

**The “In-Between”: Caribbean and the White Creole in Jean Rhys’s
Wide Sargasso Sea and Phyllis Allfrey’s *The Orchid House***

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Abstract

The question of identity has long been an impending issue in the branch of Caribbean post-colonial discourses, and many attempts have been taken in defining and theorizing the identity of peoples occupying the Caribbean space. The question is made further tricky by the racial discrepancies of the region. A violent colonial history of plantation slavery plays a significant role in determining the segregation of races based on color, language, and culture. The complexities embedded in this multi-racial society render psychological dilemma for the hybridized creoles who are caught between the racial and historical prejudices. This dissertation attempts to examine the place of the minority white creole in a black/colored dominated community, as depicted in the works Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey. Being white creole West-Indian authors and witnesses to the transitioning societies of the Caribbean, the literary narratives they produce efficiently aid in shaping the white creole's articulation of self-identification, and in securing a space in the post-colonial negotiations of imperial constructs.

Introduction

The Caribbean archipelago has long been the subject of post-colonial curiosity and debates -owing to its exceptional history in race formation, cultural amalgamation and mixed notions of identity. Like the non-uniform geographical positioning of the scattered islands and the colorful variation of the Caribbean tropical landscapes, the Caribbean people are just as divergent and heterogeneous in their racial and cultural origins. Much has been written about them in the form of history, theory and literature – Derek Walcott, Jamaica Kincaid, Franz Fenon, Aime Caesar, Kamau Brathwaite etc. are only to name a few important contributors– giving shape to a potential Caribbean discourse that deals with the ambivalent issues of race, culture, identity, nationality, colonialism etc. The intricate process of creolization is unique to the Caribbean race and to the creation of the Creole. This paper shall begin by articulating the significance of creolization in the makings of these creole races, and the problems it poses in determining social and cultural identities.

According to Charles Stewart¹, the word “creole” denotes the offspring of the Old World progenitors born and raised in the New World. This raises questions on historical origins, the ‘mixed-ness’ or hybridization of their transplanted but individual identities, the conflictive issues of color in Caribbean people. I often wondered about the ambiguous nature of the identity question that the Caribbean creole faces with regard to his/her racial and cultural location in the community. This paper shall investigate the location of the ‘white creole’ in the versatile racial and social arrangements – between that of the blacks/whites/coloreds of the islands – where their colonial history plays an important role. I found it exceptionally interesting as how the white creole situation has been explored in many influential writings. My paper shall further assess the

¹ Stewart, Charles. *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*. California: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2007. 1-26. Print

space occupied by West Indian authors Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey in post-colonial discourses, and their attempts in giving voice to the silenced white creole, as depicted in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The Orchid House*.

To understand the ambivalence of the terms creolization, creoles, notions of Caribbean identity etc. it is essential to return to the history of the islands. In my paper, I shall frequently interchange between the terms ‘Caribbean’² and ‘West Indian’³ in my reference to the island nations of the Caribbean Sea and territories surrounding South and Central American mainland. However, my paper shall only concentrate on the nations Jamaica and Dominica, in concern of my chosen texts, and these regions that were formerly British colonies. The plantation commerce in the Caribbean was hardest hit during the Emancipation of slaves during the early 1800’s, and the social climate in the West Indian colonial regions changed forever. My paper shall identify the social changes in my two chosen texts.

The question of ethnicity is resultant of the geographical displacement of entire peoples from other continents: Europe and Africa. Over the last century, research had been devoted in understanding the unique positioning and hybridization of the creole: the whites, the blacks, and the coloreds. Each race of color face existential crisis of self-recognition (owing to their hybridized histories), but are exclusive in their own colonial experiences and national Caribbean identities. The black African slave culture derived from the plantation fields immediately renders the difficulties of racial hatred for imperial dominance imposed by the white European slave driver. The initial struggle was a dichotomy between the whites and the blacks – and later into

² The word ‘Caribbean’ is derived from a corruption of the Spanish word ‘caribal’, a pronunciation of the word ‘cannibal’.

³ ‘West Indies’ arose in contrast to the designation ‘East Indies’, the ‘spice islands’ of Asia and Columbus’ intended destination when he ‘discovered’ the Caribbean in 1492.

the arrangement – enters the ‘in-betweens’⁴. A race born out of rape and slavery, the master/slave relationship is now complicated by not only the issue of a cruel and unforgiving history, but also by the racial conflicts that generated over the following centuries. My first chapter will provide the historical background for my texts and settings, provide an account of the problematic arising from Caribbean creolization, and also critically assess the general ‘fixed-ness’ of the ambivalent post-colonial term.

The white creole identity in this mixed Caribbean population is far more complex than a supposedly superior rung of the social ladder. In fact, it is this ‘whiteness’ of their complexion that serves as a constant reminder of the region’s colonial history, racial discrepancies and cultural syncretism. With the rise of the black racial discourse defending the black and coloreds in the post-colonial mission of refute against epistemic violence⁵, I find the position of the white creole yet to be fully explored. Post-colonial efforts made by Rhys and Allfrey to participate in the movement of ‘writing back’ to the Empire is essential in consolidating the white-creole voice – a voice of the periphery that has been imperially marginalized and silenced along with the “Other”. Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* portrays the story of silenced Bertha Mason in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* while Allfrey’s *The Orchid House* passively defends the white creole’s marginality against an intimidating national consciousness among the blacks. The written novel, then, becomes a site of refutation and resistance by the hybrid that is trapped in the margins *within* the “other”. My second chapter aims to designate a space for the literary tradition in which Rhys and Allfrey may comfortably settle in.

⁴ Homi Bhaba’s reference of the ‘Third Space’ in his book *The Location of Culture*, 1994

⁵ Spivak applies the term *epistemic violence* to describe the destruction of non-Western ways of knowing the world, and the resultant dominance of the Western ways of perceiving, understanding, and knowing the world.

To understand the anxiety among the light-skinned creole counterpart in a predominantly black society, Rhys and Allfrey personalizes several characters in situations that presents the themes of racial impurity, marginality, social anxiety, an evolving anti-colonial spirit and nationalism. I will use these texts to argue how the blacks and the coloreds become more comfortable and flexible in their settings while the settler whites become increasingly anxious and insecure in their social position. Their adherence to the ancestral European culture is also unrequited, and they are left 'marooned' in an antagonistic community. My third chapter will demonstrate the cultural and domestic relationship between the white and black creoles, to prove the reversal of colonial mimicry⁶ taking place on the ambivalent grounds of "Third Space", and to depict the communal isolation from the blacks and expatriation from the European ancestor. To further place the white creole in the Caribbean context, this paper shall look for and mention the aspects and themes from within the texts that would qualify the novels as vehicles for not only resistance, but also the abode of authentic Caribbean experiences.

The two literary pieces that I have chosen to prove my arguments serve as ideal texts because of the difference in times in the same West Indian setting. *Wide Sargasso Sea*⁷ is Jean Rhys's contrapuntal to nineteenth century English author Charlotte Bronte's masterpiece *Jane Eyre*. It depicts the childhood-to-adulthood progression of Antoinette's life in the Dominican estate of Coulibri, while *The Orchid House*⁸ captures the domestics of a white creole family in the post World War I setting in Dominica. Set by a century apart, the two pieces allows the tracing of how the social and political values have evolved over time in the region, and also the conditions of white creole families in a post-colonial era. The two novels further explore the

⁶ See Homi Bhaba's "Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse," in *The Location of Culture*

⁷ Hence forth cited as *WSS*

⁸ Henceforth cited as *OH*

psychological expectations and adaptations of the white creole consciousness, and closely study the disappointments of alienation as a concept attached to their creolized identities. In addition, the novels have been included in the feminist discourses owing to the narratives provided by female characters, and this gives an insight of the woman's experience and endurance as a white creole.

The fundamental idea of my dissertation is that the white creole is a margin within the marginal, in terms of their Caribbean cultural and social experiences. Parts of both the black community and that of the European ancestry in England (but recognized as their own by neither) this creole straddles between two opposing identities. His familiarity with the Caribbean ways, and the remnants of his European heritage is deep-rooted to the Caribbean soil he occupies. Therefore, he should embrace the differences and blur the fixed lines between borders of self-identification, and form his own unique ethnicity.

Chapter 1

Defining Creole: Between Words, Color and Culture

“I would never be part of anything. I would never really belong anywhere, and I knew it, and all my life would be the same, trying to belong, and failing. Always something would go wrong. I am a stranger and I always will be, and after all I didn't really care.”

— Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*

Creolization is quite a perplexing term because of its openness to the vast variety of subjects exposed for substantial debates. At any length, the complexity of the word has been recognized in post-colonial discourses since the surfacing of theories challenging imperial ideologies of the West. The voice of the Other in the ‘Orient’ had been growing louder since the dissolve of Western European colonies all over the world while each race try and make its stance in mankind. Simply put, the process refers to the ‘mixing’ and integration of two dominant races into one another when they came to co-exist in oppressive dealings of the colonial dynamic, stretching all the way back into the sixteenth century.

To secure creolization under the rigidity of any structure would be a mistake because, like all other indefinite notions of race, imperialism, marginality and identity, creolization is a continual process of adjusting and adaptation. (Delle 56) In his essay “The Material and Cognitive Dimensions of Creolization in Nineteenth-Century Jamaica”, James Delle defines the term ‘creolization’ as a form of ethnogenesis – the process adopted by creoles to understand themselves as ethnically distinct from the wider social landscape. According to him, “creolization is a dual process, comprised of both social and material elements, through which

distinctive identities, social cultures, and material cultures were created, negotiated, and re-negotiated in colonial zones of the New World.” (56) The ‘creole’, therefore, is the consequence of social and material factors attached to the individual identity, generated in a historical region with a colonial climate.

Ethnographers do not always agree on a cognitive definition of the creole. Charles Stewart’s historical and theoretical examination of the phenomenon draws out certain opinions regarding the problematic.

Historical contingencies have fractured and inflicted the meaning of “creole” so that it denotes different things in different places. In Haiti, which won independence early and expelled the white population, creole could only refer to black people, whereas in Martinique, which remained within the French Orbit, the same term referred to white people as it did in Louisiana. In Mauritius, creoles are those who cannot claim the term ‘white’ following the “one drop” rule. It is evident that the historical development of the ‘creole’ as an identity in the post colonial period is quite complex. Certainly there can be no disputing that the historical concept offers plenty of support for those who apply it today in the sense of mixture. (Stewart 8)

Though the word generally refers to the historical emergence of different races under specialized circumstances, many other scholars emphasize on the lingual relations to the term because language denotes ethnicity as well as identity. Martinican writer and literary critic Edouard Glissant denotes ‘creolization’ as the appropriation and transformation of the colonial master’s

language and applies similarly to the case of cultures. He explains that the *lingua franca*⁹ operates in turning the master's language against him, soon becoming a "site for resistance." The emergence of pidgin dialects – language of verbal contact between groups that have no other language in common – evokes the interest of historians and anthropologists to explore the social conditions of communication and the origins of such uncommonness. All heads would turn to look back at the painful circumstances of plantation slavery in which creole languages took shape and out of which creole societies grew. Therefore, the domains of syntax, phonology and lexicon would quickly transcend into the psychological foundations of self-recognition, marginalization, and 'rootlessness'. (Stewart 2-8)

The motif of the creole is reveals ambiguity, simply because it meant different things to different people at relatively different times. The context, nevertheless, is attached to the location of creolization, and the mixtures of races involved in creolization. The question of the creole becomes crucial to define the Caribbean identity, as discovered by Nigel Bolland. In his article "Reconsidering Creolization and Creole Societies", Bolland asserts that the dynamic nature of Caribbean cultures is unique to the creolization concepts because it provides significant moments in the ideological decolonization of the Caribbean: "The concept of creolization is important because it avoids both the view that enslaved Africans were stripped of their cultures and acculturated into a European culture, and also the view that evidence of the African heritage in the Caribbean lies only in 'retentions' or 'survivals.'" (Bolland 1) Although these avoided views are distinguishably powerful catalysts to the course of creolization, to hold them solely responsible in creating the Caribbean creole identity would be inaccurate. It is thus established

⁹ 'Lingua franca' is known as the vehicular language. It is to bridge communication between people who do not share a mother language.

that the process of creole creation is as complex and multi-dimensional as the creoles themselves.

The discussion of creole classification opens up to the even more intricate cultural fields of the mullato and mestizo, the white creoles and the black creoles of the Caribbean islands – each population derived from the same history but exclusively different colonial experiences in different regions of the Caribbean. It is this difference in experience that determines their current locality in a much-hybridized community. Franz Fanon's question regarding the Negro creole is significant in placing the black man's colonial experience, social antagonism and sexual expression in the racial equation of Black/White and Self/Other. Needless to point out, the black voice is given urgent recognition in post-colonial discourses because of his centuries-long endurance of the white man's torture. Fanon urges Caribbean writers to drop their "white masks" and embrace a unique Caribbean stance. On the other hand, V.S. Naipaul is less optimistic about the consequences. He critically comments that the Caribbean authors are "fictional characters whose secondhand experience, like their surrogate literature, betrays them as mimic men of the New World", implying that their creole selves could never get rid of the European influence. (Huggan 643) Post-colonial debates between scholars have been argued from different parts of the world (as per colonial experience) yet the dilemma concerning the creole individual, both as author and character, still remains.

With the augmentation of black racial discourses since colonial decline, much research and analytical theorizing have been directed at the deconstruction of Orientalism¹⁰, and the more popular studies are found in exploring the slave class – the blacks and the black/brown-skinned

¹⁰ Edward Said argues that the Europeans divided the world into two parts; the east and the west or the occident and the orient or the civilized and the uncivilized. This was totally an artificial boundary; and it was laid on the basis of the concept of 'them' and 'us' or 'theirs' and 'ours'. The Europeans used 'orientalism' to define their superior themselves. Said, Edward *Orientalism*. London: Penguin (1977)

hybrids in colonial regions. To return to the importance of location, it is not an attempt to draw attention upon only the physical landscape. Rather, “‘place’ in post colonial societies is a complex interaction of language, history and environment.” It is distinguished by a sense of dislocation in those who have moved to or away from the colonies, or the displacement of language and environmental experience of cultures when faced with the colonizer. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 391) Graham Huggans feels the need to decolonize the map – in terms of ‘place’ – by the use of post-colonial discourses, in refutation of what the colonial masters has created in the image of the ‘Other’. By creating a post-colonial fiction that occupies a colonial space and language subverts the colonizer’s imperial intentions.

Backed up by a long colonial history, the creole becomes a struggling ‘middle-ground’ between two wholesome races - a space that proves to be not only cumbersome but also inescapable as expressed by most Caribbean sensibilities. To overcome this predicament, Edward Kamau Brathwaite sees the process of creolization as contributory parts of a whole, and not in terms of black and white, or master and slave, or elite and laborer or as any other separate units.(307) Therefore, the word ‘creole’ is applied to all those occupying the colonial space. In his examination of the Jamaican development of the creole community, Brathwaite finds that the confrontation between two cultures as cruel but also creative. The white plantation and social institutions reflect one aspect, while the slaves’ adaptation of their African culture to a new world reflects another. The middle-ground is therefore occupied by the ‘creations’ and different yet unique products of the master-slave dynamic – a two-way mimicry between the white elites and blacks. (Brathwaite 301)

A bigger concern then arises regarding the authenticity of creole cultures. Homi Bhaba’s post-colonial criticism has been quite prominent in redefining post-colonial and minority

cultures. In the Introduction to his book *The Location of Culture*, Bhaba urges literary critics not to classify groups of people based on “organic” and pre-existing attributions. Instead, he asks for an understanding of cultural differences as being based on hybridities created in moments of historical transformation (2). African-American artist and writer Renee Green emphasizes on the need to understand the cultural difference as the production of minority identities that ‘split’ – are estranged unto themselves. “Multiculturalism doesn’t reflect the complexity of the situation as I face it daily,” she says. “It’s still a struggle for power between various groups about what’s being said and who’s representing who? What is a community anyways? What is a black community? What is a Latina community? I have trouble with thinking of all these things as monolithic fixed categories.” (Bhaba, 4) It is in this dilemma where the binary oppositions of the “white creole” and the “black creole” become even more uncertain. The concern then emerges, as this paper shall elaborate, that the white creole – given its very unique circumstances – cannot be placed in any fixed category at all.

