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**Antoinette – A Hybrid Without a Home
Hybridity in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea**

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Introduction

Wide Sargasso Sea is a story of being an outsider written from many perspectives, where feelings of belonging are determined by racial and social differences. It is a novel of how we are unable to understand and support each other because of our background, our family or status. The characters live in-between different roles and states of mind: who they think they are and who they are expected to be, not knowing which way to go, trying to form an identity that can be accepted by others, but which can still be their own, and attempting to find meaning in life at the same time. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published in 1966 and was written as an imagined prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, published in 1847. Although the two works are divided by more than a hundred years of history, Rhys still wanted to give a voice to Brontë's madwoman in the attic, the creole wife of Edward Rochester whom protagonist Jane Eyre faces under such dramatic circumstances in *Jane Eyre*. Antoinette is that woman, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the story of her life before her tragic end at Thornfield Hall.

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set on beautiful Jamaica in the 1830's where a young Creole heiress, Antoinette Cosway, is living in a world that she does not belong in. Defining Antoinette as a creole can suggest both that she is a descendant of European settlers in the West Indies and that she is of mixed ethnical background (*Oxford Dictionary & Thesaurus*). Both claims are true in her case; she is the daughter of former slave owners, but is now living with her mother and younger brother after her father passed away. The Cosways used to be a wealthy family, but since the emancipation of the slaves the family has lost its status and wealth and are now laughed at by their former slaves and avoided by the other Europeans on the island. The racial and social conflict between the ethnic groups and their shared history of oppression and slavery seals the Cosways outside all communities and leaves them to live alone on their beautiful, but run-down estate. It is in this environment that Antoinette grows up, with her ill younger brother and unstable mother, who does not seem to have the strength to give her daughter the support she needs.

The colonial land where the novel is set offers the characters a physical space to live in, a place to call home, but many of them do not have their roots on the island. They have had to form an alternative identity based on who they are, where they come from and in which direction they are going in life. It might seem easy for the colonizing Europeans to claim their right to hold on to their European identity, not having to deal with the effects of their imagined superiority. In fact, holding on to an identity, without having to recognize people like Antoinette as a part of one's own community, but keeping people like her at a distance, creates a self-other binary, which secures their own identity and gives power that can be used against the other.

The novel's two main characters are Antoinette and her husband Edward Rochester. Rochester's name is never mentioned in the novel, but having read *Jane Eyre* and knowing the connection between the two novels, it is obvious that the man Antoinette marries is the same character as Edward Rochester from *Jane Eyre*. To simplify and to avoid misunderstandings, Antoinette's husband will be referred to as Edward Rochester in this essay. Edward is a son of a rich Englishman and he comes to the West Indies looking for a wife. Not knowing much about Antoinette or her background he agrees to marry her, mostly due to the considerable amount of money Antoinette's father-in-law is willing to pay him for marrying her. The tension between Europe and the New World, master and slave, white and black is a central theme in the novel already before the young couple marry, but it is in their relationship that the conflict becomes most visible and intense. While Antoinette is neither European nor Caribbean, she is ambiguously close to both, something Edward cannot stand and does not know how to react to. To illustrate their differences, one can study the way Antoinette and Edward view Europe and especially England: according to Edward the highest form of culture and civilization can be found in Europe and especially England, while Antoinette is not even sure England even exists. She becomes a woman he has difficulties understanding and her lack of interest for England and love for the island she lives on all contribute to his view of her as impure and unstable, nothing like an English woman.

Antoinette is a threat Edward cannot afford to have; her mere existence can possibly call into question everything he considers valuable, and she clearly does not understand the supremacy of his background and upbringing. Early in their relationship, Edward begins alienating her from the rest of the world, a strategy which culminates at his mansion Thornfield Hall in England, where Antoinette is locked up in the attic, sealed off from the rest of the world.

This essay will focus on the alienation and rejection of Antoinette, both within the Jamaican community where she grew up and later on when she marries an Englishman. Keeping people like Antoinette at a distance makes sure that one's own ideas and values can never be questioned; she is a threat to both sides of the opposing factions and can never live up to the idea of an European woman, neither will she ever be a true Caribbean either. I will argue that her hybridity is the cause for this. In order to better understand Antoinette's predicament, Homi K Bhabha's theory of hybridity will be employed in. It opens up possible ways of interpreting the character's dilemma, her sense of alienation and her difficulties in shaping an identity. It can be said that a person who does not have a given identity based in a nation or community, but is somewhere between two opposing cultural spheres, is forced to shape a new identity. Antoinette's situation with her physical home in the West Indies, family bonds to Europe and relatives she is not supposed to be in touch with due to the colour of their skin all contribute to her insecurity about her identity and background. Not belonging to any discrete groups makes a person who is in this in-between position not only an outsider, but also a target for discrimination as a possible threat to the pure and original people.

