

أزمة هوية الكريول البيض في رواية "بحر سارجاسو الواسع" للكاتبة جين ريس

White Creole Identity Crisis in Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea

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تحاول هذه الدراسة تسليط الضوء على ممارسات التهميش والإقصاء الاجتماعي للمستعمرين وسكان البلد الأصليين على مجتمع الكريول الأبيض وتوضح كيف أنّ هذه المعاملة تسبب أرباكاً نفسياً لدى أفراد الكريول البيض فهي تجعلهم يعانون من حتمية فقدان هويتهم بفعل التردد فيما إذا كانوا ينتمون إلى مجتمع الأستعمار أم سكان الجزر الأصليين. كما أنّ هذه الدراسة تحاول أيضاً استكشاف الأساليب العنصرية التي يتم ممارستها على شعب الكريول البيض في جزر الهند الغربية والحقائق المروعة التي يواجهها الذكور الكريول البيض وكذلك الإناث من هذا الشعب. وبينما توضح الدراسة هذه الصدمات السلوكية، فإنها تتطرق إلى الأساليب التي يطور بها الجنسان المذكوران أنفاً إحساسهما بذاتهما، والطريقة التي يؤثر بها غياب العوز والفاقة وانعدام الشعور بالأمان على حياتهم، وكيف يلعب المجتمع دوره الذي يقودهم بالتالي إلى الجنون. أنّ هذه الدراسة تهدف إلى تقديم نظرة تحليلية للحالات المؤلمة التي يواجهها هذا الجزء من المكون الاجتماعي أثناء اختلاطه وتواصله مع مجتمع يرفضهم ويستبعدهم بسبب كونهم جنس هجين تنقصه الهوية البايولوجية الواضحة.

Abstract

This study attempts to highlight the practices of marginalization and social exclusion of the colonizers and the local inhabitants alike on the white creole community in the Caribbean Islands. The papers shows how this treatment causes psychological confusion on the part of the white creole subjects and makes them suffer from the inevitability of their identity loss due to bewilderment as to whether they belong to the colonized or colonizers' community in these islands.

This paper also attempts to explore racism practiced on creole subjects in the West Indies and the horrifying realities that white creole males as well as females encounter. While the study clarifies these behavioral traumas, it comes across the ways how the aforementioned genders develop their sense of self, the way financial security or insecurity affects their life, and society plays its role leading to their insanity. This study is intended to provide an insight into the traumatic instances they confront as they mingle and communicate with a society that rejects and excludes them.

Introduction

This paper attempts to study the 'creole identity crisis' in Jean Rhys' novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This novel particularly deals with the racial and sexual exploitation. It steadily explores racism, complex society and history of the West Indies as well as the horrifying realities of a woman's position. The novel is alternately narrated by Antoinette, giving readers a female perspective on the various themes that the novel is based upon. In *The Wide Sargasso Sea* the characters mainly, like Antoinette, Annette and Rochester suffer from identity crisis in a quite peculiar way though they are all aware of the place they occupy in the the natural pattern of human society. Nevertheless, everything turns to be the most pitiable and incomprehensible world. For instance, Antoinette's identity is in a constant flux between her childhood self as the daughter of an ex- slave owner at Coulibri estate and her desire as an adult to join the English through her unfaithful husband. Throughout the novel, Antoinette keeps seeking answers for her identity and position in community, and eventually concludes that she is a minor character according to the colonial paradigm of society.

The notion of being a minority as the 'other' is significant for the post- colonial studies and to the readers' understanding of the pressures in the *Wide Sargasso Sea* as well. Both the black majority and the white minority have marginalized Antoinette and her white creole family, making them total outsiders, and consequently, they live in social isolation. The subjugation of women to male authority is a significant theme of the novel and is crucial element in this paper. Rhys has painfully illustrated the very restricted role of women in the Victorian society. Antoinette is unable to free herself from the oppression of Rochester because she has no financial independence. All her money has been given to him in the form of dowry, and as such, most of the female characters are dominated by the males.