This paper shall limit its colonial search of the creole at a span of Jamaica and Dominica, in concern of Caribbean authors Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey’s textual representation of white creoles in *Wide Sargasso Sea*¹¹ (1966) and *The Orchid House*¹² (1954) respectively. 19th century Jamaican creoles were referred to all members of the society, both black and white. However, during the 17th century, detects a self-conscious distinction between those who are born in the Caribbean and those who immigrated to the islands, in search of wealth in Caribbean plantations. Brathwaite illustrates the three forms of creole societies that were created from the master-slave relationship in the plantation commerce of Jamaica: the Euro-creoles were identified primarily by their European heritage and the Afro-creoles were acknowledged through

¹¹ Hearby cited as *WSS*

¹² Hereby cited as *OH*

their African ancestry. The third group was called the 'maroons' – a society formed by runaway slaves and their descendants. The maroons gradually developed a sovereign identity apart from those who were incorporated into the colonial plantation system. The Dominican question of creole societies showed similar outcomes to that of Jamaica, chiefly because of the proximity between the islands and their common European colonizer. The French and English fought bitter wars over Dominica, and thus the creole groups absorb traces of both English and French cultures.

The social climate in Britain faced a drastic change with the emancipation of slaves in the British colonies since the Abolition of Slavery Act of 1833. The change, however, was not well received by the English plantation commerce because it threatened the supply of manual labor. British Parliamentary member William Wilberforce (1759 - 1833) strongly advocated the emancipation, after having received shocking reports from teams of researchers investigating the severity of slavery in Africa, the Caribbean and certain parts of South America. Joined by many other influential voices, Wilberforce achieves to abolish the Slave Trade in 1807, which finally led to the Emancipation itself in 1833. The delay in liberating slaves after the trade abolishment was accounted for the parliamentarians' argument of having the slaves trained and educated before setting them free and include them as equal parts in social contexts. Also it prevents, as understood by the abolitionists, the abrupt dissimilation of the plantation commerce because much of the British economy depended on its Caribbean exploits. The immediate problem was tackled by substituting cheap free labor with the more expensive slave apprenticeship where low wages were handed out on year-bound contracts. These alterations were brought about by long

series of enacted ordinances¹³ – products of endless parliamentary debates and arguments to make gradual adjustments (both social and economic) to the abolishment of previous slave arrangements in different regions of the Caribbean – and thus the Emancipation turned out to be a matter of generations.

Social segregations existed long before the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Owing to the long withstanding sugar-plantations, there were divisions in the classes of planters as well as the slaves. The West Indies colonies were populated with whites, free people of color and slaves, and there was a constant competitive endeavor between the well-to-do whites (merchants and planters making up the economic elite), petty planters or the poorer whites (European deserters who came to strike rich in the Caribbean), and the free coloreds. The petty planters demanded equal social consideration as the rich planters and refused to join lowering ranks of the militia, in fear of being referred to as “white-negroes.” Nevertheless, their whiteness made them stand out as members of the social elite when compared with the conduct and status of the free coloreds.

When the free people of color began to actively pursue equal rights with the whites in 1769, their armed services formed their main arguments. Their struggle became urgent when a strict separation between whites and non-whites was introduced in the years following the Seven Years War...Separation enabled domination. One influential author argued that separation was impossible without a buffer between two principal classes in the form of a separate class of free mulattoes. (Klooster, 89-90)

¹³ Ragatz, Lowell J. *Guide for the Study of British Caribbean History 1736-1834 Including the Abolition and Emancipation Movements*. Da Capo Press, 1932.

The intermediary class had to be completely distinct from both the planter and slave classes. To escape the clutches of impending slavery, free blacks settled to intermarry with the free mulattoes, giving rise to several more racial segregations. As Wim Klooster discovers in his examination of the revolution, Dominica, along with surrounding islands as Martinique, Jamaica, Trinidad etc. all faced similar social chaos because the Haitian events spread its revolutionary acts all over the Caribbean. It is within this pandemonium of social turmoil that Euro-creoles, Afro-creoles, and all those in between competed in pursuit of rights, economic security, and social dignity and recognition. With the growing black and colored population, the number of white European plantation settlers declined in the post-revolution Caribbean. (91) Most rich planters - the grands blancs - returned to their Mother countries, after exploiting Caribbean people and resources to the best of their abilities. Some old planter families, however, found their roots strongly grounded in the Caribbean, yet experienced difficulty in fitting in and in letting go of their European cultural adherence. My paper shall focus on this white creole ex-planter class, and their struggle to maintain a Caribbean identity in a black-dominated society.

Leaders, writers, artists and activist groups were influenced by the emancipation, and much of nineteenth century literary works discuss the abolitionist arguments. Jean Rhys, who was a witness to the lingering effects of slavery in the West Indies, chose to portray the white creole struggle for identity instead of empathizing with the black ex-slave class. Critics, such as Brathwaite, have acclaimed that Rhys's usage of historical facts of white colonialism displays a perception that does not represent an experience true for most West Indians: the underprivileged, non-white majority. (Callaghan 76) However, it is also important to remember that Rhys's intentions were aimed at creating a contrapuntal in the favor of the minority. She has been successful in manipulating the temporal setting of English literary classic *Jane Eyre* and

carefully incorporates the spirit of West Indian history in her contrapuntal *WSS*. It is her retort to Bronte's portrayal of the creole woman in the attic, and an attempt at justifying the 'madness' that pushed Rochester away to retain his colonizer's coldness. It is through her white creole viewpoint that enables the reader to estimate an 'other-ness' in the white-skinned – an uneasiness that has been widely overlooked when deconstructing the European perspective of the blacks.

Rhys perhaps felt closest to Antoinette's white creole experiences because of the similarities in their Caribbean heritage, and many critics detect autobiographical aspects in the text. In her article "Double Complexity in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", Silvia Panizza examines the nature of situations presented by the author and relates it to the complexity Rhys endures in her Caribbean placement:

In this novel, in particular, the parallels between herself and her heroine are so extensive, including a special sensitivity, a troubled childhood and a painful struggle for identity and for a place in society, any society that they brought back to the author memories of a remote but still disturbing past. (Panizza)

Because of its cultural hybridity, and its jumble of moods, fears and extreme passions, *WSS* reveals Rhys's own psychological complexity and internal conflicts she suffered all throughout her life – enduring failed marriages and poverty – and it is reflected in all her heroines. (Panizza 1)

Jean Rhys, born in Dominica 1890, sets *WSS* in Jamaica after the Emancipation Act of 1834. Like Rhys's own maternal family ties, her white creole heroine's Antoinette's family

owned plantation slaves. The disintegration of the plantation society in the Caribbean and her family's growing poverty isolate Antoinette and her mother from their surrounding black community. They are saved from economic ruin when Annette marries an Englishman, Mr. Mason, but it poses a bigger problem. The freed blacks, who mocked the whites' financial degradation, reacts with contempt and violence to their new wealth and burns their family estate. The resultant death of Antoinette's brother Pierre and the trauma split up the family, and Antoinette, after years of refuge in a convent school, is married off to a virtual stranger – the Englishman Mr. Rochester of Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. The destructive nature of their marriage leads to the development of mutual hatred and finally, to Antoinette's mental collapse. The novel ends with her imprisonment in her husband's English mansion, Thornfield Hall. This novel deals with the attempt and failure of communication and cultural relations between white Creoles and expatriate whites; between the blacks, whites and the free colored of the West Indies; between male and female, between colony and metropolis etc. As Antoinette asserts "there is always the other side. Always". The mirror imaging of Tia and Antoinette in her attempts to obtain black acceptance and the conversation between Antoinette and Mr. Rochester about their lack of comfort in each other's environment are only two examples of "failed attempts to communicate across racial, cultural, social and national barriers." (Callaghan 78)

Phyllis Shand Allfrey, another Caribbean voice in the same context of Rhys, was also born in Dominica in 1915. She sets *TOH* on a post-colonial Dominican island which is now ruled by colored merchants and civil servants. The Catholic Church also plays a strong rule role over the inhabitants of the island. The novel recalls childhood years during the post WWI 1920's, but the displayed transnational politics suggests that the main course of action takes place in the

period of 1940's. Allfrey stresses on the theme of social change that is mirrored by the functions of one unnamed white creole family. The colonial patriarchy, which we also see in Rhys's Rochester, is portrayed as 'the Master' in *TOH*. Crippled by war experiences and a shell-shocked returnee, the master loses the focus of the narrative to his three daughters who then take control of the storyline. Stella, Jean and Natalie's maturation, departure from and return to the island is narrated by their old black nanny, Lally. The constant juxtaposition of the past and present in the novel displays the simple family chronicles in its social and political context, and it also presents the early representative government of the island. Evelyn O'Callaghan, in her article "The Outsider's Voice", finds similarities with WSS because of the changing inter-cultural relationships between the white creole elite, black peasantry and the colored middle class. (Callaghan 79)

Eldest daughter Stella tries to withdraw her father's drug addiction by destroying the dope-peddler Mr. Lilipoulala while the second girl Joan returns home from an uneasy marriage. She comes back to Dominica to make a political difference and involves herself with the laborers of the island. Her need to identify herself among the people in Dominica propels her to look beyond the boundaries of race and color, devoting entirely to fight against as what she perceives the greater enemy to all: poverty. Most critics would recognize Allfrey in the makings and actions of Joan. (Nurminen 11) Natalie, the youngest of them all, recognizes the futility of conscious struggle of 'belonging' in the Caribbean, and she uses the fortune left by her dead husband as the means of escape. She is represented as frivolous, but she manages to rescue her cousin Andrew from the illegitimate relationship with another woman, and the tuberculosis from which he suffers. Though the methods embraced by each sister are uniquely different in order to

move ahead from the Caribbean influence on their lives, there is a constant reminding of the influence itself.

