La Mulâtresse During the Two World Wars: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Suzanne Lacascade’s Claire-Solange, âme-africaine and Mayotte Capécia’s Je suis Martiniquaise

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When we think of the literature produced before, during, and after the two World Wars we rarely think of the Caribbean as a site of significant literary output. Typically, we privilege a white, male, European literary voice. If we do consider literature from elsewhere, it usually follows a pattern of normative privilege. Therefore, it is useful to consider the female Caribbean voice and its response to colonialism, racism, and gender violence during the period between 1914 and 1945. Claire-Solange, âme-africaine offers arguably one of the best examples of a female Caribbean perspective on World War I as well as global politics. Although Suzanne Lacascade’s novel has been obscured and lost over time, the Martinican author portrays everyday scenarios in France during World War I to empower marginalized Caribbean women during one of the most tumultuous moments in the early 20th Century. While Lacascade shifts our lens to the First World War, Mayotte Capécia’s Je suis Martiniquaise is set, in part, during the blockade years in Martinique during World War II under Admiral Georges Robert. Together, these two Martinican female writers – even though they are less well known than their canonical male compatriots Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, and Patrick Chamoiseau – lucidly portray the everyday lives of mulatto women in Martinique and in France as they negotiate their place on the periphery of French society. I argue below that through their interrogations of the everyday during these two wars that Lacascade and Capécia generate female protagonists who challenge racial, cultural, gender, and sexual stereotypes, which have historically rendered mixed race women as marginalized figures in Francophone Caribbean literature.
During the two World Wars, the dominant literary view of everyday life throughout the world came from European and U.S. writers. Therefore, we have a quite biased perspective on the world within a literary frame. The bulk of the literature that treats the history beyond the Western world is exoticized and stereotyped under a white male and even ethnographic gaze. In the Caribbean, writers began to adopt this problematic style in order to describe their own history. The Martinican writer René Maran, author of *Batouala: Véritable roman nègre*, mimics the European ethnographic model to describe quotidian scenes in French West Africa. While trying to provide the perspective of a participant observer, Maran – simultaneously allured and repulsed by the Africans – depicts scenes of debauchery and “savage behavior” as the pitfalls of African society. It is quite clear that Maran’s erotic and exotic portrayal of African life is packaged for a French readership. Although Maran could not avoid writing in French like most colonized writers, his imperialist treatment of Africa, and the brutal treatment of Africans as subjects of study fall in line with the majority of white French ethnographic literature of the time.

*Batouala* was published in 1921 and Maran’s Africa seems entirely cut off from the rest of the world because the novel does not mention the Great War. This, however, is a discrepancy that Suzanne Lacascade rectifies three years after the publication of Maran’s novel because the war serves as the main sociopolitical backdrop in *Claire-Solange, âme-africaine*. While she uses a familiar European style, rife with melodrama and ethnographic categorization, the effect is quite different. Lacascade interrogates French models of race and stereotypes in the Caribbean through her appropriation of French poetics. Above all, she wishes to deconstruct the trope of the *mulâtresse* as a hyper-sexualized, mad woman.¹ From the beginning of the novel it is clear that the *mulâtresse* is the focal point of Lacascade’s analysis of race in the French Empire, she writes: “Mais ces climats sauvages ne conviennent plus à Étienne, il souffre du foie, et sa fille, en
But these tropical climates no longer accommodated Étienne, he suffered through indigestion, and in short, his daughter found herself to have a soul that was more than half European… a mulâtresse”].

Although Claire is born to a French family, her black skin and tropical origins mark her as the Other, simultaneously lending her cultural identity to both France and Martinique. Lacascade highlights the fact that the French history of métissage is inescapable and she situates the beginning of her novel within the context of the colonial family romance. She also makes reference to the objectification of la mulâtresse in French culture, a phenomenon that was very à la mode in Paris during the 1920s, where “‘la créole des romans […] séduit tous les hommes et désarme les femmes” [the creole woman of novels […] seduces all the men and disarms the women”]. The métisse, or mixed race woman, distorts and disrupts the European family unit in the Caribbean. She is a licentious presence who is the object of the male plantocrats as well as the envy of their wives. Although the métisse is depicted as meek and powerless, her mere existence challenges French cultural hegemony. Lacascade’s choice to display the stereotypical mulâtresse is a cautionary measure more than anything, refusing to allow Claire to fall into the same cultural traps as her mother Aurore.