The proposed research attempts to clarify the concept of female identity by means of conducting a detailed study on the ways a woman develops her sense of personality, the way financial security or insecurity affecting her life as well as the role the society plays in the insanity of a particular female individual. This paper offers an insight into the psychology of the creole women throughout the exposition of the psychological sufferings and struggles of their characters. To achieve this task, the study portrays Antoinette as suffering from a severe suicidal tendency while she sits imprisoned in the attic from everyone. She is deprived of her identity but is conscious of what goes wrong with her life. This awareness of her catastrophic status instigates her go back into the past to find out what happened. Past memories move back and forth in her memory; one moment she is in the present, the other moment she is back in her past.

Antoinette consciously or unconsciously explores the delicate human mind that reaches its psychotic state because of the circumstances and many other factors. Consequently, these personal circumstances that the protagonist is suffering from develops the schizophrenic tendencies in Antoinette, and eventually lead to the identity crisis, as a mental disease marked by disconnection between thought, feelings and actions, often accompanied with delusions and breaks from social life. Hence, the research problem deals with the overall psychic problem of the protagonist Antoinette along with other minor female characters, who represent the white creole women.

In reviewing her life, Antoinette assumes her mother's efforts to provide her with economic security. Unfortunately, however, the problem of the mother and daughter is doubled by Mr. Mason's lack of understanding, which increased the black people's hostility towards these white skinned creole women in their lives. From this point on, the

entire novel is Antoinette's expedition through the question relating to her identity and ultimately her failure in finding answers to them. Throughout the novel, the psychic perplexity of Antoinette revolves around the female protagonist's search for self. Her account reveals that she is a dependent woman who is unable to express the essence of her being. In the first part of the novel, she is the main narrating voice. But in the second part, she grows and converts into a character whereas in the third, she is an individual who gradually resumes control of her life. These big changes are symbolic representations of her growth in the awareness of her true self. Thus, Rhys represents the view of the world through her own life circumstances.

Creoles and their origins

The study of 'creoles' has always been marked by questions and controversies about their emergence and whether they can be identified by their physical features, or genetically recognized with relation to their lexifiers. There have also been many conflicts and disagreements about the kind of varieties or races that can be counted under the Creoles, what distinguishes them from one another, and how their languages are different. The English word 'creole' comes from the French word 'creole, and,

was originally used to describe the descendants of European colonists who were born in the colony. Creoles, in this sense, are ethnic groups that emerged during the colonial period as a result of racial mixing, primarily between Africans and New Orleans natives, Louisiana Europeans, and occasionally South Asians and Native Americans.

(McWhorter, 2005: 10)

The growth of creole languages is most of the times mistakenly ascribed to the unfolding of the creole ethnic identities. However, they

are truly unconventional individualistic developments. Creoles are said to be “a mixed nationality of people belonging to different parts and regions. Another unique thing about creole people is that their color is a blend of white and dark” (Smith& Veenstra, 2001: 84). Hence, it is a natural thing that a person can notice that some creoles are white while others are dark, but they are all creoles.

The word ‘creole’ refers to “a mixed breed of Europeans and Africans born in the Islands in several parts of the southern Caribbean” (Ibid: 33). Over time, there was also intermarriage with Asian inhabitants. They finally developed a shared culture as a result of their shared experiences living in countries colonized by the French, Spanish, Dutch, and British.

Creoles, thus, were developed among the slaves or the inferiors. From then on, ‘creole’ is what it is till date. Despite the potential transfer of the island to English and the addition of English vocabulary, Dominica’s Creole language remains primarily French, and despite what is said, the Creole retains its place at the heart of Dominican culture. For a long time, Dominica’s underdeveloped road system hampered the growth of the villages, where ‘Creole is still the only language spoken. In this connection, Rochester argues that Creole “...is like a dream” (Rhys, 2001: 60) for the English.

The process of creolization

Creolization is the process by which new world Creole cultures arise. As a result of colonization, a group of people from America, West Africa, and Europe formed what became known as Creolization. 'Creolization' is, "a term that has usually been associated with the Caribbean; nevertheless, it can be extended to include other Diasporas. The mingling of individuals resulted in a cultural blending, which led to the emergence of new identities" (Migge, 2003: 62).

