

Internalized Racial Oppression in *La Nègresse Blanche*

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To my family and friends

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
DEDICATION .....	ii.
Chapter	
I. Internalized Racial Oppression in <i>La Nègresse Blanche</i> .....	1



Mayotte Capécia, the first woman of color to publish a book in France, has been widely criticized for her discussion of race in the 1948 novel *Je Suis Martiniquaise*. Less scholarship has been conducted on Capécia's 1950 novel *La Nègresse Blanche*, the novel I will examine, which illuminates the honesty, truth and lived experience that informs the protagonist's racial thinking. Unlike *Je Suis Martiniquaise*, *La Nègresse Blanche* tracks a progression of consciousness that begins with a rejection of blackness and ends with a desire for racial equality and a budding national consciousness. Capécia's writing explores history and self through a colonial lens, and offers us the sometimes wry narrative exploration of internalized racial oppression as lived experience. *La Nègresse Blanche* ends with a shift away from colonially engrained racist thought and moves toward racial consciousness, and self-acceptance. While Capécia is mentioned, and "*Je Suis Martiniquaise*" is found in anthologies of Antillean literature, there remains little research on *La Nègresse Blanche*. This text has been largely ignored though it offers a perspective neglected in scholarship of the Antilles. As a piece of literature, it is an early examination of colonialism in the Antilles, informing our reading of other literature of the Antilles, global literature, and sociological and psychological understandings of identity formation. Historical misreading and neglect of Capécia's writing denies the possibility for unearthing the striking site-specific politics that predate authors like Maryse Condé and Edwidge Danticat, offering us a necessary view into the Vichy period in Martinique.

*La Nègresse Blanche* is set in Martinique under Admiral Robert, during the Vichy period, and follows the life and loves of the twenty-four year old protagonist

Isaure. In the beginning pages of *La Nègresse Blanche*, the mixed-race, phenotypically white, single mother who has been abandoned by her white spouse, refers to a bar patron as a “dirty n\*gger” (*sale nègre*). Not coincidentally, this is the same epithet Frantz Fanon uses to begin chapter five of *Peau Noir Masques Blancs*. This is the first moment we see her violent feelings regarding race and her desire to control space through race. Her sexual relationships—all with white men—are at the heart of the novel’s conflict alongside the possibility that she will bear a child. Her third and final lover, a childhood friend named Pascal, brings together the novel’s racial and class tensions. She may own a bar, but he is a white “Béké” whose family opposes their marriage. Their relationship is strong but brief. Unrest in Martinique results in Pascal’s death. Sympathetic to the struggles of black Martinicans, he attempts to mediate a conflict and is murdered by a large group of black workers.

Pascal had a close relationship with Gustave, Isaure’s brother, who, like Isaure, is phenotypically white but, in Isaure’s words, “talks like a black.” She despises her brother because he remained in the town where they were raised and associates with blackness. Eventually, he becomes mayor and the work he performed in assisting deserters from the war is rewarded. He tells Isaure that because her son is white in the shifting racial landscape, that her son’s life will become difficult. Her feelings around race in Martinique move toward a desire to accept all races. At the end of the novel she leaves for Paris because she feels she can no longer live amidst the violence in a place where her skin color, once a privilege, is no longer a privilege, in a cultural shift toward negritude. In the final pages of the book, she uses what little power she has (in her own understanding), rooted in being a woman, to lie to Pascal’s mother. She says she is

expecting a baby, conceived with Pascal, and that racial antagonism is pushing her from the island. The novel ends with Isaure selling all her belongings and preparing to leave for Paris.

