultural guide, and endeavors to civilize the narrator. Even though the narrator is just as adept as Cyril in many accomplishments of polite society, she allows Cyril to dictate what she listens to, what she reads, and how she should think. The penchant for classical music shared by the two represents the European influence in the narrator's life. Educated in France, the narrator suffered a fractured sense of identity. It is obvious that Cyril is the dominant one in the relationship due to the dynamics of gender and race, a fact the narrator resents. Cyril sets the tone for the progression of the relationship.

The narrator feels that because she is a mulatto, no one expects her to say anything of real value. She
envies the physical attributes of Marie-Dominique, thinking perhaps if she had a pretty nose or blond hair, her words would be more respected. For even though she is a competent doctor (a fact which the reader is not told definitively until about page eighteen of the novel), no one hangs on her words as they do Marie-Dominique's.

Comme j'envie Marie-Dominique qui ne parle que pour répondre aux questions posées: alors quand elle ouvre la bouche, on s'attend à recueillir des diamants. Je voudrais être belle, blonde, blanche et claire comme Marie-Dominique. Je voudrais avoir le joli nez de Marie-Dominique. Au lieu de tout cela, je ne suis qu'une mulâtresse, avec une peau en chocolat, comme disent les petits enfants de France qui n'ont pas l'habitude des gens de couleur.(14)

There is an inkling of a deep lack of self-esteem on the narrator's part, no doubt due to the identity crisis often experienced by oppressed peoples of all races and ethnic origins. When one is constantly bombarded with beauty ideals which contrast greatly with one's own features, in this case white skin, blond hair, blue eyes and a small nose, it is easy to be
unhappy and discontented. It is not clear why she needs Cyril. She says that Cyril brings oxygen into her little cube, but he does not have much to say to her. Evidently this "oxygen" symbolizes life for the narrator, which implies that Cyril is vital to her well-being. This leads the reader back to the question of the relationship between Cyril and Madevie. The narrator's technique of not mentioning her name or the fact that she too is a doctor, the intellectual equal of Cyril, underscores her lack of self-esteem and the uncertainty of her identity in her own mind. She seems to look to Cyril for her validation in life.

Cyril is, in the narrator's description, very corpulent and a rather unappetizing specimen of manhood, whom Madevie does not love in the romantic sense. "Une imposante architecture de chair grasse et blanche sur un tout petit squelette."(15) She forbids herself to love Cyril in the romantic sense, and restricts herself to feelings of friendship. The reader doubts that Madevie is attracted to Cyril physically; she is drawn rather to his mind and the power of his
whiteness. The fact that Cyril is white gives him the right, from Madevie’s point of view, to be fragile and fat. Cyril or rather “white” is the symbol of reason. “Ici tu es blanc et tu as le droit d’être gras et fragile. Tu es le symbole de la raison.”16) Madevie envies him the luxury of being able to be fat and fragile. Being doubly oppressed, she does not enjoy the same luxury. She must be twice as strong in order to survive. At this point in the story, it is difficult to understand the motives behind the seemingly tenuous relationship between Cyril and the narrator. Is she using or attempting to use Cyril to further her place in the medical profession and/or society? She obviously resents him and what he represents. Is this a symbiotic or parasitic relationship, and if so then on whose part and to what extent?

Is Cyril really teaching the narrator "culture," such as the appreciation of classical music, when the narrator already seemed to have this appreciation for Bach and Vivaldi before having met Cyril? The classical music seems to give Madevie peace until Cyril
enters and imposes his will on it, effectively smothering Vivaldi’s guitars as he symbolically smothers the narrator. Madévie cannot listen to the music and form her own opinions about the piece. Cyril tells her what to like or dislike about the music. Cyril’s efforts to “civilize” Madévie through the finer things in life may just be an attempt to use her sexually in the same way that the colonizers used their religion to rationalize the exploitation of the colonized people of Madévie’s homeland.

Is the narrator a victim of sexual harassment? Does she welcome Cyril’s attentions, or does he give her no choice? He seems to enjoy his position of power. He always suggests what music Madévie should listen to and what literature she should read. If she has the audacity to think for herself and pick something different to read, Cyril punishes her with his silence. Even though the narrator is a colleague, he scoffs at her suggestions while embracing those of the white nurse, Marie-Dominique. It is not so much what the narrator says, as what she does not say that leads the
reader to believe that Cyril takes great delight in frequently undermining the narrator's already shaky self-esteem.