Being contemporaries and of similar ethnic backgrounds, Rhys and Allfrey find themselves dealing with the social setbacks of being white in a dominantly black community, in a place where the trauma of slavery is yet to be forgotten. The light skin reminds strongly of the European colonizer: the slave-driver, plantation-owner, and ruthless exploiter. The loathing response received from black neighbors drives the white creole to react in either one of two ways. Either he tries to hold on to European prejudices and the stubborn superiority, or he attempts to embrace the Caribbean culture as an inevitable fate. Much of this consciousness is explored thoroughly in Allfrey's treatment of her white creole characters in *TOH*. Unlike Rhys, Phyllis Shand Allfrey was a busy political activist in Dominica – a career that compensated her time and dedication as a writer. Author of only one novel, a number of short stories and an unfinished autobiography, Allfrey is known to be incapable of writing pure fiction and usually founded her stories on true events. She was born to a long-withstanding plantation family in Dominica in 1908, and although she was sent away to England for her education, Allfrey spent most of her life in the West Indian island. She is better known as the founder of the island's first political group, Dominican Labour Party, and she considered herself to be a complete Caribbean person. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, friend and biographer, emphasizes on her self-recognition in *Phyllis Shand Allfrey: A Caribbean Life*.

"She was fond of describing herself as 'a West Indian of over 300 years standing despite my pale face' and would look upon her political work...as nothing but her duty 'to pay my obligations to the Dominican people.'"

Evidently, Rhys and Allfrey differed in their sentiments concerning their identities, but that may be due to Rhys's absence from her homeland for so long. Regardless of the different circumstances under which they wrote, each author resonate comparable themes of nostalgia and to return in search of belongingness. As mentioned earlier, the time frames of the settings are separated by a century. Though many social and rational changes took place in Dominica since 1830's (time of which *WSS* begins), it is interesting how the white creole characters portrayed are still familiar with anomalous emotions of 'rootlessness' and uncertainty regarding identities – themes so strongly presented in *Antoinette*.

There are many similarities, as well as differences, in the representations by the two novelists. As mentioned earlier, both authors were born and raised in Dominica, and as Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert explains in *Phyllis Shand Allfrey: A Caribbean Life* (1996), they became friends in England and kept in touch during their exile and even after Allfrey returns to Dominica. (Paravisini-Gebert 47-48) Many critics have been hesitant to connect the works of the novelists, and Allfrey only receives a passing comment when discussing Rhys's connection to the Caribbean. (Nurminen 4) However, it would be unmerited to deny the common opinion that is asserted by the two authors in defense of the white-skinned Euro-creole – under conditions that are not in pace with their social security and self-identifications in a black-dominated community. The following chapters shall discuss (in context of the two primary novels *WSS* and *TOH*) the standpoints taken by Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey in their depictions of the white creole cultural identity and the trauma of 'in-between-ness' with regard to their respective settings. The two authors are voices of the periphery - yet they both belong to the literary tradition that concern itself with 'interacting' racial/cultural orientations. To assess their

opposition, it will be essential to study the literary forms that are embraced or rejected by each author, as well as the course of actions undertaken by the textual characters.

Chapter 2

Margins within the Marginal: The White Creole Writes Back

“All of writing is a huge lake. There are great rivers that feed the lake, like Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky. And then there are mere trickles, like Jean Rhys. All that matters is feeding the lake. I don't matter. The lake matters. You must keep feeding the lake.”

— Jean Rhys

The word ‘post-colonialism’ denotes a large field of various subjects and describes various positions occupied by different professional and literary enterprises. It is a mean of critiquing Western forms of discourses – be it historical or literature – that has been developed over colonial periods in the imperial venture of ‘Other-ing’ the Second and Third Worlds. The problem of condensing categories within this heterogeneous term, as Stephen Slemon discovers in his article “The Scramble for Post Colonialism”, is in the securing of the concept of ‘colonialism’ itself. In order to meet the development in Western theories of subjectification, resistances need to be made sophisticated and complex. (Slemon 45) It is under this umbrella term that each post-colonial author tries to make their voices known, foregrounding a secured position by emphasizing on their differences from the theories assumed by the imperial center. Authors Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey’s attempts in placing themselves and their characters in defense of the white creole, qualifies them as parts of those who writes back to the Empire.

As the post-colonial strives to score a local identity continue long after colonial dissimulation, there is a constant attempt to place writers in categories. Binary divisions such as black/white, man/woman, master/slave etc. projects the concerned individual to belong in either

one of the groups in a pair. Homi Bhaba sees this binary relationship as slippery and illusory, such that the fixed identities of the divisions cannot hold during the colonial discourse process.

In his introduction to *Location of Culture*, Bhaba says:

The move away from the singularities of “class” or “gender” as primary conceptual and organizational categories has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation – that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in-between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhaba 2)

The “in-between spaces” mentioned above is formed in the process of seemingly simple but opposing groups clashing and articulating their differences from one another. In the initiation of “new signs of identity”, hybrids between two opposing cultures take shape, and authors Rhys and Allfrey can comfortably settle in the expansive territory of hybridity.

As Helen Tiffin puts it: “Post-colonial cultures are inevitably hybridized, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local, but hybridized identity.” Her theory applies competently to Jean Rhys’s contrapuntal *Wide Sargasso Sea* – a “canonical counter-discourse” – where the literal

characters in Charlotte Bronte's novel are taken up and subverted to serve post-colonial purposes. (Tiffin 97) Phyllis Shand Allfrey is similarly involved in creating a hybridized identity through her short novel *The Orchid House*, except that she retains her Caribbean identity over her English heritage - in the very site her European ancestors forced entry and settled down. The following arguments shall discuss the kind of response each author is making via her literary subjects, and how they stand to assert the white Creole's middle-ground in attempts of reviving voices that may have gone unheard. This can be further demonstrated by the accentuating sentiment of "misfit" felt by the white creoles in a post-colonial territory of the rising black masses.

The hybrid of these post-colonial territories holds a certain power in asserting the differences from the imperial center. In his essay "Signs Taken for Wonder", Homi Bhaba stresses that hybridity is a subversive tool whereby colonized people might challenge various forms of oppression. Bhaba refers to the example of the British missionaries' imposition of the Bible in the 19th century, as how the English language was introduced into the country, as well as imperial ideologies. He emphasizes that the English book (and language or discourse) – an epitome for European dominance – also hands over the power to the colonized in using the colonizer's language to refute back to the English book and its ideologies.

The discovery of the English book establishes both a measure of mimesis and a mode of civil authority and order... For it is in between the edict of Englishness and the assault of the dark unruly spaces of the earth, through an act of repetition, that the colonial text emerges uncertainly...consequently, the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference. (Bhaba 152-153)

Caribbean authors, Rhys and Allfrey, belong to this hybridized post-colonial territory because they betray the foundations of authority – by not describing the fixity of the European rule and by empowering the colonial subject with a mode of resistance against imperial opposition. Stephen Slemon addresses the complications of the nature of literary resistance in “Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World.” He asks whether or not literary resistances are only set forth against “a clearly defined power relations” or is it produced and reproduced through mediating structure of culturally specific histories. The most important question he raises is whether or not do literary resistances “escape the constitutive purchase of genre and trope and figure and the mode which operate elsewhere as a contract between text and reader.”(Slemon 1990) It is, therefore, important to draw out the different treatments given to their genres by the two Caribbean authors.