Instead of allowing Claire to tumble into obscurity like Aurore, Lacascade constructs Claire as a strong female character who is engaged in global politics. Claire fearlessly shows off her erudition during dinner conversations about global events, which help to place the novel in its historical context. During a few conversations, the Hucquart family discusses the notion of anti-Semitism in Europe as well as the Dreyfus Affair. Lacascade displays the discussion of anti-Semitism to interrogate forms of racism and cultural hegemony in France. She essentially preempts what Aimé Césaire would later articulate in Discours sur le colonialisme,
“christianisme = civilisation; paganisme = sauvagerie” [Christianity = civilization; paganism = savagery]. It is also worth mentioning that Césaire wrote these words in 1955 after the battle of Dien Bien Phu and well after World War II. Therefore, Lacascade’s questioning of anti-Semitic discourse as racism predates the theories of some of the most esteemed Caribbean thinkers.

Lacascade equates Judaism with blackness when Madame Pol asks Claire to give her opinion on the treatment of Jews during the early 20th Century: “Comment vous répondre? Papa a traversé le monde, combattant les préjugés; et pourrais-je mépriser une autre race opprimée, moi je suis nègre” [How shall I respond to you? Father trotted the globe combating prejudices; and could I despise another oppressed race, I am a Negro]. Claire understands that anti-Semitism correlates with the racism she has experienced due to métissage. She contests that because both groups are oppressed, that they share a common plight in the white, Christian, masculine discourse in France. Claire’s statement also creates a sense of solidarity with Jews and other subaltern groups that reject the hierarchization of the world based on race, class, and gender. Thus, we see Claire as a visionary Caribbean character, “a woman with a mind, intellect, and political savvy ready to comment on the sociocultural inadequacies of her time.”

Without hesitation Claire refuses to accept Mme Pol Hucquart’s prejudices, or, for that matter, the rest of her family’s views on religion and white Eurocentrism. During a conversation about Christmas, Claire refuses to be duped by Mme Pol’s facetiousness:

Oh ! Tante d’Europe, tante blanche, tante trop blanche ! Croyez-vous posséder le monopole de la Nativité ? Jésus n’est pas un blanc à l’esprit étroitement mesquin ! Il vint aussi pour nos zones torrides, celles où le puissant soleil, en décembre, chauffe à la fois les airs, l’eau du bain pour les petits enfants, et l’écorce odorante dont les sauvages se font un briquet…"
[Oh! Aunt from Europe, white aunt, white-white aunt! Do you believe you possess the monopoly on the Nativity? Jesus isn’t a strictly petty-minded white person! He came also for our torrid zones, those where, in December, the powerful sun warms at the same time the air, the bath water for the little children, and the scented bark that the savages use to make themselves a fire…]⁷

Claire is quick to note, to her “tante trop blanche,” that her aunt has overlooked an entire region of the world that also celebrates Christmas as a result of European colonialism. Lacascade appropriates a racial discourse in order to deconstruct Mme Pol’s evocation of Christianity. Claire also points out to her aunt that Jesus was likely not as white as she would like to believe, alluding to the notion that whiteness is associated with civilization and Christianity. Claire’s anti-colonial counterpoint falls on deaf ears as Mme Pol tries to demystify what Aimé Césaire termed, “l’idée du nègre barbare” [the idea of the black barbarian], an idea that continued to justify the colonization of the Caribbean at the time.⁸ Although Claire is able to openly reject her family’s prejudices about the Caribbean, she cannot escape their “[…] leurs gestes [qui] créaient une atmosphère d’exotisme dans ce salon bourgeois” [nonchalant gestures [that] created an exotic atmosphere in [their] bourgeois salon] that renders her the racial Other.⁹

Once the First World War starts, the novel unfolds in a series of conversations in the Hucquart home until the narrative is interrupted by the amorous correspondence between Claire and her second cousin, Jacques Denzel. The epistolary form serves to create a chronology of the war, postmarking the month and day. Enthralled by the war effort, Lacascade thrusts the reader into a French nationalist discourse:

“La guerre! les soldats rouges et bleus, l’odeur de la poudre, les sous-officiers, ses amis, défilant comme au 14 juillet ; les charges de cavalerie… La guerre ! la grande leçon
Through a series of silhouettes Lacascade reveals the feverish nationalism leading France into the First World War. However, one cannot help but remark that these images are all representations of France in Europe, which ostensibly excludes the rest of the French Empire. They also proscribe a set of Eurocentric values, which one must subscribe to in order to be considered French. Not only does Claire lack enthusiasm for Bastille Day, she is further ostracized because she does not have a soldier to send off to war: “Claire-Solange prolongerait son séjour en France pour y assister; les femmes de tirailleurs partent avec leurs guerriers; mais elle n’a pas de guerrier!”[Claire-Solange would prolong her stay in France in order to give her support. The soldiers’ wives are leaving with their warriors, but she did not have a warrior!].

Suddenly a nationalist discourse has also taken the form of a male-centered discourse, from which Claire is also left out because in order for her to be proud of her partial French identity she would need a soldier for social validation. On the other hand, because Claire does not have a soldier she cannot validate him or his power over her according to the prevailing social hierarchy. Feminist scholar Shoshana Felman argues in her work *What Does a Woman Want: Reading and Sexual Difference* that:

The relationship between man and woman is one of sexual hierarchization, in which the man is the master, where as the woman is reduced to the state of a mere slave, at once
man’s pleasure object and his narcissistic assurance of his own importance, value, and power.\textsuperscript{12}

Despite the fact that Claire is alone, she is not the property of a French soldier or someone whose mere existence is used to justify male virility. Claire is merely caught up in the fever of the time and cannot help but feel excluded from the popular French social discourse because she does not conform to dominant French culture, race, or gender roles.

However, it is under these social pressures that Claire later finds herself entangled in idealistic politics that envision a unified France despite its racial differences. In one of her first letters to Jacques on the frontlines, Claire writes, “Et moi, j’ai laissé partir mon cœur aussi, avec les troupes noires, avec les troupes blanches, avec vous, Jacques!” [And I, I let my heart leave too, with the black troops, with the white troops, with you, Jacques!].\textsuperscript{13} Under the current social conditions in France Claire ultimately throws herself at Jacques, but her vision of the war effort is inclusive of the African troops, instead of exclusionary. The African troops are, from Claire’s vantage point, equal to the white French soldiers.

Unfortunately, like the African troops lost on the frontlines of World War One, Claire is unable to continue under the current political atmosphere in France. In large part because Jacques never responds to her directly, choosing instead to correspond with Claire’s aunt Jeanne, Claire is left to lie in wait for her potential suitor. While Claire patiently awaits Jacques’ response, we see her left to wither away both spiritually and physically. Her depression takes over and, like her mother Aurore, she feels increasingly more foreign in France. Thus, in the end we have a narrator who is no longer outspoken or engaged. Instead, we have an introverted \textit{mulâtresse} who crumbles under the repressive French politics during World War One, forever left to question her origins. The novel itself has also been lost and repressed in the literary history.
of the Caribbean, even amongst Caribbean intellectuals because there only remain a handful of original copies in the world. Though, as this analysis implies, the novel still has been marginally resuscitated within North American academia circulated by way of clandestine scans and photocopies. Unfortunately, we are left with a novel that, according to Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé, “remains in the abstract, and Claire-Solange, âme-africaine never becomes the erotic book it might have been.”

Another Caribbean novel produced during the interwar period, *Je suis Martiniquaise* by Mayotte Capécia, born Lucette Céranus Combette, interrogates the everyday conditions of those living through World War II. The novel focuses on the life of the main character, Mayotte, who grows up during the interwar period to reach adulthood by the time World War II is well underway. Formally quite different from Lacascade’s novel, *Je suis Martiniquaise* is a bildungsroman. The protagonist’s upbringing is crucial for Capécia because the narrative follows a circular pattern, in which Mayotte returns to her village at the end of the novel to rejoin her father after the loss of her mother. Although Mayotte’s return to her native village after the falling out with a French naval officer, and Capécia’s novels in general, have been critiqued most famously by Frantz Fanon in *Peau noire, masques blancs*, I wish to display other ways of theorizing about Capécia’s literary output.