*La Négrresse Blanche* is not widely examined in Antillean scholarship. It is discussed briefly in chapter two of Martinician philosopher and psychiatrist Fanon's dissertation-turned-book *Peau Noir Masques Blancs*. Written in 1952, *Peau Noir Masques Blancs* examined the psychological impacts of colonialism on the colonized. It was widely disseminated in the 1960's throughout the Antilles, Africa and the United States and it has influenced liberation movements throughout the globe. Fanon relegates *La Négrresse Blanche* to a footnote and writes,

Since *I Am a Martinican Woman*, Mayotte Capécia has written another book, *The White Negress*. She must have learned by her mistakes, here we see an attempt at reevaluating the black man. But Mayotte Capécia did not reckon with her unconscious. As soon as the novelist allows her characters a little freedom, they use it to belittle the black man. Every black man she describes is either a scumbag or a grinning *Y'a bon Banania*. Moreover, and this is already an omen, we can safely say that Mayotte Capécia has turned her back on her island. In both books only one course is left for her heroine, i.e., leave. This island of Blacks is decidedly cursed. There is in fact a sense of malediction surrounding Mayotte Capécia. But she is centrifugal. Mayotte Capécia has denied herself. May she not add to the mass of her idiocies. Go in peace, mudslinging novelist.... But remember that beyond your 500 anemic pages we shall always find the honest way home that leads to the heart. And you can't do anything to stop us. (Fanon

35)

In his appraisal of Capécia's work, Fanon ignores the gendered experience of the protagonist. In both novels, the protagonist must leave because of her role as a mother and provider. She is the primary caretaker of her child, and in the transition from cultural anti-blackness to an acceptance of blackness, with a phenotypically white son and with her husband dead, she decides to leave for a place that she deems safer. Her own brother reminds her that after occupation, her son will not be in the position of privileged whiteness that he was before Admiral Robert's expulsion from the island. Additionally, she is not turning her back on the island. Her internal dialogue around race and nation in the latter half of the novel, illustrate a desire for the unification of Martinique and the unification of all people, regardless of race which, in this novel, is primarily conceived in terms of phenotype.

Additionally, in this footnote, Fanon acknowledges Capécia as a novelist, in his assessment of *Je Suis Martiniquaise* however, he conflates author and protagonist. His neglect of the novel and its relegation to a footnote predicts contemporary readings of the novel. Where Fanon rejects Capécia, and reads her work autobiographically, one can read Capécia's parallel to Fanon. The novel shows a progression from racism internalized from the French metropole to a fuller understanding of race rooted in the historical, social and economic particularities of Martinique.

Despite the historical importance of Fanon's work and its associated extensive research, Fanon's miscomprehension of Mayotte Capécia's *Je Suis Martiniquaise* is far reaching. In the body of the text, Fanon identifies Capécia as being disturbed and as advocating "unhealthy behavior," disregarding the honesty in a text exploring racial

tensions and color prejudice in a sphere where such discussion was taboo. Additionally, Fanon confounds the protagonist and author. His violent analysis of Capécia, which has been read and massively proliferated, ignores the significance of truth in writing a novel that fearlessly (not carelessly) reveals the internal exploration of racialized identity and the progression of racial thinking influenced by a social and historical privileging of whiteness. Fanon writes,

Un jour, une femme du nom de Mayotte Capécia, obéissant à un motif dont nous apercevons mal les tenants, a écrit deux cent deux pages—sa vie—ou se multipliaient à loisir les propositions les plus absurdes. L'accueil enthousiaste qui a été réservé à cet ouvrage dans certains milieu nous fait un devoir de l'analyser. Pour nous, aucune équivoque n'est possible: *Je Suis Martiniquaise* est un ouvrage au rabais, Prônant un comportement malsain.

One day, a woman by the name of Mayotte Capécia, obeying a motivation whose reasons are difficult to grasp, sat down and wrote 202 pages on her life in which the most ridiculous ideas proliferated at random. The enthusiastic reception the book received in certain circles obliges us to analyze it. For us, there is no doubt whatsoever that *I Am a Martinician Woman* is a third-rate book advocating unhealthy behavior. (Fanon 25)

In Fanon's interpretation, the corruption that Capécia embodies (in writing both *Je Suis Martiniquaise* and *La Nègresse Blanche*) is because of her relationship to and idolization of whiteness. Fanon feels that what Capécia is writing is corrupt and he conflates the author and protagonist, writing "sa vie" when it is not entirely true. In both

novels, Capécia illuminates the truth of the conditions under colonization and its associated impact on her conceptions of race and nation. Fanon writes that Capécia “turned her back on her country.” He feels that she immersed herself in whiteness. However, the novel explores a complicated balancing act between kinship with one’s own country and or color, and the pervasive toxicity of assuming white superiority.