In addition, 'Creolization' happens when people choose cultural components that may become hereditary culture. In this connection, Robin Cohen states that, "Creolization is a phenomenon in which the structures of inherited culture are disrupted, [he further says that it is] a condition in which the formations of inherited culture evolve to become different from those they possessed in original cultures, and then, they creatively merge these creating new varieties that supersede the prior forms" (Arends, 1996: 71). According to Charles Stewart, "the concept of Creolization began in the 16th century, albeit there is no specific date for when the word 'Creolization' first appeared" (Charles, 2007: 20). Dominican Creoles are Creoles based on French, and French is Dominica's primary language. The vocabulary of Caribbean French Creole and Dominican French Creole is predominantly French-derived, with African and Carib elements in syntax. Furthermore, the presence of an English Creole may be seen in a number of idioms, and Spanish influences can also be seen throughout the language.

Since late nineteenth century, the study of creoles is marked by social partiality according to which all the Non- Europeans were not capable of learning European language properly. 'Creoles' have also been termed to be a separate language from their lexifiers and not genetically related. Although, however, the basic dialect of a Creole has a very different linguistic structure, its grammatical features can be

traced, but partly. Finally, the word 'Creole' evokes a richness rivaled only by the term's widespread misunderstanding. Creoles have a unique culture, a comprehensive multidisciplinary history and culture of their own.

Creole identity crisis in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Identity crisis in *Wide Sargasso Sea* literally implies personality disorder when an individual fails to identify his/her individuality in the widening paradigm of human existence. He/she starts suffering from mental agony where the true color of self-existence is lost in a land that is not his/her own. Consequently, mental imbalance lurks in one's own personality, for which a person becomes victim of his/her own existence a human being worth of living. And the result is that an individual starts behaving in an unusual way in a very usual place and time to an extent that he/she creates a situation where things are basically normal, smooth and widely acceptable. Thus, now, arises the 'identity crisis' which is an unnatural, strange mental disorder beyond human comprehension and understanding. One of the most pressing problems that a man might face in his lifetime is the problem of his quest for identity. They suffer not only from war, famine and ruin but also from the impacts of all these elements on their psyche.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, the reader comes across the main characters like Antoinette, Annette and Rochester. All these three characters, more or less, suffer from identity crisis in one way or another. But, the main female character, Antoinette, vehemently experiences horrible agonies on this wretched Caribbean island. Other than Antoinette, several other female characters, more or less, go through the same prolonged problems of identity. Christophine Dubois who happens to be the slave of Annette, Antoinette's mother, was

presented to her a wedding gift. Annette says “she was your father’s wedding present to me...” (Rhys, 2001: 245). This introduction of Christophine tells a lot about her marginalized status in the place she lives in or is brought into. She was probably transported like an object from one place to another. She belonged to Martinique and therefore she too, like Annette and Antoinette, is regarded as an outsider in Jamaica. These three women have shared similar traumas and miseries. There is a line in the novel that says “she slept in the little room next to the kitchen” (Ibid: 11), symbolizing the alienation that she endures even in a place where she is among the people she loves. They too were not really as bothered about her. Nevertheless, she remained faithful to Annette throughout and was like a mother to Antoinette. - “... she sang to [Antoinette] if she was in the mood” (Ibid: 11). Also, she is kind, compassionate and powerful as she knows Obeah, and that created fear among the natives. But the novel does not mention if that is Christophine’s way to deal with the people who never accepted her. In fact, her character remains mostly unknown to the readers, “... she never saw her son who worked in Spanish Town” (Ibid: 12). Rhys possibly is trying to say a lot by not saying much about Christophine here; she is only known enough through narrative voices of other characters, primarily by Antoinette. Some might also feel that Rhys has been unsuccessful in giving voice to this marginalized character. While she has a very powerful voice that sometimes threatens Rochester, she is hardly given any allowance to speak. In this connection, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who, in her innovative essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ suggests that the Western act of benevolence toward the ‘Third World others’ is indeed an act of violence since the intellectual tradition of the Western world that attempts to teach, and eventually save, the oppressed by ‘civilizing’ them indeed denies their voices. Spivak, in ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ goes on to say that, “if, in the

context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Morris, 210: 83). Rhys, time and again reminds her readers that she is a slave and her voice does not matter much. This stands as a paradox to the traits she has. Her history and past experiences are largely deleted from the novel. One can only guess at her traumas caused by slavery and her forced removal from Martinique to Jamaica, which would have been greatly sad and traumatic then. The only difference in Christophine is that she never really surrenders to her weakness, probably she is very much aware of her crisis within, and she never lets it get to her. Hence, she is never seen collapsing. She somehow manages to stand between the odds unlike Annette and Antoinette. That makes her one of the strongest characters with or without the crisis.