In order to work through the more recent feminist re-readings of Capécia’s two novels – *Je suis Martiniquaise* (1948) and *La Nègresse blanche* (1950) – we need to recognize the extent to which Fanon wished to exile Capécia from the Caribbean canon and in doing so ironically preserved her memory. Until 2012, French versions of Capécia’s novels were out of print, as well as its 1996 English translations by Beatrice Stith Clark, although, as Keja L. Valens notes, the English versions are readily available through online marketplaces and still contributes to the
revitalization of Capécia in literary criticism. In 1952, two years after the publication of La Négresse blanche, Fanon wrote in his psychoanalytical work Peau noire, masques blancs, currently in its second edition in the esteemed Points essais collection, that Capécia denied her blackness to the point that “[Elle] aspire à se faire admettre dans le monde blanc” [she] aspires to admit herself into the white world. Since the late 90s many feminist critics have attacked Fanon for proposing such a coming out into the white world as being steeped in misogyny, but as Francophone literary scholar T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting reminds the more singularly focused feminist critics, the dynamic between the two Martinican compatriots cannot be limited solely to gender disparity. In her chapter titled “Fanon and Capécia,” Sharpley-Whiting amplifies the scope of critique of Fanon while rebuffing feminists for their apparent oversights:

These feminist critics deny Capécia’s agency or at least circumscribe her autonomy more than Fanon ever could. In their logic, the only way a colonized black woman would ever acquiesce emotionally/sexually to her oppressor was under extreme economic duress; it becomes unfathomable that a black woman would desire, “love”, or “sleep with the enemy,” so to speak […] within the folds of these analyses is a sheer lack of understanding of the terrorizing effects of colonialism and systematic racism and sexism on the psyche of the colonized.

In her book chapter, Sharpley-Whiting commences what I label the Third Stage in the study of Mayotte Capécia where scholars are hesitant to accept Fanon’s psychoanalytic perspective and the subsequent feminist theories, which have dominated the scholarship on Capécia. For Sharpley-Whiting, these perspectives are limiting and represent nothing more than a case of “theoretical orthodoxy or as authorizing [a] new institutionalization.” In their critical re-edition of Je suis Martiniquaise and La Négresse blanche Francophone cultural critics Myriam Cottias
and Madeleine Dobie note that Sharpely-Whiting is not the only one critical of the Fanon revisionists, saying that:

Une réaction similaire se lit chez le plus important biographe de Fanon, David Macey, qui prétend que ‘toute tentative de voir dans les critiques de Fanon un manichéisme racial ou la conséquence du sexe de l’auteur plutôt que des considérations objectives ne fait que reproduire les stéréotypes dont Fanon se voit accusé.

[A similar reaction can be read in the work of the most important biographer of Fanon, the Englishman David Macey, who argues that “all attempts to notice in the critiques of Fanon a racial Manichaeanism or the importance of the author’s sex rather than objective considerations only reproduces the stereotypes of which Fanon sees himself accused.”]²²

Therefore, in analyzing Je suis Martiniquaise it has become increasingly more important to analyze the aspects of the novel that previous critics have ignored, or have neglected due to their own particular theoretical agendas. Even after all of the recent scholarship on Capècia, she still escapes the purview of many Caribbean scholars and bibliographies; except for in notable works such as Maryse Condé’s Parole des femmes, due to the critical lambasting she received by Fanon.²³ Above all, I wish to consider the historical context as a way of understanding the relationship between Martinique and France during World War II by focusing on the everyday life of the protagonist Mayotte in Je suis Martiniquaise.²⁴

The novel begins with Mayotte’s life as a child living with her mother and father in a rural Martinican village, but this is relatively short-lived because Mayotte’s mother dies before she reaches adolescence. Her accelerated maturation causes her to take on many of the responsibilities her mother once occupied herself with, including housework and cooking. Mayotte’s sudden shift to a matronly figure is accompanied by her father’s reversion back into
more normative masculine behavior after the death of his wife such as betting on cockfights and copious drinking. This juxtaposition of events weighs heavily on Mayotte’s psyche and she feels that the sudden change has started to transform her from a happy-go-lucky child to an adult. The sudden death of her mother also causes her father’s desires for a male child to resurface:

\[ \text{J’avais trop à faire avec le ménage et avec l’école que mon père me forçait à suivre tant bien que mal ; je grandissais et d’importants changements s’accomplissaient en moi. Je n’étais plus le garçon manqué que d’autrefois, je riais moins, je devenais sentimentale.} \]