De temps en temps, il me gratifie de mon titre de Docteur en medicine avec ironie. Je suis une femme-médecin et donc dans son esprit, encore un peu plus "tordue" que la moyenne des femmes. Je me demande s'il me considère comme un confrère. Si c'est le cas, il me fait par là une grace!(18)

The dynamics of the relationship between Cyril and the narrator revolve around power. Cyril obviously has it and the narrator resents it and it affects her entire outlook. In the male/female dynamic, the dominant male sets all the rules for standards of behavior. In the case of Cyril and the narrator, the latter is judged on her ability (like his) not to show emotions in the face of tragedy.

When they discover that one of their patients, a famed cyclist, has an incurable and inoperable cancer, Madévie dreads breaking the awful news to the patient and his wife. The seemingly unaffected Cyril mocks the narrator's dilemma and chides her for her lack of indifference.
Even as she tries to convince herself that Cyril's attitude is the correct one, she cannot seem to rid herself of those pesky emotions accorded to women, not the least of which is compassion.

A certain statement made by Cyril gives some insight into his character. He says "Voilà l'urgence source de jouissance! n'est-ce pas docteur Ramimoutou?" (18) Urgent or emergency situations tend to bring out the best in Cyril; he is at his most competent, most efficient, most unemotional. In this instant, he is all powerful and he must derive no small satisfaction from that knowledge. It is almost akin to a sexual gratification, hence a play on the word "jouissance." Cyril's character comes off as being asexual, and Madévie states that Cyril has never been with a woman, which leaves the reader to wonder at Cyril's sexual orientation. Perhaps because of his corpulence and unattractiveness he has little success with women, hence his hostility and his glee in performing those unnecessary caesareans, and the sexual gratification he can only attain through his work.
Dr. Ramimoutou envies Dr. Démian's power, a sort of double envy: of the phallus and of the race. Cyril has a double advantage and she has none. Due to this advantage, Cyril will never be judged on the basis of his looks, so he can afford to be fat and unattractive as long as he is competent and white. Dr. Ramimoutou has to be as competent, but more often than not more competent to succeed in a predominately male profession; then she must fight to overcome the condescension from her colleagues because of her gender and her race.

Cyril ridicules Madévie's fear of seeing someone suffer and her desire to do something to alleviate another's emotional suffering, which is a testament to a woman's "weakness" of being too emotional. Cyril is interested only in the medical aspect for purely clinical reasons. He is indifferent to the human aspect of his vocation. He goes on to goad her with his enthusiasm for tears, which he equates with the act of climaxing. "Allons, allons! Avouez que vous raffolez des sanglots, c'est comme une jouissance, hein!" (26)

At this moment a person, free of inhibitions, reverts
to a primal urge as old as time and is completely open and vulnerable. The last time Madévie was so free physically and emotionally was in her disastrous love affair with a white man in France, details about which the author teases the reader with gradual revelations of what transpired during Madévie’s time in medical school. The intimate nature of this exchange between Cyril and Madévie is further proof that their relationship goes further than an acquaintance among peers. Cyril never openly suggests that anything of a sexual nature occur between himself and Madévie, but he does place himself in close proximity to her on occasion and Madévie herself is left to wonder what is on his mind.

Cyril s’obstine à vouloir s’y pencher en même temps que moi. Je me blottis vers l’embrasure, mais je n’arrive tout de même pas à éviter le contact doux et mou de son buste. Doux et mou comme un placenta.(13)

Even with Madévie’s discomfort around Cyril, at one point in the story, Madévie says that she needs him. She says that there is not enough oxygen in her “cube” and Cyril brings her oxygen. The cube is symbolic of
the prison-like white society. Enclosed in this
confining space, Madevie must conform to the dictates
of the dominant culture, where Cyril endeavors to
civilize her through music and literature. The cube
also represents the dilemma she and other minorities
face. In order to assimilate into the dominant culture,
the minority has to be essentially bi-cultural to
succeed educationally and financially but to also
maintain a sense of pride and identity. The effort it
takes to accomplish this assimilation overwhelms and
chokes the narrator periodically. She needs Cyril,
ironically, to ground her and to remind her of her true
Guadeloupean identity, which is merely the image that
Cyril, representing white society, imposed on her.