Next to Christophine comes the character of Rochester, though not a Creole, but is certainly suffering from the identity crisis on the Caribbean Island. Rochester was the younger child of his father. Unlike the elder brother, he could not inherit his father’s property which he desired very much to own. His search for money, property and security brought him closer to Antoinette. In the beginning, he appears to be a very unsuitable, nervous and shy suitor to an extent that Antoinette almost rejects him. Being the younger child, he already was a weak person with no rights over his dad’s property. He was determined to convince Antoinette of marrying him. He did agree to everything that Antoinette said, accepted all her terms and conditions that included his promise to stay in Coulibri. But as soon as the marriage is done, she finds him hiding himself in a small room writing letters to his father where he clearly mentions his urgent need for his father’s the money. This indicates that he is not really interested in her as much as he is in the money and property she owns. As far as racism is concerned, he

stared at Christophine when she said whether there is such a place called 'England'. Rochester is mentally shocked and wonders how is "... this ignorant, obstinate and old negro woman, who is not certain if there is such a place called England?" (Rhys, 2001: 198), and, therefore hates all the black servants. He is also uncomfortable with the way Antoinette is so close to Christophine and all the other black servants.

Thus, the subject of tragedy is very much valid to Rochester also, who suffers from identity crisis, just not as deep as his wife. In this connection, Antoinette charges Rochester once as she says: "Why do you hate me? Why do you never come near me? Or kiss me, or talk to me. Why do you think I can bear it, what reason have you for treating me like that? Have you any reason?" (Ibid: 76). The psychological tragedy of Antoinette revolves around what Rochester thought and heard about her mother which was not really true. Time and again, she tried to tell the truth before Rochester that her mother, after the death of her father was left alone and was financially unstable for five years. She was left alone and unheard. She says "There are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about" (Ibid: 77).

Again, the tragedy for Rochester is that he married Antoinette for money, but money alone could never give him peace. Being away from England makes him feel suffocated. In his opinion, this locale was unbearable for him that he wanted to be relieved from this tragic place. As such, he was always in search of a plea to get out of this dungeon-like-place. He even dreamed that he was being buried while he was still alive. He was "cold too, deathly cold and sick and in pain" (Ibid: 82). He thought that he had been poisoned that he went to the window and vomited. Then he "lay on the bed too weak to move" (Ibid: 83). Here, the pain and affliction of Rochester is mental rather than physical. In his subconscious mind, he furtively roves around his

identity crisis, that is, what he wanted to be, and what he is now. From Christophine's point of view Antoinette did not come to Rochester's house to beg him to marry her; rather it was Rochester who came all the long way to her house; it is Rochester who begged her to marry him. Antoinette loved him and gave him all she had. Christophine charged Rochester that he said he did not love her and broke her apart. Again, Christophine warned Rochester as to why he did not leave the West Indies if he did not want her anymore, and says "I like to see the world before I die" (Ibid: 93).

In the final part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette assumes the role of narrator again. She is now a prisoner at the Thornfield hall in England. Thornfield hall has an attic that makes Antoinette a prisoner in a jail. Since Rochester could not cope with the attitude of Antoinette, he throws her into this dungeon. He never really tries to understand even a bit and fails to look at her beyond his own convenience. The abnormal behavior of Antoinette makes the others think that she was mad, but in fact, she was not mad; rather she was driven mad and traumatized. She feels unaccepted and misplaced, with no one to love her. She becomes a victim of paranoid and solitariness.

Antoinette's sense of displacement

Antoinette Cosway, daughter of Annette and the white creole heiress, belongs neither to the white Europeans nor to the black Jamaicans. Her identity is in a constant flux between her childhood self as the daughter of an ex- slave owner at Coulibri estate and her desire as an adult to join the English through her nameless faithless husband. Her world is also in a flux after the Emancipation Act of 1833, which released the black slaves and led to the ruin of many slave and land owners. The servant class turns against her family, she could clearly feel the hatred of the people she thought of as her own, from her own land, the home that she no longer belongs to. She could not even belong to her mother enough as her mother never showed much concern towards her; she was too busy battling with her own demons and madness.