[I had too much to do with the housework and with school, which my father forced me to continue with, for better or for worse. I grew up and big changes began to take place in my life. I was no longer the missing son from the old days, I laughed less, I became sentimental]^{25}

The sudden change in routine causes a (trans)formation in Mayotte’s life as she evolves from an amiable, tomboyish child to a sentimental woman free to reign over home and hearth. In the French, Capécia uses the term *garçon* to refer to Mayotte as a child which is quite curious considering the way Fanon writes off Capécia as being essentially duped into portraying a particular sort of assimilated femininity. Given that Mayotte is from a rural family and an only child, her father’s traditional values left him disappointed with the fact that Mayotte was born a girl. While Mayotte is quite stable in her embrace of her femininity as an adult, we can see that as a child she expresses an interstitial identity as a result of her father’s lack of attention. As a child Mayotte is perplexed by the joy her mother derives from plucking her eyelashes in front of the armoire, instead expressing more interest in cockfights. Despite the liberty of gender performance that childhood affords her, Mayotte undergoes a (trans)formation from a tomboy to
a more matronly woman, a change that follows her when she moves from her rural village to Fort-de-France.

Mayotte’s life changes completely after her move to Fort-de-France as her urban surroundings provide her with complete independence. In the city, Mayotte realizes that she can “[...] avoir un commerce à moi, être tout à fait indépendante, avec la perspective de gagner davantage. J’étais, je suis toujours ambitieuse” [have a business all to [herself], to be completely independent, with the idea of earning more and more [money]. I was, I am still ambitious]. The urban center of Fort-de-France fosters Mayotte’s ambition and augments her sense of resolve, as she is no longer under the control, albeit as muted as it was, of her father. The city also gives Mayotte the chance to meet other women and men outside of her natal village, and, because the war effort was ramping up in the Western world, the chance to see firsthand the French soldiers stationed in Martinique. Due to Admiral Robert’s blockade in the Caribbean it was extremely difficult to gain access to the world outside the Caribbean, which transformed Martinique – and Guadeloupe for that matter – into veritable microcosms of Franco-Caribbean tension. Despite the obvious economic implications of such a blockade, there were also extreme consequences for gender relations. Although Mayotte had grown out of the hypermasculine space, which her father cultivated after the death of her mother, she suddenly found herself in a new, slightly more cosmopolitan, sexually liberating space. In her article “When One Drop isn’t Enough: War as a Crucible of Racial Identity in the Novels of Mayotte Capécia,” Cheryl Duffus aptly notes that “French servicemen had little to do during the blockade and often spent their time drinking, chasing women, and fighting.” The backdrop of World War II allows Capécia to show how Martinican men quickly began imitating the French rather than just affecting a French accent. They began to perform a French brand of masculinity handed down by Admiral Robert himself.
Mayotte begins to notice that the Martinican men have adopted the fever for war and battle, only further entrapping them in a particular gender and cultural performance, in turn, falling into the same problematic relationship with the French war efforts as the *tirailleurs sénégalais* [West African troops] during the Great War in *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*. Mayotte remarks that Martinican men “ran after women” like the idle French soldiers, giving them the “false promise that Martinicans could be ‘authentic’ French people.” The blockade not only produced idle French soldiers, but also, to borrow Duffus’ term, served as the crucible for a new brand of Martinican masculinity of which Mayotte is but an observer.

As a person conscious of her sexual identity, Mayotte once again profits from her metropolitan surroundings by confidently entering a relationship with a French officer named André. Eager to maintain her independence, Mayotte only agrees to start seeing André because he treats her like a human being, rather than an object of desire like many other Martinican women were at the time. However, one day, André presents her with a golden ring, which she promptly refuses:

> “Tu me t’aîtes comme une fille ! Murmurai-je. Tu c’ois que je me suis donnée ou’ de l’a’gent…
> – Petite Mayotte, dit-il, tu me fais de la peine. Non pas de refuser cette bague, mais de faire un pareil calcul. Tu m’as donné ton amour, comme je t’ai donné le mien.”
> [You’re treating me like a girl! I murmured. You believe that I have given you myself for money…
>
> Little Mayotte, he said, you’re causing me pain. Not by refusing this ring, but by coming to such a conclusion. You gave me your love, as I have given you mine]
Mayotte chooses not to accept the ring because she realizes its potential to represent more than a fleeting expression of love. Since her childhood, Mayotte noticed the disparity between men and women, men regarding them as objects of affection rather than as individuals. Mayotte’s mother is perhaps the best example of the gender hierarchy, as she was caught between the exotic desire of the priest that oversaw Mayotte’s school and her husband. Therefore, the rejection of André’s ring allows Mayotte to maintain her social and financial independence. In her post-feminist analysis, Sharpley-Whiting argues that Mayotte “is self-sufficient […] She expressly refuses to use André, the French officer in *Je suis Martiniquaise* for financial mobility, safety, or anything else besides his presence.” Later on, Mayotte gets pregnant by André and gives birth to a son whom she names François, which is eerily close to Français, or French, playing on an almost cliché manifestation of his mixed-race heritage. Shortly after François’ birth, André receives an order to depart for Guadeloupe in order to rejoin his regiment, leaving his son and Mayotte in Martinique. However, Mayotte is determined to follow André only to realize that he is nowhere to be found in Guadeloupe. André sends Mayotte a series of letters, and in the last one he encloses a check in order to provide for Mayotte and François in his absence. Utterly offended by this emotionally bankrupt gesture, Mayotte tears up the check and leaves Guadeloupe in order to go back to her natal village to take care of her ailing father.

While within a Caribbean context returning to one’s natal land is a sort of rite of passage, Mayotte’s return allows her to reconstitute her cultural identity after the episode with André and to regain a more intimate sense of her Martinicanness. Chimegsaikhan Banzar argues in her article on Caribbean female identity that, “female identity constructs itself through the history and the experience of generations […] the search of the feminine Self is inseparably linked to the reconstitution of the past, of ethno-cultural origins, of familial and communitarian histories.” In
Carbet, Mayotte can resume her previous role as the master of the household: “Je dus bientôt m’occuper de tout le ménage et des soins que réclamait la santé de plus en plus mauvaise de mon Père […] Je le sentais vivement depuis mon retour à Carbet” [I soon had to take care of all the housework and the care of my father, which restored my father’s worsening health].\textsuperscript{32} Caribbean literary scholar Jennifer Sparrow discusses Mayotte’s narrative trajectory in terms of “flight-as-failure” wherein the canonical departure and return of a protagonist is traditionally interpreted as deleterious rather than ameliorative. However, Sparrow agrees that Mayotte’s narrative is nuanced and that previous readings of \textit{Je suis Martiniquaise} that she and Sharpley-Whiting critique, “fail to take into account the ways in which the intersections of racial and gender oppression have historically conspired to silence the female subject.”\textsuperscript{33} Over the course of the novel it is clear that Mayotte is situated at the very intersection between race, gender, and cultural identity, therefore making her choice to return to her natal village of Carbet a deliberate decision that takes into account her own personal identity. Dominican writer Ana-Maurine Lara explains that places, physical or imaginary, can liberate individuals from prescribed social, gendered, and sexual constraints. In discussing her own personal identity as an Afro-Caribbean lesbian writer, Lara explains the way her sexual identity “freed me to invent myself and create myself and my own expectations for my own life – not just in terms of sexuality but also gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality.”\textsuperscript{34} For Mayotte, the physical space of Carbet represents not only a place where she can (re)-invent herself, but also a place that embodies a pure sense of Martinicanness that she cannot find elsewhere. Returning from Fort-de-France and a metropolitan lifestyle, Mayotte takes rural Martinican values and uses them to reconstruct her racial, cultural, and gender identity.
The first half of the twentieth century was a chaotic epoch for not only the Western world, Suzanne Lacascade and Mayotte Capécia forge female protagonists who struggle with racial, gender, and sexual prejudices in order to critique established social order, patriarchal society, and the hegemonic cultural mores of France. These Martinican women writers imagine and create female protagonists who are capable of exposing the constraints and contradictions posed by masculinist societies, whether French or Martinican, in order to live differently than the women who preceded them. However, the two Great Wars of the twentieth century reroute, blockade, and retard the development of coherent cultural, gender, and sexual identities. Claire-Solange enters into a dream-like state after achieving a sense of self-actualization and can never truly fashion a livable identity, whereas Mayotte, despite all of the misdirected criticism towards the novel, reconstructs her Martinican sense of self through the return to her natal village of Carbet. Amidst discourses of patriotism and racial orthodoxy in both novels, as a result of the two World Wars, these women find solace in the everyday activities of their lives, which allows them to segment themselves from denigrating forces of power. However, in the end, Claire-Solange and Mayotte depart on mental and physical journeys with dreams of Africa on one hand and the tumult of Post-War France on the other.