Evidemment, je suis malheureuse et
j’ai besoin de Cyril. Il faut que je
sois malheureuse pour Cyril. Je suis
un tout petit globule rouge et il
n’y a pas assez d’oxygène dans ce
“cube”. Cyril Démian m’en apporte.
Il ne dit rien! ou si peu de choses...
Généreusement, il m’offre le paysage
d’en bas. Il me fait cadeau de mon
pays: me voilà, les bras chargés de
ma savane brûlante, de la mer
Caraïbe engloutissant le gigantesque
soleil d’or.(15)
Xavier was an intern at a hospital in Paris while Madévie was in medical school and became her first lover. He was a member of the bourgeois class and he claimed to be more cultivated than he actually was. For example, Madévie knew more about classical music than he did. Xavier was attracted to the exoticism of sleeping with a black woman and the fact that she was a virgin only made the temptation even greater. This was his chance to sow his wild oats and to realize his sexual fantasies before settling down to a bourgeois marriage designed to add prestige to the family name, not to mention money to its coffers.

Sauvage et inépuisable baiser, multiple, impatiente caresse dans la chevelure neuve d’un pubis, frémissement et ardeur d’une vierge rose captivant la vulve interdite et désirée, goûtant sa part de magie, de vaudou, avant le mariage bourgeois.(38)

Madévie, for her part, was raised by her mother to admire the white man and things white most likely because whites made all the rules and they had all the power.
She probably felt vindicated as a person because a white man found her attractive, and even for a good Catholic girl like her, being deflowered by a white man was not a big sin.

Le curé de Saint-Suplice absourdrait bien vite le jeune homme et quant à Madévie, sa mère qui l’avait bien éduquée dans l’admiration du blanc lui en voudrait à peine!(38)

Unfortunately, Xavier was sexually obsessed with Madévie and she mistook this for love. It was an added boon that she was intelligent, but he still treated her as a sexual object. In all fairness to Xavier, he probably loved Madévie in his own way, but his prejudices and those of his societal milieu ruined what could have been a good thing. For after everything was said and done, she was still black. Madévie, 22 years old, gave Xavier her only commodity, her virginity, and she wanted marriage in return. She was ready to renounce her race and become white (she was mulatto), and to give him white children. In her naïveté, she did
not realize that one drop of black blood made you black in the white man's eyes, therefore one notch lower on the evolutionary scale. She even believed that she was almost white because they taught them in school that the blacks from Africa were savages, but that the Antilleans were almost white.

Cet été là, elle croyait encore aux choses qu'on lui avait apprises dans les écoles antillaises: des ancêtres gaulois, voyons! Elle était doublement françaises: d'abord pour être née dans une colonie française, ensuite parce qu'on lui en avait donné la ferme assurance lors de la départementalisation en 1945, alors qu'elle était déjà une petite fille qui comprenait beaucoup de choses. Les nègres d'Afrique sont des sauvages, lui avait-on dit, tandis que les Antillais sont presque des Blancs. (43)

It was inevitable that she becomes pregnant, so that the reader can see Xavier show his true colors:

Si j'épouse une fille de couleur, ce sera pour ma famille une véritable catastrophe! Maman en mourrait! Et mon frère Alain! Si ambitieux, qui voudrait que j'épouse une riche hérétique, et aristocrate en plus. (61)

He claims to detest the bourgeoisie and all it symbolizes, but he rationalizes his inability to defy
the wishes of his family, citing his mother's certain devastation and his brother's social ambition. Nevertheless, he admits to being unable and unwilling to give up certain perks of the class.

Bien sûr! Il y a des aspects que je condamne totalement chez la bourgeoisie au pouvoir dans notre pays. Mais que veux-tu, je ne peux échapper à mon milieu social et familial, et je dois avouer que je suis sensible à certaines vanités...Je suis un arriviste arrivé! Tu me comprends?(62)

When Madevie confronts Xavier, seeking a real and honest commitment, he placates her by telling her what she wants to hear, even telling her that he loves her in order to bed her. Of course he says this in the throes of his physical need, and Madevie is well aware of this. Nevertheless she allows him to use her body sexually, perhaps because she wanted so much to believe that he loved her in the same way that she loved him. It is easy to convince oneself that something is true if one wants it to be true badly enough.

Alors elle oubliait la "structure de la bourgeoisie parisienne" parcequ'il lui avait dit "je t'aime" comme on dit "je t'aime" à une sapotille bien mûre, comme on "veut" un mango juteux.(62-63)
What follows is a perfect example of Madévie’s objectification by Xavier. His “love” was simply an obsession with the exoticism of being with a black woman. He did not care what she wanted or how she felt. He was intent only on his own gratification. He took her roughly without a thought to her pleasure. Sadly, she let him.