Her first memories are of her father's Coulibri Estate in Jamaica, where she lived with her mother, disabled brother Pierre, and two black servants, Christophine and Godfrey. Her story begins when she becomes aware of certain significant changes in society that have a direct impact on her family. In the midst of it all, Antoinette's mother is the main character in her story. She is mostly aware of the changes around her because of their impact on her mother and her family's exclusion from creole culture. In this sense, she observed, "So few people came to us [and] no one came near us" (Ibid: 9- 10). Antoinette explains that this situation did not affect her personally, "I got used to a solitary life... [but she makes reference to its effect on her mother Annette:] ... My mother still planned and hoped perhaps- she had to hope every time she passed a looking glass... she was young. How could she not try for all those things that had gone so suddenly, so without warning" (Ibid: 10). Her remarks show that she is aware of her mother's situation, which leads to a greater understanding of herself.

Another thing Antoinette recalls was the increasing hatred of black people toward her mother as their economic condition deteriorated. Annette's horse was poisoned by the locals, therefore cutting off Annette's only method of connection with the white people.

Antoinette recalls being allowed independence as a youngster, despite her lack of economic, cultural, and psychological resources. Her mother believed she was aged enough to care for herself, which compounded her troubles. Annette's disengagement of her motherly responsibilities has been noticed by Antoinette initiated her own withdrawal of the responsibilities as well.

Her mother was dead last year; no one told her how, and she didn't ask; she only prayed; "but the words fell to the ground meaning nothing... [But Sister Maria Augustine says:] Now, go quietly back to bed. Think of calm, peaceful things and try to sleep. Soon I will give the signal. Soon it will be tomorrow morning" (Ibid: 36- 7).

Antoinette believes that a series of events set in motion by the mysterious past have resulted in significant changes in her life. Her presence in Tia's outfit in front of her mother's English friends, as well as Christophine's taunt on Annette, served as a wake- up call. She develops numerous strategies and attempts to re- establish touch with white people. Antoinette later explains this crucial fact to her husband, who is unable to comprehend and blames herself for her mother's death,

"... there was that day when she saw I was growing up like the white nigger and she was ashamed of me. It was after that day that everything changed. Yes, it was my fault...that she started to plan and work in a frenzy, in a fever to change our lives"

(Ibid: 79).

Antoinette admits that it was her fault; she sees this ironic circumstance as the first step toward the complete loss of identity she was aiming for. She saw herself, in an instinctual act of self-preservation, seeking sanctuary in the landscape, which was consistent while being unfriendly and unsympathetic:

I went to the parts of Coulibri that I had not seen, where there was no road, no path, no track. And if the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would think, 'its better than people'. Black ants or red ones, tall nests swarming with white ants, rain soaked me to the skin – once I saw a snake. All better than people. Better. Better than people. Watching the red and yellow flowers in the sun thinking of nothing, it was as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself anymore.

(Ibid: 32)

Being there at Coulibri estate, finding new ways, new roads or not finding them at all provides young Antoinette an escape from her troubles, from her issues of alienation that she has faced for years. The instances of 'red ants', 'black ants' and 'white ants' all at the same place being happy in each other's presence somehow gives Antoinette a sense of non- discrimination unlike the people she is living with, who are full of hatred for each other. She wants to escape from all this. But this Coulibri estate is not a home, a safe and protected place that Antoinette can relate herself with and make it her own. The people who live here with her are slaves, who are not really willing to be their slaves. Their intensions are opaque and obscure. Antoinette likes to forget her troubles, her situation, and the reality of her life to an extent where she does not exist anymore, to a point, where she is not human anymore. She is not really identifying herself with humans. "Better than human" (Ibid: 54), as if she is not one of them. This alienation

from the people has created a sense of separation in the mind of Antoinette from them. This is not essentially a good thing. Antoinette goes through an abnormal issue of identity since the very beginning of the novel.