Rhys embraces the genre of European modernism – a style of writing chosen perhaps due to her early immigration to England at only age sixteen, where she aligned herself more closely to her father’s Welsh heritage. She follows a loose incoherent and fragmented style of narration, streams of troubling consciousness, which is especially apparent in the voicing of interior monologues and memories when Antoinette is presented as deranged or ‘mad’ in Thornfield Hall. As Maren Linett explains in article “New Words, New Everything: Fragmentation and Trauma in Jean Rhys”, Rhys’s fragmented narration does not only reminds the reader that while modernist fragmentation may sometimes “depict the chaotic but decipherable flow of consciousness”, but it also conceals and reveals the “not wholly accessible fragments of traumatized psyches.” He further discovers that Rhys has always been careful in taking in “the political ramification of the language on the page” as seriously as her depiction of her story. (459) Thus, Rhys effectively subverts the power relations assumed in nineteenth century

Victorian social values and the narrative forms by presenting an alternate modernistic narrative of the Caribbean colony in *WSS*.

However, it is equally important to note that *WSS* is a literary piece produced in exile. Moreover, Caribbean authors face a certain literary anxiety owing to their lack of history, and their dilemma is of acceptance and denial with that of European literary forms. Simon Gikandi explains with regard to his examination of Caribbean modernity, that exile is a dominant trope among Caribbean experiences and “those Caribbean writers who aligned themselves with the European avant garde would adopt exile and its rhetoric as the gesture that, by individuating and universalizing artistic production, would also liberate the writer from his or her 'compromised' literary traditions” (Gikandi, 34) Rhys, being away from Caribbean soil for most parts of her life, sufficiently evokes the cultural displacement in her character Antoinette’s experiences. Irrupting into Caribbean modernity, she is able to create something absolutely different from her imperially assigned ‘space’.

If examined even more closely, it appears that Rhys is responding to the white Victorian English woman Jane – giving voice to the white creole woman that has been silenced in *Jane Eyre*. Moreover, Antoinette is not able to tell her own story in isolation from other influences. Over half the narrative was voiced by Rochester and the situations that Antoinette endured were represented through the eyes of the English husband – Antoinette’s ultimate adversary. Even the relationship that she shares with Christophine or Baptistee or other black members of her surroundings is presented only through Rochester’s eyes, and it is through this medium that the readers are able to estimate the relative intimacy or disparity between the blacks and the white

creoles. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her much celebrated work "Can the Subaltern Speak?" questions whether or not is there a possibility of recovering the silenced subaltern voice in the historical imperial discourse. Although she establishes Rhys's novel as an important literature for post-colonial debate, she raises her concerns about the margins of that has been silenced.

Let us now move to consider the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban sub-proletariat...the oppressed... inside and outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing and earlier economic text, *can the subaltern speak?*... (Spivak, 25)

Applying it to Rhys's novel in her essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," and appreciating the author's writing against Charlotte Bronte's characterization of the 'mad' Creole in *Jane Eyre*, Spivak yet again raises the question of Christophine's tangential role in the narrative. It is her implication that the black nurse is driven out of the story. (Spivak, 256) Benita Parry refutes this by saying that Christophine's disobedience is the counter discourse to the white creole woman and she is able to withstand her own individual character by answering back to Rochester's patriarchy in a powerful manner that Antoinette herself failed to do. (40) It now becomes obvious that there are many layers of "third spaces" that are constantly refuting back to the first and second 'spaces' in the realm of the post-colonial.

Phyllis Shand Allfrey occupies the space of the "in-between" too, except that her hybridized response is directed to both the European imperialism (since her location in time and space is similar to Rhys) as well as the black racial discourses – the ones that personify creole

blacks of the Caribbean. Prominent black Caribbean figures such as Jamaica Kincaid and Franz Fanon are known for their demonstrative contempt with regard to the white settler in their discourses. Kincaid in 'A Small Place' celebrates the transformations in her post-colonial Antiguan society in the Caribbean due to the crumble of colonial power. She deems the English as a 'pitiful lot' who didn't know how to cope after they lost legal authority.

They should have never left England...a place they had to leave but could never forget. And so everywhere they went they turned it into England...The English hate each other and they hate England, and the reason they are so miserable now is that they have no place else to go and nobody else to feel better than. (Kincaid, 92)

Fanon talks about the double alienation that the Negro is subjected to in rigid methods of white/black binarism, and he repeatedly drives for a cultural recognition among the blacks so that they can be 'liberated' from the colonial influence. It is the burden of this influence that leads him to procure horrific self-images: "I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me...I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects." It becomes apparent that the Negro's self-degrading nature is attained by generations of inhumane intimidation, which (much to the colonizer's advantage) has been internalized by slave races. Although Fanon acknowledges the liberation from such influence as an extremely unstable and difficult process, the efforts undertaken is applauded by those who recognize the Englishman's devious schemes to facilitate imperial dominance. (Bhaba, 60) The white-skinned Euro-creole (the 'Englishman's descendant) is clearly the awkward object of such racial contempt.

Whereas Rhys's responses in *WSS* were easier to place (because of her chosen historical settings) Allfrey's matter is complicated with the settings of time, narrative and margins in the political domain of *OH*. Unlike that of in Rhys's *WSS*, Allfrey does not refute to any specific text by any specific author, or dominant literary forms. The storyline of *OH* does not shift in either the location of narrative or in the voice of narrative, and it lacks the fragmentary nature of Rhys's modernistic approach. The question then arises, what is Allfrey responding to in terms of literary traditions? In her examination of counter discourses, Tiffin discovers that no post-colonial writer is simply "writing back" to the English canonical text, but "to the whole of the discursive field within which such a text operated and continues to operate in post-colonial worlds." (95) It is in this continuation in time that Allfrey's response is awarded lesser importance than Rhys because of the absence of the former literature. Nevertheless, each of her white creole characters in *OH* faces the same community with a hideous slavery past. The time frame of the setting, therefore, is significant to the psychological presentation of the white creole.

Allfrey returns to the island as soon as she finishes her education in England in 1954, and she dedicates herself in the political advancements of Dominica. Her characters do the same too (Joan attempts in mobilizing the Dominican locals – mostly blacks – to stand up against the white elites for their rights). Following World War I, there was an upsurge of political consciousness among all races – Afro-creoles, Euro-creoles, mulattoes, free coloreds etc. – throughout the island, and there discussions about forming representative government association Dominica. The period between 1920's and 1940's (the duration depicted in *OH*) was then socially unstable because of the rising modern, national and anti-colonial spirits in the island, and racial clashes came down for an independent state. Franz Fenon describes the hazards of national consciousness in his article "National Culture":

National consciousness, instead of being all-embracing crystallization of the inner-most hopes of the whole people, instead of being the most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been...the nation is passed over for the race and the tribe is preferred to the state. These are the cracks in the edifice which show the process of retrogression that is so harmful and prejudicial to national effort and national unity. (Fanon 153)

The modern sentiment of nationalism is therefore, unable to fulfill its promises of the unity in consideration of “whole” people in a sphere. There is the inclusion of some races and the exclusion of some tribes. The white creole family portrayed in *OH* of Dominica faces exclusion in the black masses, owing to its colonizer role in the island’s history of slavery.

It becomes quite evident that Allfrey is doubly opposed. She is responding to the anti-colonial spirit of nationalism in a place where her European linkage poses her as one of the offender group, as one of the ‘other’ in an Occidental sense. She is also answering back to the European assumption of the white creole in the Caribbean space. Although her tone in *OH* is far less subversive than Rhys’s *WSS*, she also protests subtly to the ‘other-ing’ from the European end. Her narrative is simple, and it relates the psychological manifestation of the white creole, seemingly demands no more than an understanding of their delicate positions. In spite of the dissimilarity between their responses, Rhys and Allfrey both strives to belong to the West Indian literary traditions that concern itself with ‘interacting’ racial/cultural orientations.

The attempts to ‘belong’ to the West Indian literary tradition are again questioned by the standards of the West Indian novel. Kamau Brathwaite distinguishes the West Indian novel as a

literary work that captures the true Caribbean spirit, by illustrating the folk forms and experiences of the Caribbean, making room for improvisation. He uses the idea of jazz music as an aesthetic model to demonstrate the relationship between jazz and “the more conscious products of the ‘written’ tradition” – the West Indian novel. He projects Roger Mais’s *Brother Man* and Salkey’s *A Quality of Violence* as the perfect jazz novels – with all their flaws and predicaments – because of their attitudes towards the West Indian material. Brathwaite further suggests that most novelists can really formally express deep-rooted folk-traditions after they have left the “West Indian orbit” and moved beyond the Caribbean boundaries before returning to it again, and that the true West Indian novel is that which is written by “a West Indian *in* the West Indies about the West Indies.” (327) Brathwaite further defines the ‘jazz novel’ as to be:

...dealing with a specific, clearly-defined, folk-type community, it will try to express the essence of this community through its form. It will absorb its rhythm from the people of this community and its concern will be with the community as a whole, its characters taking place in that community, of which they are felt and seen to be an integral part. (330)

Both Allfrey and Rhys left their Caribbean soil and experienced the ‘outer’ world before they produced their novels. Whereas Allfrey returns back to her Dominican home from England, Rhys remained in Europe and wrote *WSS* over a long period of 20 years. Moreover, the conflicts that arise in their novels represent some “Existentialist stoicism of alienation” – elements that calls for disqualification in Brathwaite’s depiction of the West Indian novel. The folk people that are represented are mirrored by the ‘other’ *in* the folk community (e.g. Tia in *WSS* is visualized as Antoinette’s mirror image, and Mimi Zacariah and Christophine in *OH* are depicted as

‘course’) – images that are, in Bhaba’s notion, “almost the same, but not quite.”(127) Therefore, both Rhys and Allfrey fall short in fulfilling the standards of the West Indian literary tradition.