Both *Je Suis Martiniquaise* and *La Nègresse Blanche* represent a marginalized group of people. Maryse Condé’s argument that *Je Suis Martiniquaise* provides us a “precious written testimony, the only one that we possess, of the mentality of a West Indian girl in those days, of the impossibility for her to build up an aesthetics which would enable her to come to terms with the color of her skin” can be extended to *La Nègresse Blanche* (Condé x). Both *Je Suis Martiniquaise* and *La Nègresse Blanche* elucidate a neglected and ignored populous: that of the multiracial subject in the postcolonial Antilles. It is not the “enthusiastic reception” that should encourage an analysis of Capécia’s writing but the uniqueness and value of a voice that has not been examined with the closeness and vigor of others.

Neither *Je Suis Martiniquaise* nor *La Nègresse Blanche* advocate “unhealthy behavior” in Isaures choice of lovers and Capécia is not Isaure. This is Fanon’s own internalization and interpretation. Neither book is meant to serve as a guide to West Indian living as a multiracial woman. Both truthfully (though dramatized for the purpose of fiction) illuminate the mental struggle and feelings of alienation that are a product of multi-racial existence in the specific Martinican context of the Vichy period.

A reading of Capécia's *La Négresse Blanche* that examines the psychological consequences of colonially mandated racism and acknowledges the complex social history of the Antilles reveals the striking shift the protagonist undergoes toward racial consciousness. Martinican psychiatrist and author, Frantz Fanon (among other writers) overlooks the importance of what the novel accomplishes when he conflates author and protagonist in the second chapter of *Peau Noir Masques Blancs*. Further, the alienation of the multiracial subject, and the disruption of a cohesive identity due to the associated internalized racism is not exclusively a West Indian phenomenon. The weight of internalized racial oppression and alienation illuminated in *La Négresse Blanche* appears throughout global literature, pointing to a fundamental psychic and human question of belonging and place.

Fanon was not the first to criticize Capécia's writing, though his criticism in *Peau Noir Masques Blancs* is well known. Rene Etiemblé reviewed *Je Suis Martiniquaise* the year it was written for *Les Temps Modernes*, a French journal cofounded by Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre in 1945. At its height in the 1960's, it had over 20,000 subscribers. Sartre's interest in Capécia's writing came from his views on social progress in Europe and he engaged with and supported the negritude movement. In this push toward negritude, in Sartre's "Orphée Noir" preface, the ideas in *Je Suis Martiniquaise* (According to Etiemblé) were unacceptable and retrograde. Fanon wrote his critiques of *Je Suis Martiniquaise* and *La Négresse Blanche* later than Rene Etiemblé and likely read this review before including Capécia in *Peau Noir Masques Blancs*, as he maintained relationships with French intellectuals including Sartre and De Beauvoir

and was heavily influenced by Sartre's interpretations of Hegel in his thinking on race and white supremacy.

Fanon believes Capécia idolizes and desires whiteness, which is central to his examination of the relationship between black women and white men. Despite his condemnation of Capécia, the ideas she presents in the novel are not entirely in opposition to Fanon's ideas. One of his arguments centered on the so-called "neurosis" associated with lightening the race, is illuminated in both *Je Suis Martiniquaise* and *La Nègresse Blanche*. Isaure's affinity for white lovers in *La Nègresse Blanche* supports Fanon's argument in the chapter "The Woman of Color and the White man" in that Isaure wants to have a better life, and a "better life" is associated with the material conditions of whiteness. Isaure's choice is a realistic decision emerging from a racist society that privileges lighter complexions. This offers her social advancement. Capécia's writing is not in opposition to Fanon's thoughts on this "neurosis" of white aspiration and idealization, it solidifies his argument. What she espouses and believes as a protagonist reflect the racial attitudes of Martinique before the shift toward Césarian negritude, one of solidarity in rejecting colonial racism of the metropole. Where the novel ends, Isaure's position has changed entirely and she and her brother both discuss the shift between a valorization of whiteness to a rejection of this and acknowledges her interstitial precarity in her phenotypic whiteness highlighting the connection between morality and whiteness and immorality and blackness, illuminating the war and postwar, colonial and postcolonial impacts on conceptions of race.