Another incident takes place. Antoinette's friend Tia, a black girl, has wounded her in a fight. Like the 'Razor Grass', Tia is also a representation of the harsh home. Tia embodies what Antoinette aspires to be: a black lady rather than a white Creole girl who is rejected by both white and black cultures. Tia Antoinette, like Tia Antoinette, will never have a racial identity of her own. This is the beginning of Antoinette's doubts about herself, about the wounds that will always be visible to her. Antoinette tries hard to be one with those living in Coulibri, witnessing her mother's struggle and sadness. It is not just her but also her mother who is trying to fit in. The only black lady who is close to the Cosway family is 'Christophine' and it is clearly seen how the blacks have segregated her even though she herself is black. Finally, the Blacks end up setting their home on fire, where Antoinette loses her brother and in a way her mother too. The image of the burning parrot in it flight is a sort of metaphor towards end of the novel. This incident turns Annette, Antoinette's mother, completely mad. She is kept in a rehab full of Black people who did not treat her well. All these things have created a huge impact on the young mind of Antoinette. She steadily understands the whole matter but her helplessness is now starting to play with her sense of identity. The Negroes' hatred grew as a result of Mr. Mason's lack of understanding, and they set fire to Coulibri. The damage resulted in a loss of location and identity for both her mother and herself, causing psychological disorientation.

As part two begins, a change can be seen in Antoinette's mode of life as well as her personality. She marries the English man, Mr.

Rochester, whose first name is not mentioned in the concerned text. That marriage has been arranged by Mr. Rochester's father and Antoinette's stepfather. Her family have given her away to a stranger, and signed her money over to him, as was the law. Rochester weds her only for the sake of her property and finances; she is not an English beauty at all. Just for show, Rochester kisses her fervently promising her peace, safety and happiness. But as the story moves forward, Rochester appears to be a narrow-minded orthodox and is only and only thinking about his own race, searching for the same etiquettes, same mannerisms and passiveness like those of English women, in Antoinette. "What would my friends in England think of you? They will think you are a wild creature, untamed" (Ibid: 196). Rochester tells Antoinette as she is playfully bathing in the pool. He further says, "I was thirsty for her, but I didn't understand her. She is still a stranger to me" (Ibid: 55). Somehow, in a way Rochester is threatened by her sense of freedom, her fearlessness and carefree attitude. There is a scene where Antoinette is dancing with Emily in front of her mansion; the dance form is of a traditional African- Caribbean style nowhere close to what English people do. Rochester is disturbed and annoyed by just the sight of it. Not just Antoinette but also Rochester has identity issues it seems. For him, the world Antoinette lives in is unreal; millions of people, their houses, and stress are all unreal. Such paradoxical behavior obviously implies that Rochester too is a victim of identity crisis. For Antoinette, England is a dream for she has never been there. Contrarily, Rochester replies angrily that her world seemed like a dream to him even though he was in it. The greatest irony is that Antoinette is keen to learn more about England, which is quite but natural, in order to get closer to him, but Rochester sees her lack of knowledge as her incapacity to comprehend. So, he was all over, the distinguished and retreat, the questions and hesitations. "Everything

finished for better or for worse” (Ibid: 210) as Rochester remarks in the beginning of part two. Thus, falling back upon such unremedied Hamletian situation, Rochester also becomes the victim of identity crisis. It further deepens intensely when he knows from Daniel that his wife is mad and that his father knew about her condition before marriage. That night when Antoinette reveals the truth, he ends up cheating on her with the servant girl Amilie. Antoinette ends up cursing him in aggression, he feels shattered, because he knows that he has probably lost something that he might have found precious- his wife’s love. \And therefore; he goes on to compare her to a mad person who might try to kill him, and says to himself that he must lock her away like a bad memory. Rochester redefines her as a being of madness and violence, symbolic of the chaotic feminine as opposed to his own sane and patriarchal self. Having married her for her money, he strips her of all control, taking away her belief in her own sanity, for his voice has more power and credibility. Antoinette is pushed towards madness and imprisoned in her own mind.

When Rochester becomes the narrator in the second part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it becomes clear that he intends to play the part of a passive victim, at least in the beginning. He has not gathered enough information about his wife to be able to hurt her. Therefore, he creates his own system of knowledge about her and the landscape she comes from in his own terms. He claims that he married hastily just after he had a fit of fever when he was unable to think appropriately. Later, he would develop a chain of thoughts in his mind pretending that he has been tricked into marrying a creole girl of doubtful character. Hence, Antoinette sold her and identity in the name of marriage:

It was a song about a white cockroach. That’s me.
That’s what they call all of us who were here before

their own people in Africa sold them to slave traders. And I have heard English women call us ‘White Niggers’. So, between you, I often wonder who am I, what is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all.