However, it should not be overlooked that the two authors still manage to improvise a certain effect by manipulating the tone, rhythm and image – the ‘jazz’ elements – of their texts in their maneuvers of the Caribbean diaspora felt by none other but the historical *colonizer* himself in a colonial space. They utilize their freedom as artists, and represent the experience of the white creole – hybrids within the Caribbean ‘Third Space’ – an indigenous experience which is as authentic as that of the dominant black race in the Caribbean. As Gikandi mentions that Creole self-assertion begets "a discourse of alterity which is predicated on a deliberate act of self-displacement from the hegemonic culture and its central tenets, "as one may gather from the recurrence of the Maroon¹⁴ in Caribbean texts and the cultural marooning adopted by many writers from the region (20). It is, then, equally fitting to classify Rhys and Allfrey as parts of the West Indian literary tradition, but carrying the burdening influences of their European ancestors.

WSS and *OH* both portray communication of several racial and cultural groups, but it is chiefly with the white Creole perspective that this paper is concerned. Despite the major differences in literary response and treatment of the genres, the two novelists – using their white Creole female characters – evoke a sentiment of alienation in the texts. Evelyn Callaghan describes these estranged characters as parts of the “outsider persona” who looks on but is rarely able to take part in the transformations of the West Indian socio-history. (80) These novels are able to depict the society in transition – the disappearance of the old colonial order to be replaced with the new modern spirit of independence, and the slipping of power from the hands of the

¹⁴ Maroons of the West Indies were referred to the runaway slaves who escaped and lived in isolation, forming independent communities.

white creole to the rising black Caribbean nationalist. All the female characters belong to families who take up an insecure position in the socio-economic ranks, and thus they fail to 'fit-in' the rigid classes of their society. The following chapter shall look at the marginalized space in culture and society that the white creole occupies, as depicted by Rhys and Allfrey.

Chapter 3

Caribbean Made Flesh: The “Othering” of the White Creole

The previous chapter attempts to secure West Indian authors Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey under the post-colonial umbrella and the hybridized ‘third space’, with respect to their literary refutations and enunciations of the white-creole voice. The complexes faced by the authors transcend onto the pages of their literary subjects, creating characters and situations that may only relay the social and cultural marginality of their creolized identities. The whiteness of their skin and the European label carried by these characters evoke a crisis so concentrated within their own beings that it hinders the route of fitting in as one of their black-dominated Caribbean community. The historical process of ‘Othering’ – as practiced by their European ancestors on their colonial subjects – have left them vulnerable to be ‘Othered’ by those who have yet to forgive and forget the exploiters of their colonial past.¹⁵ This chapter shall identify the social tensions between the Caribbean creoles – the European colonizer descendants and the African slave progeny – in Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Allfrey’s *The Orchid House*. The white creole families represented in the two texts are caught in the racial dilemma of an abstract cultural marginal: the ‘outsider’ looking in. The white creole’s cultural identity in terms of both European heritage and Caribbean roots shall be examined.

The growing social and cultural tensions become characteristic to the dawn of the New World, in societies where the Emancipation Act exerted most impact. By the late eighteenth century, mixed races have already emerged in the Caribbean space due to the white European blood trickling into the African black slave race (very rarely, the other way around) and the

¹⁵ An idea made popular by Edward Said's book *Orientalism*. The concept of the "Other" opposes the "Same", an integral part of comprehending of a person, as people construct roles for themselves in relation to the 'other'. "Othering" is imperative to national identities - practices of admittance and segregation to form and sustain boundaries and national character. "Othering" involves the demonization and dehumanization of groups, which further justifies imperial attempts to civilize and exploit these 'inferior' others.

resultant mixed-blood marks the process of hybridization. The primitive imperial assumptions regarding the colonial Subject was simply that it was the 'Other'. With the progression of time and colonial consolidation, the category of the 'Other' was further divided by more boundaries. This continuous and rather perplexing process of hybridization gives rise to finer but fixed margins, and Rhys attempts to place the pale-skinned creole in a distinguished border. In her juxtaposition of Antoinette with the blacks in *WSS*, she highlights the place of the white creole – a hybrid caught between the English imperialist and the black Jamaican. The girls in *OH* – as presented by Allfrey – exhibit similar traits of dislocation. Their culture is suspended between the Eurocentric natures of declining imperial influence in Dominica and the rising nationalism among the black locals. The uniqueness of these colonial children is that they preserve their European heritage as efficiently as they absorb their surrounding Negro culture.

Edward Kamau Brathwaite has denoted this preservation and absorption as parts of the historical binding of the Caribbean's creolization processes.

The single most important factor in the development of Jamaican society was not the imported influence of the Mother Country or the local administrative activity of the white elite, but a cultural action – material, psychological and spiritual – based upon the stimulus/response of individuals within the society to their environment and – as black/white, culturally discreet groups – to each other.

(Brathwaite, 202)

The interactions between the whites and blacks were, no doubt, constructed and dictated by the transplanted society's historical foundation – slave/owner/plantation dynamic – and the cultures from each dominant group underwent exchange beyond the expectations of the colonizer. As

Brathwaite relates in his book *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, the slaves arriving in Jamaica from West Africa underwent processes of “seasoning” – slaves were branded, renamed and put under apprenticeship of former slaves – and “socialization” – participation in the blacks’ communal and recreational activities so that they are soon culturally homogenized under one distinct envelope: slaves to the European owners. Among those who were self-seeking and inquisitive imitated their colonial masters, thus producing the “mimic-men”.

V. S. Naipaul feels critically about the West Indian man and colonial mimicry, implying that nothing is authentic in the creations by the West Indian. As his ambivalent hero in Naipaul’s book *The Mimic Men* remarks: “We pretend to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new.” (Naipaul 416) Thus, he blames the colonizer for releasing the corruption into the colonized, and he condemns the colonized for his inability to rise above the mimicry and not create anything genuine. Returning to Homi Bhaba, his views on colonial mimicry is a process not entirely tragic, but as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable ‘Other’, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” through which there is the disruption of the authorized “otherness” in colonial discourses. Derek Walcott refutes to Naipaul’s notion of colonial mimicry in his article “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry” by asserting that the uniqueness about colonial mimicry lies in its talent to create something absolutely new by giving meaning to the copies made off of the colonizer. The mimicry culture is not ominous, he argues, but that it the beginning of everything in the Caribbean sphere. The West Indian mimics and imitates the colonizer until something new is invented. “In the Caribbean history is irrelevant, not because it is not being created, or because it was sordid; but

because it has never mattered, what has mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of the races, what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention.” (Walcott 6)

In the ambivalent ‘Third Space’ occupied by the Caribbean, black creoles and white creoles reflect and react differently to the process of colonial mimicry. The speaker in *OH* would immediately come to mind as a strong image of the colonial mimicker. Lally is Allfrey’s portrayal of the Afro creole nanny to a plantation family. Her point in the plot is of utmost importance because the plot is narrated through her voice, and whatever Allfrey asserts is asserted through Lally. Although the girls of this unknown family generally spends a happy childhood under the watchful eyes of the black nanny, Lally, just like Christophine in Rhys’s *WSS*, cannot rescue her girls from the complex intricacies of adulthood. She tries to understand both Stella and Joan in their decisions to leave their married lives and come back to their Dominican homeland. Lally is proud to be “a book-taught English speaking Negress” (4) and “always been above the patois speaking” (77). She raises her girls with the correct English mannerism and scolds them if they performed otherwise. She expresses disapproval of Joan’s friendship with black worker Baptiste, whose mother is “Frenchy and Catholic and boasting of a drop of white blood.” (4)