The possible consequences of Fanon's relegation of *La Nègresse Blanche* to footnote and his misunderstanding of elements of the construction of her novel are underscored in Guadeloupean critic Maryse Condé's 1993 article, "Order, Disorder, Freedom and The West Indian Writer," Condé comments on the female writers of the West Indies as being "little known" with their works being "forgotten, out of print, misunderstood" (Condé 152). Both Condé and Clark cite that West Indian feminist literature (including *La Nègresse Blanche*) is misunderstood, namely in Fanon's initial reading of *Je Suis Martiniquaise* (and a broad interpretation of Capécia's writing) as autobiographical. Condé and Beatrice Clark both cite a general avoidance of literature in addressing color prejudice in the Antilles. This, Condé asserts, is why Capécia has received such abundant criticism. Capécia's honest exploration of a protagonist grappling with racial consciousness, economic independence and gender equality, are requisite additions to the study of Antillean Literature. What Capécia expresses surrounding the idealization of whiteness and the alienation of multiracial beings in a post-colonial society is brave. Many felt the same anxieties. Even if the author and object were one and the same, Condé reminds us that the novel was written in 1948 and, "all the societies which had suffered from the wrongs of slavery and colonial exploitation were alienated in the same way" (Condé 131). The unadulterated thoughts on self and other are necessary as we can begin to trace the evolution of Isaure's thinking around race as an example of a person who is a product of a colonial history, one that she eventually separates from.

Critics beyond Fanon have similarly misunderstood crucial elements of the

Capécia's writing, focusing mostly on *Je Suis Martiniquaise* and not on *La Nègresse Blanche*. In Lizabeth Paravisini-Gébert published "Feminism, Race and Difference in the works of Mayotte Capécia, Michele Lacroisil, and Jacqueline Manicom" in 1992, but she pays little attention to *La Nègresse Blanche*. Paravisini-Gébert chooses Manicom, Capécia and Lacroisil because they are, "novelists whose mulatto protagonists appear to have internalized the colonizer's myth of black racial inferiority with its resulting selfcontempt, an internalization which leads to ambivalent, at times almost hostile, relations with black men, whom they reject in favor of ill-fated liaison with whites" (Paravisini-Gébert 68). According to her, focusing on colonial and patriarchal imperialism hides the importance of feminist ideas and themes in Guadeloupian and Martinican writing. Her argument, however, does not adequately reckon with class dynamics in the texts. She writes,

In their quest for autonomy as women, their feminine quest, the characters in these texts must contend not only with their internalized prejudices about race, with their potential for self-contempt, but with received notions of male dominance and their own middle-class aspirations. As mulatto women, disenfranchised by gender, when not by gender and race, they seek a measure of the power traditionally held by men in Caribbean societies. (68).

Similarly, in *Reimagining Liberation: How Black women Transformed citizenship in the French Empire*," Annette Joseph Gabriel uses Suzanne Césaire (among others) to examine French colonialism and highlight the impact of black women on the decolonial movements of the twentieth century. Their involvement and writings

rejected imperialist France, forming and imagining multiracial and multicultural identity formation and relationship. Writing alongside similarly overlooked women activists at the time, Suzanne Césaire among them, Capécia narrates a shift in consciousness in *La Nègresse Blanche* from internalized colonial racist thought to the potentiality for a multicultural identity that rejects essentialism and hypodescent.

It is certainly the case that Isaure in *La Nègresse Blanche* is able to own her own bar because she is a woman with light skin. Toward the beginning of the novel, she has privilege because of her light skin. This shifts throughout the novel. The “Tan Robè” period marked a shift from white superiority and idealizing the metropole, toward negritude. The commander in chief, Admiral Robert, operated under Vichy France and though slavery was abolished 1848, Robert re-segregated cafes and stores. During Robert’s power, the white population was doubled in Fort de France which increased racial tensions. By 1943, Robert was no longer in control (Duffus). In Cheryl Duffus’ article “When One Drop Isn’t Enough: War As a Crucible of Racial Identity in the Novels of Mayotte Capécia,” Duffus writes, “this was a profound moment of community redefinition that exposed the lie behind the promise of assimilation- that black Martinicans were just as “French” as the ‘French French’” (Duffus 1091).