(Ibid: 61)

Antoinette raises another crucial problem in expressing her conflicting thoughts about race to her husband Rochester: the topic of national and racial identity. Because the Caribs and other indigenous groups came before them, neither the Blacks nor the Whites can claim ownership of the islands. Antoinette’s observations here may help to explain why white creoles are so hated: their marginal status as a not-quite- black and not- quite- white people weakens the idea that either race is entitled to claim the island as their own.

Antoinette’s identity issue starts developing more and more after her marriage with Rochester. With time, Rochester appears to be a very obstinate, insincere and insensitive as he tends to find himself superior because of his origins. Antoinette’s illegitimate brother sends a letter to Rochester which creates problems in their marriage. Daniel Cosway, who is Antoinette’s bastard brother, the son of her biological father, Alexander Cosway portrays his own father to be an immoral man with many bastard children, Annette is a mad woman who was locked in the asylum when she died and he also claims that Antoinette is a woman of questionable character with madness in her genes. Hidden things are out now regarding Antoinette’s mother, her past and her death giving rebirth to old insecurities and sadness. Antoinette tries hard to explain her and her mother’s hardships to Rochester but he refuses to believe her. He chooses to believe Daniel’s version of the story in order to torment her. He gets a great excuse when Antoinette, hurt by his coldness and infidelity, becomes angry, throws wine bottle

at him and curses him. Rochester can now safely portray her as an uncontrollable mad woman, the image of her that he has in his mind. As Gilbert and Gubar say, “proper women must be submissive, passive, modest, selfless and angelic [their] angry revolt against male dominion is demonic” (Ibid: 156). Antoinette’s rage is far from angelic and can easily be interpreted as a sign of madness. She says, “Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that’s Obeah too” (Ibid: 88)

Following this, Antoinette finds herself abandoning her ongoing struggle in favor of protecting her identity. She gives in to her husband’s and society’s expectations. Rochester is not really keen about understanding the creole side of her like everyone else; he is also not accepting the Creoleness of a creole lady. Just like these quoted lines, Rochester is calling Antoinette by another name, an English name, this is not only demeaning, it’s his way of being a dominant over her entire life and identity, just as he acquired legal control over her fortune and property when he tied the knot with her. This makes Rochester no different than the Caribs or Blacks living there. He claims, “I scarcely recognized her voice, ‘No warmth, no sweetness’. The doll had a doll’s voice; a breathless but curiously indifferent voice” (Ibid: 102). Antoinette has been reduced to a ‘doll’, an inanimate item in Rochester’s eyes. However, one could argue that he has been objectifying her the entire time. The whole issue is open for dispute at this point in the novel, towards the end of it whether Antoinette’s doll-like exterior is just a veneer, a mask to hide her rebellious inclinations, or whether Rochester has accomplished his dominance over her. All of these things contribute to Antoinette’s identity dilemma in some way.

However, Christophine states that “She is not *beke* like you, but she is *beke* not like us either” (Ibid: 93). Here, Christophine tries her

best to explain Antoinette's complex status to Rochester, but even Christophine, who is very good with words, cannot seem to explain exactly what Antoinette is. Finally, as she is taken away to a foreign land, living among foreign people, her sense of self is completely lost now. Living in the attic she does not know who she is, what time or month it is, or where she exactly is. She is deprived of all information, deprived of all the love she always expected.

Antoinette's story neither denies her insanity nor does it confirm it. She gives a view of her life from within her psyche. The trouble too was inside her. Her complicated personality and high cultural sensitivity set her apart, leaving her feeling bewildered and alone. She believes that, in both her and her mother's cases, society and her husband, acting on their expectations, produced settings that worsened underlying fears and contributed to disorientation. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is portrayed as a dependent or restrained lady as well as a divided personality unable to express her true self. She lacks self-awareness since she was forced to accept an alien image of woman, symbolized by the name Bertha in an attempt to Anglicize her.