Franz Fanon’s notion of the black woman’s association with the white man (or with ‘whiteness’ in general) depicts that it is a method adopted by the black woman to obtain the social superiority recognized with the whiteness. In attempt to save her race from the doom of color, she tries to ‘bleach’ her life by adopting the European ways and fantasizing about the white man, ultimately ending up rejecting or ignoring the black Negro man or the blackness of her own race. (Fanon, 47) According to Audrey Thompson’s assessment of the Whiteness

Theory, there is a difference between the sentiment of Eurocentricism and the 'white privilege'. The 'white privilege', in contrast to Eurocentricism, depends on the "devaluation of non-whites" instead of simply ignoring or denigrating other cultural values and experiences. (Thompson, 7-29) Whereas Baptist's mother craves for the 'white privilege' consciously, Lally's association to the Euro-creole family in *OH* goes beyond the moment of 'white privilege' convenience and inclines towards Eurocentricism because for longer parts of her life she was completely unaware of the blacks' conditions:

...when you are working for white people whom you love, you can only think of those people and their wants, you hardly notice anything else. I did not even pay any attention to my own people, the black people, in those days, but now I am observing them and seeing what is happening to them. I am seeing how poor they are, and how the little babies have stomachs swollen with arrowroot and arms and legs spotted with disease. (7)

It is perhaps her 'Englishness' and her absolute preoccupation with the European ways of life and attitudes that prevented her from completely understanding the dilemma of Caribbean identity that the girls suffered from. Lally, therefore, was more 'English' in ways than the Euro-creole girls were not.

Christophine¹⁶ of Rhys's *WSS* – a paradoxical counterpart to Lally in *OH* – did not succumb to the European devotion. She is depicted as a powerful personality, a woman of substance and a source of comfort and reassurance to Antoinette. Christophine is not a Jamaican

¹⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's feminist readings establish Christophine as the doubly colonized woman in the patriarchal world, and her association with the mystical obeah reincarnates the spiritual exoticism characteristic to the Eurocentric view of the "Other". This paper, however, will not look at the feminist complexities of the colonial dynamic.

native (she is a slave descendant from Martinique) but she was commoditized all the same: “She was your father’s wedding present to me” explains Antoinette’s mother. (12) Perhaps it is the translocation in time for which each servant differs from the other: Christophine is still traumatized by the memories of slavery, and considers her service to Annette as that expected of a slave. Lally, on the other hand, is born in a much later time, and her devotion to the family arises from gratitude of being granted employment and good treatment. Whereas Christophine is paid by living accommodations for her service, Lally’s payment is made known by the very first sentence of the novel - “Madam came to see me this afternoon bringing the news with her and my few shillings which she has always been faithful to give me, even when there was hardly any money in the house.” (3) Christophine’s owner regarded her as an opportunist: “Christophine stayed with me because she wanted to stay. She had her own very good reasons you may be sure. I daresay we would have died if she’d turned against us and that would have been a better fate.” (12) The difference between the two nannies lies in their attitudes towards their masters and mistresses. Whereas Lally strongly adheres to the culture of her employers, Christophine is skeptical of the English ways and held the Victorian laws with contempt. In “The Fact of Blackness”, Fenon illustrates the “inborn complex” – in the form of self hatred – bred in the Negro by utter betrayal on the white man’s part.

While I was forgetting, forgiving, and wanting only to love, my message was flung back at me like a slap. The white world, the honorable one, barred me from all participation...I was expected to behave like a black man – or at least like a nigger...As I begin to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. (324-325)

Christophine openly accepts the blackness of her skin, and although she acknowledges Rochester as a “man not bad-hearted” (66), she is neither forgetting nor forgiving the Englishman’s exploitative schemes, and England for her is the “cold thief place” (67), contrary to what Antoinette knows about the snowy land of her dreams. She also expresses wariness with the English law regarding women’s rights over property¹⁷, and warns Antoinette to be cautious of Rochester: “Your husband certainly loves money”(68). As Fanon suggests, there are two ways out of the conflictive self-identification with the blackness of one’s skin. “Either I ask others to pay no attention to my skin, or else I want them to be aware of it.” (325) Christophine is unabated by the blackness of her own skin, and she makes no attempt to link herself with European blood. In other words, she refuses to participate in Lally’s mimicry, and rise above the “absurd drama” that Fanon feels is staged around the Negro regarding the discomfort of his/her own black skin.

Whereas Naipaul deems the practice of imitation with a derogatory tone, Bhaba uses it to disarm the colonizer, and Walcott finds this mimicry necessary to the newness of Caribbean imagination and culture. The mimicry, therefore, is an unavoidable relationship – remnants of the historical dynamics – between the colonizer and the colonized. Though mimicry is almost always used in post-colonial studies with reference to colonials and immigrant minorities imitating the white European cultural and linguistic norms, the process can also work in reverse. Kamau Brathwaite feels as though that this colonial mimicry, as a gradual development, did not leave out the whites: “But it was a two-way process, and it worked both ways...In white households the Negro influence was pervasive, especially in the country areas.” (203) Examples of reverse

¹⁷ "The Married Woman's Property Act" of 1870 stated that the woman's personal property before marriage is to be transferred completely to her husband, unless settled in trust for her. The property is at the husband's disposal with disregard of their man-wife relationship. In *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Stuart Hall implies that "the wife's position under the common law in England is worse than that of slaves in many countries."

mimicry, as explored by Amardeep Singh in his article “Mimicry and Hybridity in Plain English”, are frequent in the history of British colonialism where British subjects disguise themselves as Indians and Africans, or fantasized of doing so. Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* stands as a strong and influential example in literature where he invents a white child – the son of an Irish soldier serving in British India – who grows up wild in the streets of Lahore outside the reach of British society. Though this sort of “passing down” does not surmount his racial criticism against Indians, it still evokes an interest in those who might be examining the theme of “going native”. (Singh, *Lehigh University Old Blog Site*)

“Going native” becomes an integral part of both Rhys and Allfrey’s white creole characters. Antoinette wants to attain the blackness of her surroundings and she identifies a black creole as her alter ego. Miss Joan of *OH* expressed her desire to be a part of the black community since a very young age. The reader glimpses this longing in one of Lally’s memories of their childhood where the young Joan complains “I wish we were colored and could go to the convent with all the colored children instead of having lessons from Mamselle Bosquet and Dr. Caron.” (13) Antoinette and the girls are seen to be torn between their desire to blend in with the native environment and their obligation to please the family who still adheres to Eurocentric attitudes of keeping the non-whites at bay. These conflicts of the “in-between”, as both Rhys and Allfrey provides, ultimately disqualifies them from belonging full-heartedly to either group, and their anxiety to ‘fit in’ is overridden by the racial and social segregation of the colonial islands. This sense of ‘misfit’ is further heightened by the rejection they experience from the native end. Antoinette’s unrequited friendship with Tia is an exemplary. Tia kept mistreating her whenever she got the chance. She takes Antoinette’s dress and leaves her own for her, in attempts to reverse the role of the victim and victimizer. Antoinette is forced to go home in Tia’s ragged

clothes, embarrassing her mother in front of her guests. Later, when Antoinette runs towards her for comfort near her burning house, she is most shockingly received:

When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It as if I saw myself. Like in a looking glass.” (27)

Silvia Capello discovers in her article “Post-colonial discourse in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Creole Discourse vs. European Discourse, Periphery vs. Center, and Marginalized People vs. White Supremacy” that the quoted scene in the novella is extremely important to describe the reversed components of slavery dynamics. In the moment of Antoinette’s humiliation, she becomes the black and inferior component of the slavery dynamics while Tia enjoys the white malevolence supremacy. Being on the either side of the mirror, Tia represents Antoinette’s alter ego – creating an illusion of similar images but of different realities, of switched roles. (Capello, 49) The role-switching also takes place between Joan and Baptist of *OH*. He grew up reading her European books, and contrary to Lally’s form of colonial mimicry, Baptist’s education grew in him distaste for the imperial discourses. He joins Joan’s eager participation for the Labor Party formation for the coloreds, and Joan’s humiliation by the labors at the assembly consolidates his place as the authority among the two. This is also a reinforcement of Bhaba’s implication of the “double vision”: “Mimicry does not merely destroy narcissistic authority through the repetitious slippage of difference and desire... but raises the question of the authorization of colonial representations.” (Bhaba 129) It is that ambivalent moment where the colonizer master – in seeing the native mimic him – sees himself, but also ‘not-himself’. It is such that the master is no longer the Subject, but also the Object: a transition where authority does not exist.