The evolution of Isaure’s thinking on race, though mercurial and ultimately unresolved, represents a progressiveness in racial thinking during the Vichy period, where Capécia’s protagonist, Isaure, ultimately accepts blackness as a part of her heritage and rejects racial segregation in a movement toward nationalistic pride. She approaches an awareness around her racial thinking questioning the validity of racial difference as a category of separation. Though I will focus on Isaure’s transformation

toward racial consciousness in *La Négrresse Blanche*, I would like to mention that the text also highlights important moments like, her rejection of a lover who does not treat her with respect, and from the lens of queer theory her relationship to other female bodies.

In 1973, Beatrice Stith Clarke (translator of the version of *La Négrresse Blanche* that I address) wrote the first published article devoted entirely to Capécia. She added an update in 1996 writing the necessity of refraining from reinterpreting Capécia at the biographical level, leaving her to exist fictionally (Stith Clarke 457). Stith continues to refer in her introduction to *Je Suis Martiniquaise* as autobiographical but points to the pseudonymic complexities that are explored in Christian Makward's book "L'alienation..." where she goes further to say that not only was Capécia writing under a pseudonym but that it was influenced heavily by the Correa publishing house. With the little that is known of Capécia's biography, Makward asserts that she was only semiliterate and could not have written both books signed to her name. Still, this author who suffered an "execution sommaire" wrote what was the basis of these books, rooted in a specific experience in the Vichy period of Martinique. Clark asserts that *Je Suis Martiniquaise* is "not an authentic autobiography...but more importantly is a just reappraisal of the fictive ability of the woman who adopted the nom de plume, 'Mayotte Capécia'" (Clark xi). *La Negresse Blanche* can be viewed the same.

It is important to look at this novel as a commentary on the social construction of race and the possibility for nationalistic unity. One of the most striking elements of this piece is the difference in tone and attitude between the narration and the written dialogue of Isaure's character which might offer a way of looking at this piece as satire.

The dialogue reads as genuine and sincere, with Isaure's understanding of self somewhere between tragic and conscious, however, returning to the question of authorship and of the melding of voices, there is a bitingness to the narration. A character named "Mayotte" appears toward the end of the novelette. Capécia writes, "why was her past cropping up so suddenly in her path....they were stopped by Old Mayotte....she began to complain as in the past...But she had known Mayotte when she was a little girl, and she enjoyed rediscovering a past older than the one she had just evoked (Capécia 224). It is a small and fleeting moment but one that should not be read as coincidental. This past, the coalescence of Mayotte, Isaure and Capécia is yet another possibility for reading into the wit and the wovenness of author, subject, and narrator.

Another example of this is the unsettling description of Isaure through Capécia's narration, likening her skin to banana, orange, coconut and coffee, cash crops central to the colonial economy, pointing to her full lips-- a gaze that was found similarly in *Je Suis Martiniquaise* and in Manicom's *Mon Examen De blanc*. This section also ends with "her face....had the look of a white person." On some level, it makes racial designation and delineation ambiguous and fallible in the novel while simultaneously reminding us of its repercussions. The discussion that follows on race and racial consciousness is surrounding a person who is phenotypically white. This discussion is not then racial but psychological though those are connected. Later, Capécia writes, "with her mixed blood's imagination, she supposed the worst," this suggests an omnipotence, a gentle prodding at the flexibility of racial essentialisms while reminding us through dialogue of the psychic turmoil it can cause (Capécia 195). Further she writes, "The young métisse felt very weak," and, "Women of mixed-blood are much more

sensitive than white women; they value their self-respect all the more, since it's more easily suspect (Capécia 197). The satirical and mocking element provide us as readers a way to look at racial constructs determined by a colonial history.