Il l’embrassait rageusement, si fort qu’elle avait l’impression d’avoir les gencives qui éclataient. Impérieux, il l’avait couchée par terre, l’écrasait, la perçait pour enfin la noyer, heureuse, haletante, dans le flot de ce liquide blanc qu’il secrétait pour ses muqueuses couleur de prune. (63)

Then he had the unmitigated gall to tell Madévie that he would have beaten her if she had the temerity to refuse him! His excuse was that he had desired her so much that he had to have her!

Si tu t’étais refusée, je crois que je t’aurais battue, tant j’avais envie de toi, lui avouait-il plus tard. (63)

Was she supposed to be flattered by this left-handed compliment (and I am sure he meant it as a compliment). Apparently, this was supposed to be
surefire proof that he loved her. Madévie's self-esteem was so wrapped up in Xavier. She feels honored to be with this white bourgeois, who risks censure from his peers. To his credit, Xavier offers to do the honorable thing and marry Madévie upon learning of the pregnancy. Nevertheless, he warns Madévie of his mother's reaction to the situation. She was a bigot and a class conscious snob of the highest order and she thought blacks were only slightly more evolved than monkeys. Of course she would refuse to have a black daughter-in-law and threaten to cut off her son if he married Madévie.

Xavier basically offers the "honor" of marrying a white man, while he would be marrying beneath his station and his race. He felt a responsibility for the virgin that he impregnated, and he was willing to alienate himself from society if she were willing to accept that he would beat her, cheat on her and blame her for ruining his life. Is that all? He admits that he will be abusive in one breath, then begs her not to leave him in another. Madévie is made to feel the criminal because she is a black woman. As if she forced Xavier to have sex with her (though Xavier's mother
thinks she put a voodoo spell on him). No wonder she had such a complex. Madévie is ashamed of her blackness and of her history and even seeks to deny it so she can seem more white, and therefore more acceptable to Xavier.

Even Madevie wonders why she accepts this self-negation, this abject humiliation to be Xavier’s wife. She decided that it was not because she loved or needed Xavier, but because of 300 years of prejudice and stereotypes. The idea that the Antillean race must whiten itself because the whites were superior had been planted and had germinated in Madévie’s mind. She had become submissive to their will.

Si j’ai accepté, cher Cyril, c’est parce que depuis plus de trois siècles, on ne répète qu’il faut que la race Antillaise se blanchisse, que
Xavier presents Madévie with the terms of their marriage: after the baby is born, they will divorce. Madévie consents to the shame of having the wedding banns declared on the same day as the divorce intentions. She endures life with a man who does not want his friends to know they are engaged, much less expecting a baby, which they would consider a biological aberration!

Les békés, par exemple, pensent sûrement que nous ne sommes pas, nous autres Antillais de couleur, de la même "espèce" qu’eux.

...et les collègues de Xavier devaient sans doute se demander comment un spermatozoïde "humain" avait pu féconder un ovule "métèque" (97)

With all the pressure and derision inflicted on Madévie by her prospective in-laws, coupled with the shame Xavier felt about marrying a being considered not quite human by those of his social milieu, Madévie undergoes a transformation. She is no longer blinded by the dominant society’s double standard. She realizes her
status in their eyes, and it is inferior. No matter how educated she may be, no matter how white she may “almost” be, no matter that she is doubly a French citizen, she is still and will always be a negress. Even if she married Xavier, she would be shunned and made to feel like a criminal because of her color. Her child would be stigmatized and marginalized. Her first lucid decision was to get out of the engagement.

Ce matin-là, je me suis dit que si j’acceptais d’épouser Xavier dans ces conditions, c’est que je n’avais plus un iota de dignité. Je suis partie, lui laissant un mot bref: ‘Ne t’inquiète pas pour moi, je ne veux plus t’épouser.’ (133)

In her confused and sad state of mind, she decides to abort her four and a half month old fetus. This is a dangerous situation, for abortions are not usually performed after the third month unless the mother’s life is in danger. Thus this significant act was Madévie’s rejection of the white man and her refusal to help whiten her race.