The transition between Subject and Object, Self and Other etc. comes about with change in the West Indian social order over the nineteenth and twentieth century. What is most vividly presented in the authors' portrayal in *WSS* and *OH* is the social transitions underwent by the colonial and post-colonial West Indian islands. In *WSS*, Antoinette's family background is of the wealthy planter class and English descent, but her mother is from Martinique. The virtual poverty they faced in the post-Emancipation financial crash, they are redeemed to a lower social status than that of the 'real' Englishman. The blacks are acutely aware of this detriment, and as Tia tersely put it: "Real white people, they got gold money. They didn't look at us, nobody see them come near us. Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger." (14) The family portrayed in *OH* also faces similar injury. They are forced to sell their town house and move to the quite country that is supported by their daughter's foreign money. Stella says "the colored merchants grow richer and the white people poorer" (63). The white Creoles in *WSS* no longer retain economic power because it now belongs to the rich entrepreneurs like Antoinette's stepfather Mr. Mason, who came "to the West Indies....to make money as they all do. Some of the big estates are going cheap, and one unfortunate's loss is always a clever man's gain" (17).

Irvin Andre's "The Social World of Phyllis Shand Allfrey's *The Orchid House*" identifies the newly recognized authority of money among the coloreds, the factor that fueled a societal transition based on the inflow of capitalist resources and nationalist awareness. Lally explains how Father Toussaint – the Catholic Church – and Marse Rufus (the colored merchants) were the real rulers of the island (154) while Joan points out that colored class "are taking the responsibility over from us — we are now the poor whites, we have no longer any power" (146) As Lally further observes "Now it was Cornélie who had land and new dresses and considered

herself to be in society; and it was Miss Joan who enjoyed the company of common people, and had no fixed station at all.” (180). It so appears that Antoinette’s dress which is stolen by Tia in *WSS* is handed down along generations and reappears in *OH*, in the possession of creole bastard Cornelia. The dress symbolizes material wealth and social stature – something that white-skinned Joan was in shortage of. Baptiste drives the political efforts forward on observing “It’s a question of economics, not of color.” (153)

However, the question of color was still very much there. The 1950’s in Dominica witnessed a significant decline in the number of the white residents – an effect of the Haitian Revolution – and the consequent rise of the blacks in banks and other offices of respectable posts. Racial prejudices still got in the way of the expected rate of colored ascendancy and the major banks of Dominica only began hiring dark-skinned people well into the 1960’s. These offices were offered only to those blacks who came from families of “big names”. The receding white minority ensured their survival by augmenting social relationships with the lighter-skinned Negroes. Marse Rufus in *OH* can be regarded as one of the examples of this trend. He has many children on the island, and he boasts on having made “a lot of people who were hardly accepted respectable.” (152) Marital ties have left him advantageous to an extended hospitality among the growing blacks, while the social aspirant enjoys a higher rank in the ladder of social respectability. (Andre 11-21) Indeed Allfrey portrays the origins of a society that transformed over the period of 1919-1950 in Dominica, a time when economics replaced race as the main decisive factor for social rank. (Andre 14) As Callaghan also notes in “The Outsider’s Voice”, the girls of L’Aromatique, like authors Allfrey and Rhys, “are English-speaking Anglicans in a society which is predominantly French or French Creole speaking and Catholic — this, perhaps, adds to their distinctness and resultant isolation.” (81)

Although considered supposedly superior – in the base of color – to the black compatriots, these black-isolated white creoles in the West Indian domain are not acknowledged as equals to the original English people. Rhys begins her novel by making the clear distinction between Antoinette's family and that of the 'real' Europeans: "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks." (9) Antoinette's English stepfather "had made me shy about my colored relatives" (42) and the girls in *OH* must disown their "colored cousins" to avert the possibility of scandals. The lifestyles depicted in both novel shows strong European adherences: the meals prepared are English as are their daily routines. However, both Rhys and Allfrey both hinted, neither imitation nor pretence of English standards makes the white creole fully acceptable in the European eyes. Antoinette's husband regards her as strange and "alien", perhaps mixed with some shameful "tainted" blood. Stella in *OH* feels alienated in her metropolitan whites that she meets on her way to America, and her marriage seems to be shaky because she is suspected to be odd by her own husband and in-laws. All throughout the novella Rhys uses the word 'maroon'¹⁸ to describe the feeling of abandonment and isolation among the white Creole.

This social and cultural isolation of the white creole characters translates into the cultural experiences of marginalization in the Caribbean. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have identified the complexities involved in the post-colonial concepts of ethnicity and indigeneity. With the shifting theoretical grounds of post-colonial debates on which groups are entitled to be labeled 'ethnic' or 'truly colonized', more reactionary debates pose the question of which groups are the centers or margins to begin with. It is already established that the relationships between the 'center' and 'margin', Subject and Object, Self and Other are ambivalent in nature, and no binary

groups can hold under the deconstruction processes of post-colonial discourses. According to Trinh T. Minh-ha, the deconstruction of the centers is called for because the center itself is marginalized. In her article “No Master Territories”, Minh-ha reveals the nature of marginal cultures in the Third World – those who cannot fit into fixed categories – and labels them as peoples of “counter culture”, “smaller independent”, “experimental margins.” (215) The colonial periphery that these “in-betweens” or “colored skins, white masks: white masks colored skins” occupy is accepted by both binaries because it strengthens the authority of each dominant race:

The margins, our site for survival, become our fighting ground and their site for pilgrimage. Thus, while we turn around and reclaim them as our exclusive territory, they happily approve, for the divisions between margin and center should be preserved, and as clearly demarcated as possible, if the two positions¹⁹ are to remain intact in their power relations. (Minh-ha 216)

The uniqueness about the white-creole culture, then, is that they do not belong to any distinct “other” group as recognized by either the European or the Caribbean coloreds. They are, therefore, othered of the *other*. Perhaps the expatriation that the white creoles felt from the Europeans of their ancestral land is also a part of the strategies of marginalization. The white creole is accepted among neither the black slave community in the Caribbean, nor does the European ancestor recognize the descendant as one of their own. Thus the hybrid’s abandoned middle-ground is a site of ‘maroonage.’

Despite the communal alienation, these two novels are able to procreate the ultimate Caribbean experience. The white creole children are witnessed to absorb customs, language,

spiritual beliefs of their black nurses and playmates, and seek ways to somehow identify with the surrounding black population. There is a clear depiction of the Caribbean aesthetic essence in both novels. The cultural rituals of obeah, mysticism, carnivals etc. merge with the chronic Caribbean themes of beauty and disease, dreams and nostalgia. The characters are also at the mercy of uncertain fates in the uncanny Caribbean space. The two narrations trail off to their ends in a tentative manner, leaving room for improvisation from the reader's part. It is perhaps this inventiveness that sets the authors' attempts and their literary creations in the territory of an authentic and poignant Caribbean experience.

Conclusion

What I have tried to establish in my dissertation is that in order to understand one's position in today's post-colonial and post-modern world, one needs to rid him/herself of all the fixed labels prematurely assigned on one. The same applies for the white creole in an uncertain Caribbean space. It is already agreed upon, after serious contemplation by Caribbean sensibilities as I have demonstrated in my first chapter, that the ambiguous nature of the complex processes of creolization, hybridization, marginalization etc. only breeds a mixture of even more complex sentiments in psychological adaptations to one's community. The creole's "Third Space" identity is made even more perplexing by all the boundaries and 'margins' surrounding the "middle-ground".

Indeed the "middle-ground" for the white creole is a "site for resistance": a place of repentance for the shameful atrocities committed by the European ancestors, a site of refuge from spaces occupied by the First and Second Others, and a voice of refutation in making one's own place made known to the world. My second chapter illustrates how West Indian authors Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey secure a marginalized position in post-colonial discourses, while maintaining unsteady ties with both their European heritage and West Indian roots in their literary expressions.

The experiences are inescapably marginal. My third chapter demonstrates, in details, as how the social and cultural white creole is made an "Other" from both ends. The white creole is torn between the loyalty to their Motherland culture and that desire of "going native". However, in spite of the social and cultural alienation experienced by the white creole characters e.g. Antoinette and Allfrey's girls, it is also important to note that none of the cultural transitions are taking place in isolation. The "middle-ground" is shared by both the black the white creole in the

form of colonial mimicry and the “double-vision”, and the characters are seen to resign in a transnational periphery.

It can, thus be reinforced that no boundary can hold between constructed margins. The Caribbean white creole is uniquely entitled to an identity comparable with both the European ancestor and the black creole neighbor, yet conquerable by neither.

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