With the confusion around authorship and pseudonyms, scholarship and examination of these texts is essential when scholars like Fanon and Etiemblé criticize Capécia as a woman and not as an author or commentator on the francophone Antilles in the Vichy period. If the criticism is of Capécia and not Isaure, then the criticism is misdirected. These books are, in Clark's words, "an inevitable expression of the realities of a marginal group, a buffer society, created by the dominant one..." (Clarke). The sociological and anthropological importance of these texts is necessary for study and analysis in the same ways Fanon's literature is studied and examined despite moments of essentialism and sexism. A sexism that may have contributed to his violent reading of Capécia's writing. Both *Je Suis Martiniquaise* and *La Nègresse Blanche* explore elements of internalized inferiority or what Fanon describes as "l'épidermalization d'infériorité," [the epidermalization of inferiority] (Fanon xv).

The concept "Internalized racism" or "internalized racial oppression" was written about before the terms were used. They exist throughout history and geographic regions. W. E. B. Du Bois' notion of double consciousness is an early examination of internalized racism in the context of blackness in the United States. Briefly, double consciousness is the phenomenon of seeing oneself through the lens of the oppressor and measuring oneself to this standard.

Fanon writes about the internalization of racism in relation to eurocentrism and

European colonization that imposed European values onto the consciousness of others. European valorization and idealization accompanied colonization and in making the black “other” believe in a racial hierarchy in which they are at the bottom, the oppression becomes internalized and subsequently self-perpetuated. Audre Lorde in “Age, Race, Class and Sex: Redefining Difference” points to the generational continuation of internalized oppression (and internalized thought processes) that does not disrupt the engrained ideas about racial hierarchy and racial inferiority that contribute to internalized racism. Lorde states that European history is predicated on simplistic opposition: “dominant/subordinate, good/bad...superior/inferior” (Lorde 1). Lorde writes,

As women, we must root out internalized patterns of oppression within ourselves if we are to move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change.....The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. The old definitions have not served us, nor the earth that supports us. The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion. For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures.

Lorde highlights the internalization of oppression that guides and molds future interactions- ones that, in Lorde’s opinion, must be dismantled. Citing Paulo Freiere,

Lorde states that a “piece of the oppressor” is “planted deep within each of us” that “knows only the oppressors tactics, the oppressor’s relationships.” (Lorde 6). I find it important to also mention that men are not exempt from this “piece.” Fanon reads and approaches Capécia from an analogous position of internalized patterns that influence his intemperate response to Capécia. The “old blueprints” Lorde points to in the context of *La Negresse Blanche* are the digested and regurgitated ideas of white superiority stemming from the metropole. The future she describes is one that takes shape in *La Negresse Blanche* in Isaure’s new concepts of power and “relating across difference.”

*La Negresse Blanche* offers an embodied sociological concept through narrative. Narrative accounts of experience are necessary in order to illuminate the personal histories that represent the physical embodiment of the sociological concept that Fanon, Lorde and Du Bois all explore. Capécia offers us a rich well of the effects of internalized racial oppression. Literature like *Je Suis Martiniquaise* and *La Nègresse Blanche* provides deep context into the subject of internalized racism: an exploration of a global, sociological and psychological phenomenon.

Isaure departs from the initial internalized racial oppression and the following passages illuminate her evolutionary thinking around race. At the beginning of the novel she regurgitates engrained racist speech, describing black people as “wretched,” “dirty n\*ggers” and “savages”. She does not speak this way in the latter half of the novel. Isaure tells a story to her son highlighting the importance of consciousness building, internalization of racial ideology and developing thoughts on race and multiraciality, transferred from mother to child. Capécia writes,

Isaure remembered those [stories] she had listened to during her childhood: some must have come from France, others from America and others from the Caribbean. The latter were filled with tales of moun-mos, the souls of the dead. Several races, several religions were mingled in them, like the songs sung to her by her black mother and those that her white grandmother had taught her. All of this gave birth to a magic spectacle, like the mixture of races that had created this new race to which she belonged, because, all things considered, it was stupid to identify only two races: black and white (Capécia 206).

This is one of the most important moments in the novel, her designation of separation as “stupid” illuminates her growing consciousness and historically influenced personal thought on racial separation. the “new race” to which she belonged highlights a growing nationalism, a Martinique in which a foundation of blackness becomes the unification.