Je me suis avortée. Moi-même. Je suis arrivé à me poser une sonde utérine. Cela s’est passé dans un hôtel de banlieue où je m’étais réfugiée. Quand je l’ai expulsé, il a bougé dans ma main.
Madévie’s next romantic involvement is with Gilbert, a local black political activist, teacher and a member of the independence-seeking group called Liberté. Madévie is wary of Gilbert because he is married, but she eventually comes to terms with her “self” through his love. For the first time in a long time, she feels attractive and desirable, not in spite of her color, but because of it. Gilbert restores Madévie’s identity, her passion and her faith.

Ainsi je suis femme, et cette femme est plus voluptueuse encore que les vagues chaudes, murmure Gilbert. Ainsi j’ai un corps, un corps que je découvre dans le sable qui fuit avec chaque lame sombre, un corps qui s’éveille sous la bouche avide et gourmande de Gilbert, prince des branches enchevêtrées du raisinier bord de mer, amant et magicien, qui de mes hanches, allonge mes jambes et découvre milles étoiles sur ma peau.(169)
She emerges from the silence of her cube to continue the work of Gilbert, who was unfortunately slain by riot control police during a peaceful protest march. This episode in the book is based on actual riots in 1967 where several marchers were shot.

Kembé raid, pas molli (Soyons fermes, ne nous laissons pas abattre). Je me répète constamment cette dernière phrase murmurée par Gilbert. (178)

Oui, Gilbert, je serai forte, je tiendrai. Même si à cet instant une cinquantaine d'Antillais s'envolent encore vers les hôpitaux, les usines et les trottoirs de Paris. Car j'ai retrouvé ton regard confiant dans des centaines d'yeux d'enfants noirs, métis et hindous. Et peut-être même qu'il pourrait naître, ce regard, dans les prunelles d'un petit enfant bébé. (185)

It is crucial for us not to interpret the ending as a symbolic switch of ideology, an either/or choice between racist assimilation (lactification) and négritude. The trade union meetings specifically warn against simply exchanging one ready made ideology for another.
The racial awakening is balanced by the class conflict. If there is to be justice and equality, race and sex must be transcended.

It is interesting to note how much of Manicom’s personal history manifests itself in this text. Manicom herself was Guadeloupean, but of Indian descent which made her a "sub-nigger", so to speak, from the Guadeloupean societal perspective. Originally the East Indians were brought in by the French to work the most menial jobs. These jobs were even refused by the newly freed Blacks. So the Indians were immediately stigmatized and this stigma lingers to this day.

Manicom was well acquainted with the medical profession, which explains the abundant and accurate use of medical terminology. She had a medical and a law degree and was also a midwife. In the book she is a capable doctor with a slight inferiority complex when confronted by her white male counterparts. In reality she was the eldest child of an extremely poor family with twenty children. From this the reader can understand her frustration and sense of futility in her confrontation with the 35 year old mother of twenty who
refuses to take steps to prevent yet another birth. She felt that her people were merely supplying indentured labor for the French Labor force. She was a strong critic of the B.U.M.I.D.O.M. It is an official employment agency which "loans" the price of a one-way ticket to Paris and guarantees a job on arrival. The job turns out to be a menial one and no provisions are made for a place to stay. Therefore the person cannot repay his loan or repays it at such a sacrifice that he cannot return home or bring his family over and is forced to continue working.

Manicom used her free access to French universities and sheer determination to educate herself and to pull herself up the social ladder. She married twice in the white French bourgeoisie, which undoubtedly did not sit well with some in the French press. They resented her for taking advantage of their system and then having the nerve to criticize it. For example, Clarisse Zimra wrote that:

Jacqueline Manicom a tout ce qu'il faut pour réussir en littérature en 1975.
Elle est athée, guachiste, guadeloupéenne et elle deteste la France qui lui a payé ses études.

Mon Examen de Blanc is therefore openly autobiographical and addresses the problems of class, sex and race. The title, My Exam in Whiteness, refers to the main character's attempts to pass in the white world. She does everything she can to assimilate into the white culture, despite the damage she does to her self-esteem and own sense of identity. Fortunately, the heroine eventually reclaims her identity, though the voyage is very painful. The novel lambastes modern medicine's callous treatment of women and their bodies, especially women of color and low socio-economical status. In Manicom's point of view, the French white male doctor is representative of the oppressive patriarchal colonial system. The clinic in Guadeloupe or the Parisian hospital is transformed into a microcosm of French society. Racism becomes the tool which represses both sexually and politically. Her criticisms and sardonic observations obviously struck a

vital nerve at the epicenter of the French medical profession. Manicom was demoted from the operating room and reduced to emptying bed pans at lower pay soon after the publication of her novel in 1972. Manicom was much more overtly militant than Capécia's was in *Je suis Martiniquaise*.