As she sits in a room that has become a prison for her body but not her mind, she experiences and dramatizes this story in her direct and indirect consciousness. Antoinette develops changes while re-enacting her story. She starts off as a narrator, but as the story progresses, she develops into a character who takes part in the drama of her own life story. Finally, in the third section, she develops into a person who progressively takes charge of her life. These changes are a reflection of her increasing understanding of her own self. This theatrical depiction of her story contrasts her internal activity with her inactivity, as well as the stages of her dissolution as a creole woman with her symbolic development of her individuality, and portrays her

asylum under insanity as a positive but ironic attempt at self-concealment.

Because she is imprisoned in Thornfield Hall, Antoinette does not have access to a mirror, which is part of Rochester's plan to deprive her of a distinct identity to call her own. The scenario with Tia is evocative of the childhood mirror incident she discusses here. Her feeling of alienation from her own image reflects her broader lack of self-identity.

However, this comment raises the bigger question of whether Antoinette has indeed gone insane, or whether it is possible that her shattered sense of self is a result of her personal history. Rhys approaches the issue of identity crises from a unique perspective. It is Antoinette's search for identity that is the part of the novel. The question of identity is prevalent everywhere as she keeps setting questions such as: who am I? What am I? What do I look like? Where do I belong? These are the questions that Antoinette wants to find answers for throughout the novel, and thus making 'identity crisis' the central theme of the novel.

Antoinette's loss of identity is apparent when, in the last part of the novel, locked up in Thornfield hall, she asks, "what am I doing in this place and who am I?" (Ibid: 107). She had once defined herself as a girl with scents, pretty clothes and a looking glass. All those things which were a part of her personality, her outward appearance at least, have been taken away from her. Her own reflection cannot keep her company anymore. She is extremely alienated, even from her own self. One night, she dreams about her moving around in the mansion, even in her dreams, she is so alone and disoriented that when she catches a glimpse of her herself, she thinks that it is a ghost. In the dream, she remembers the Caribbean and sets Rochester's house on fire. That

dream gives her a sense of purpose and as she wakes up, she sets about to burn the mansion into ashes. This is the only way she can free herself from the tyranny of a man who destroyed her identity.

In the end, Annette is forced into madness. Annette was never mad; Antoinette can never be mad. They are simply driven mad. Rochester too, is never mad; rather all these main characters have split personalities. Common readers can perceive *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a post-modernist novel that comprehensively and precisely deals with 'identity crises'.

Conclusion

To sum up, *Wide Sargasso Sea* studies the horrifying realities of white creole people in the West Indies. Even Sargasso Sea, as a locale, does not seem to be home them for it is full of fears and nightmares. Furthermore, it stands as an image for the disastrous relationship between the colonizer and the colonized on one hand and the white creole subjects on the other hand. This mutual bad relationship cast a sad shadow on the psychological state of the creole characters. Antoinette, for instance, suffers from disastrous agony due the loss of her husband's love, name, property, money and finally her freedom. This crisis has a destructive impact on her role as a woman living in a society under colonial system and exclusion from the indigenes' side. Being highly biographical narrative, *Wide Sargasso Sea* implies historical factual information about the white creole society through probing in their daily life activities.

In this novel, Rhys attempts to humanize Antoinette as a mad woman imprisoned in the attic. The author shares Antoinette's viewpoint and knowledge of the West Indian history and geography. Additionally, Antoinette is portrayed as a very impulsive protagonist for she is depicted as a young solitary girl from Jamaica who is finally turned into a lunatic in an English garret. Being a creole white woman, suffers from traumas due to the fact that neither the Westerners nor the local indigenes accepted her nor did they accept her mother. So, in her struggle for acceptance, there is a steady but affective process of her psychological deprivation and emotional fragility. Antoinette, throughout the novel, faces psychological dilemma that finally results in her setting the Thornfield into fire. Her psychic turmoil throughout the novel can implicitly be apprehended as struggle for identity and acceptance which is eventually never accomplished. This implies that

the focal theme of the novel, however, primarily deals with the development of a delicate white Creole child into a young woman who finds refuge in isolated spaces and is frightened by people around her. There is a constant search for identity throughout the novel. This paper presents a deep analysis of the white creole characters' searching for their identities and the traumas they encounter which finally lead to their pathetic crises.

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