Capécia writes, “Isaure wished for the revolution with all her heart; she felt herself ready to side with the blacks. It seemed to her that her happiness, her life, depended on this” (Capécia 232). Not only in this moment does she recognize revolution and alliance but she goes so far as to say that her physical and social life are reliant upon her relationship with and kinship to blackness. In the final moments of the novel, Isaure confronts Pascal’s mother. Pascal’s mother despised Isaure because of her blackness and begs Isaure not to leave. Pleadingly, the mother-in-law tells Isaure that their skin is nearly the same color. Isaure says to her, “A white negress, if you wish, but a Negress all the same. My ancestors were slaves and now that we are no longer slaves, we are lepers” (Capécia 258). In *La Négrresse Blanche* there is a pervasive acknowledgement and

reminder of hypodescent. The identity formation around racial thinking and its history creates fractures in identification that Isaure navigates throughout the novel.

Isaure's initial rejection of blackness fades toward the end of the novel. She explicitly expresses disgust for and fear of black people at the novel's onset, and speaks to the respect for white people that she was "unable to rid herself from" instilled in her from her mother. Isaure eventually begins to move past a learned racial inferiority that she espouses in her speech about black anger, black thought and black movement. Though Isaure is unable to achieve a complete lucidity around racial difference and its fluidity (if this is possible), she questions it and is able to assert her own opinions on racial separation and her connection to a revolution tied to race.

In the latter half of the novel, Isaure's shift toward consciousness is marked by less violent words and interactions with black people and an explicit vocalization of the desire for reconciliation between races. Capécia writes,

She didn't even want to differentiate between Gaullists and Petainist's, sailors and soldiers; the rivalries of whites and blacks, creoles and mulattos sufficed for her. She deplored these quarrels; she would have liked for people of different colors to get along once and for all. Couldn't happiness be found on an island as beautiful as Martinique? Did they need to quarrel with one another, despite the sun, despite the sea, despite the dance, despite the love?" (Capécia 192)

Though she regurgitates racial disgust in the beginning of the novel, knowledgeable of her black ancestry, she shifts toward a desire for reconciliation and understanding the unification being in the island of Martinique, beautifully imploring the possibility of a

multitude of races coming together to find happiness. This developing national consciousness does not privilege whiteness. The unease and the confusion she feels illuminates a mental turmoil and instability in what could be considered her foundational beliefs about blackness, shaped by her family, cultural history and geography. Capécia, vis-à-vis Isaure, writes,

She was no longer certain of having the same ideals. So many things had changed in Fort-de-France, so many things were changing every day. At the same time, it was as if something were awakening in her own blood--- she didn't know what—but she, herself was being transformed. She felt that soon the life she had led up to then would no longer satisfy her. Words like revolution and liberation, that formerly had left her indifferent when she heard them voiced by blacks, stirred up in her echoes of the past and disturbed her. She, too, had some black blood and when one has black blood, one is black. She could no longer limit herself to serve only whites. (Capécia 196)

The uncertainty is a coming-to-consciousness. The awakening is a pacification of some of the racial anxieties she felt, having family who idolized whiteness and a shifting culture that despised blackness but in its “changing,” moved toward an appreciation of blackness and Césarian negritude. This transformation can be read as a psychological re-formation, reshaping what existed foundationally, toward a process of mental liberation. This awakening is a moment of national allegiance, and a locus of acceptance.

*La Négrresse Blanche* serves as an allegory for the transition toward nationalism through rejecting the metropole during the Tan Robé period in Martinique. Through the

lens of Isaure, a phenotypically white single-mother, we are able to see an embodied experience of internalized racial oppression and a transition to a desire for solidarity and pride in blackness. *La Négrresse Blanche* is understudied yet its importance is in the time and location specific particularities of this experience. Additionally, the possibility of satirical elements in the novel are an important point of departure in looking at the relationship between Capécia and Fanon and their historical conceptions and misconceptions. Further, the possibilities of scholarship beyond literature like embodied sociological concepts, cultural anthropology and looking through the lens of colonial history, the book is rich in its possibilities: one that should not have been relegated to a footnote.

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