Bibliography:


Banzar, Chimegsaikhan. “Entre le passé, le présent, et le futur : Quête de l’identité féminin dans la littérature de la Guadeloupe,” in *Women in the Middle : Selected Essays from Women*


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1 Paquita Valdes in *La Fille aux yeux d’or* by Honoré de Balzac is a near perfect example of the *mulâtresse* in canonical European fiction. Taken from Havana at a young age and forced into sexual servitude by her mother, Paquita needs to attach herself to Henri de Marsay in order to gain subjecthood and by doing so falls victim to her promiscuous nature. Soon after liberating
herself from her mother, she commits suicide, leaving Marsay to ponder only what could have
become of this mixed race beauty.

2 Suzanne Lacascade, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine* (Paris: Eugène Figuière, 1924), 17. All
translations are my own unless otherwise noted. For emphasis I emphasize in order to keep the
feminine form of mulatto rather than using a more verbose formulation such as the phrase
“mulatto woman.”

3 Ibid., 15.


5 Lacascade, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*, 36.

6 Valérie K Orlando, *Suffocated Hearts and Tortured Souls: Seeking Subjecthood Through
Madness in Francophone Women’s Writing of Africa and the Caribbean*. (Lanham: Lexington
Books, 2003), 41.

7 Lacascade, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*, 63.

8 Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, 37.

9 Lacascade, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*, 73.

10 Ibid.,151.

11 Ibid., 152.

12 Shoshana Felman, *What Does A Woman Want?: Reading and Sexual Difference*. (Baltimore:

13 Lacascade, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*, 168.

14 Maryse Condé, “The Stealers of Fire: The French-Speaking Writers of the Caribbean and

16 There has long been speculation about the author’s reasoning behind naming her main character Mayotte and whether the novel is autobiographical because both the protagonist and the author share the same name and ostensibly the same origins. In order to avoid confounding the two, I refer to the author by Capécia and the protagonist by Mayotte. For a similar critical treatment of the names of the protagonist and the writer, see the footnote in *Relire Mayotte Capécia: Une femme des Antilles dans l’espace colonial français*. Eds Myriam Cottias and Madeleine Dobie. (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012), 15.

17 Keja L. Valens, “Lost Idyll: Mayotte Capécia’s *Je suis Martiniquaise,*” in *Desire Between Women in Caribbean Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 46. Even though Capécia’s work is much more available than Lacascade’s work, it receives little attention in the popular realm outside of academia.


The initial stage of criticism being the work of Fanon and the second is the revisionist feminist perspective. As a result of these various contributions, as well as that of Sharpley-Whiting, Capécia’s two novels are once again in print circulation in French after having been out of print since the late 50s. See Cottias and Dobie *Relire Mayotte Capécia: Une femme des Antillies dans l’espace colonial français*. Prior to this publication the two novels were only readily available in English as Caribbeanist scholar Keja L. Valens notes in: “Lost Idyll: Mayotte Capécia’s *Je suis Martiniquaise*.”


This phenomenon is largely due to the relative unavailability of her two novels, but there have been various book chapters dedicated to *Je suis Martiniquaise*, such as: Keja L. Valens, “Lost Idyll: Mayotte Capécia’s *Je suis Martiniquaise*,” and Omise’ke Tinsley, “At the River of Washerwomen: Work Water, and Sexual Fluidity in Mayotte Capécia’s *I am a Martinican Woman*,” in *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism Between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

A colonial relationship that became even more complex after Martinique was subsumed into Hexagonal France in 1946 as a *départment d’outre mer* [overseas department] two years prior to the first publication of the novel.


Ibid., 120.


Ibid., 1094.
29 Capécia, *Je suis martiniquaise*, 145.