Manicom comments on the feminine condition as well as the condition of the assimilated West Indian. Her feminist politics are evident in her second novel, *La Graine: Journal d'une Sage-Femme* (1974), *(The Seed: The Diary of a Midwife)*, where she addresses issues of contraception and abortion. Nevertheless, Manicom received the most critical attention with *Mon Examen de Blanc*, which skillfully manipulates the issues of race, class and gender into a poignant portrayal.

Writing becomes the means through which Manicom reclaims the body which was confiscated from her, the means through which she overcomes her voicelessness and seizes the occasion to speak, to find the discourse which will empower her to forge her rightful place in history. The graphic depiction of the female body and all of its mysterious functions were meant to shock
society into shedding the objectifying image that has been attached to females for centuries: as that of a sexual being. Being confronted with images of menstruation, childbirth, breasts and the uterus keeps one from thinking that women are no more than delicate, dependent, insipid creatures.

It indicates that there is more there than meets the eye, something that is well worth the effort to try to understand. Manicom uses the female body as a means of subverting the literary canon which was invented and established by man in order to express feminine difference. Not necessarily an entirely different feminine language, but rather a language with a new voice; the voice of woman.
Conclusion

With all of the images we have seen of the black woman in this dissertation, one theme recurs: survival. The black woman suffers racism, sexism, and the lack of economic, social, reproductive and educational control.

Capécia and Manicom employ techniques which are typical in the French West Indian women writers:
1) They use Creole instead of the master's tongue to gain their voice as well as continue their oral tradition, albeit in the written form.
2) They draw on allusions from the Bible, folktales, proverbs and songs.
3) They use the autobiographical first person narrator.
4) Both texts are inherently subversive as a means of resistance.

They put themselves into their texts by reclaiming and embracing their sexuality, a sexuality which had been repressed by the morality imposed by a patriarchal society. They successfully subverted the existing systems that repress feminine difference and emerged
with a new voice, the voice of woman. They both confronted the representations of women and they questioned them. They manipulated the representations until they were suitable for their own agendas. The trail by fire, so to speak, to find their own sense of identity really establish Capécia and Manicom as dark Phoenixes. Capécia survived harsh criticism and misunderstanding. Nevertheless, she succeeded in criticizing post-colonial society. Manicom survived demotion and ridicule to fight for what she believed in.

The fact that both authors definitely had an agenda when choosing the first person autobiographical narrative as a technique has been well established. These seemingly personal experiences aptly represented the collected consciousness of Martinique and Guadeloupe from the black female perspective. Although Capécia’s voice was all alone in 1948, and she was effectively muzzled, those who now choose to go back and give her further consideration will be pleasantly surprised at what she managed to do to subvert the outrageous stereotypes perpetuated through the years.
about black females and their sexuality as well as her criticisms of postcolonialism. Her re-vision of Hearn’s “Martinican Sketches” could easily be the topic of a dissertation and it is amazing that her original detractors never made the connection that Pauletta Richards does in her dissertation on Capécia.

Madévie’s transformation from an isolated, culturally confused silent woman to a galvanized and politically engaged woman with a newfound sense of identity and voice in Mon Examen de Blanc is representative of the voyage black women take. Even with the threat of censure looming, it is important to find that voice and not to let it be silenced. Each generation produces its share of Phoenixes and perhaps one day it will not be necessary for each Phoenix to be consumed by fire and to be reborn. It is important to pass the torch on to subsequent generations of black women to ensure that their voices will endure in perpetuity.
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Vita

Sybil S. Jackson was born on August 14, 1965, in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to Leon Dupree and Annie Sue Jackson. Her family eventually settled in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1969 where her father taught Military Science at Southern University and her mother taught mathematics in East Baton Rouge Parish. Both of her parents went on to pursue post graduate degrees, her father becoming a lawyer and her mother getting a master of arts degree.

Her parents’ strong work ethic encouraged Sybil to strive for academic excellence. She attended Baton Rouge Magnet High School from 1979-1983 where she graduated with honors. She attended Louisiana State University, where she received a bachelor of arts degree in 1987, a master of arts degree in 1989 and finally the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1999.

Sybil has been a French teacher at the University Laboratory School on the Louisiana State University campus in Baton Rouge for the past five years. She teaches French and Spanish at the Elementary, Middle and High school levels.

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