Hybridity

A home is a place where we belong, a place we can call our own, somewhere we are always appreciated. No matter how we define our own home, we can probably agree on the fact that a home is a place that not only gives us a place of shelter, stability and comfort, but also offers us means of orientation. It gives an idea about our place in the world and where we originated from,

and thus also where we belong. A home is also a place where we are welcome, all in all a secure place where we can be ourselves, argues John McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism* (McLeod 207). If a home is such an important place in our lives and acts like the very foundations of who we are, what happens then to a person who does not have a home to call his or her own? Is it possible for a person not to have a home and place of origin, and if there are people like this, do they not belong anywhere? Homi K Bhabha discusses how we shape our identity in his *The Location of Culture*: “how are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)?” (Bhabha 2). Defining this in-between position however is not unproblematic, since so many factors can be part of the shaping of an identity and because all human beings are unique. It is also impossible to even claim that there is one set of factors that form the base of who we are. To answer Bhabha's question one has to look for answers within a very diverse group of people, all those who are excluded from the community based on the categories we commonly use in our interpretation of who we are: race, class and gender, the ones Bhabha highlights. There will also be differences within the group of those who are in-between, so knowing exactly how these subjects, or people, are formed is nearly impossible without looking at every single case in detail. The result is a very diverse group of people who do not fit into our preconceived view of who we are. It is these people who are somewhere in-between that can be called *hybrids*.

The concept of hybridity, a central term within postcolonial criticism, has in recent years grown in importance and popularity; it is used to understand and interpret what it means to be a migrant, to not belong to one place only, to be a hybrid. These hybrids live “'border lives' on the margins of different nations, in-between contrary homelands” (McLeod 217). Instead of thinking of 'home' and 'belonging' with old models such as national identity and 'rootedness', we can now go deeper and reflect on the 'in-between' position, suggests McLeod. This might lead us to greater understanding of the phenomenon; instead of only seeing the dominating polarities, we can

acknowledge that there might be several sources of identity shaping powers. According to Bhabha, this kind of living in-between multiple identities leads to a form of hybridity, an ambivalent state of mind where there is no longer a specific place or home, but mixed feelings over the fact that nothing is stable anymore or is the way we expect things to be: “we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (Bhabha 1). The complex figures Bhabha discusses result from a system of power where the ones with a set, non-fluctuating identity can, in order to secure their own identity, exclude others. Bhabha summarizes his view on hybridity: “Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal ... Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects” (Bhabha 112).

According to Bhabha, hybridity is not created only by the hybrid itself, but also by the colonial power. Hybridity is a product of colonial power and cannot exist without a shared history of a colonizer and colonized, since it is the binarity opposition of these two that creates the ambivalent position of the hybrid. As time passes and the dominating colonizers no longer desire power, or wish to be part of the colonized country they have ruled for so long, the hybrids are suddenly in-between without an identity to call their own. The assumption is that the colonized are free and should thereby have the same status of sovereignty as their former colonizers and that the earlier split between colonizer and colonized should end. Instead, the former colonizers often choose to walk away, leaving the old ways just as alive as they used to be in the colonizing era. The exclusion and dividing of people is still the norm and the former colonizers do not have to admit and realize that there should now be no difference between “us” and “them”, and no excluding of those who are “different”. However the split between the two is just as real as ever before and the target of the alienation is the hybrid; being part of both social groups, but not belonging to any, the

hybrid cannot be accepted into any of them. The unwillingness to see the result of one's own actions creates exactly what Bhabha calls “discriminatory identities that secure the pure and original identity and authority” (Bhabha 112). Not having to accept those in-between helps maintain the picture of a nation that is pure and untouched by change. The colonizer can claim that it formally no longer has anything to do with the former colony, and is thereby free not to be associated with it, but the people who cannot as clearly be classified as belonging in the former colony, but neither into the colonizing country form a problem that threatens the picture of the pure colonial power. As a hybrid you are dangerously close to destroying this picture, and should therefore not be let in.

The people who are in-between two or more identities, nations, ideas and directions, do not only have to find a new way of viewing the world, a home and an identity, but they also shape the rest of the world at the same time. As Bhabha points out, the hybrids are a threat to those with a 'pure' identity, and can therefore seen as a threat to an entire view on a nation, they are “the people of the diaspora, exiles and migrants who are at once here and elsewhere and whose presence disrupts received definitions of the nation”, writes Bob Hodge and Bijay Mishra about Bhabha's work in their article “What is Postcolonialism?”. According to them, this ambivalent hybrid is a migrant who is also ideally of color, “dispossessed, schizophrenic, exilic, often profoundly unhappy and exploited under capitalism” (Hodge and Mishra 384). Being constantly excluded and rejected due to one's background creates a never ending circle that is impossible to escape from: the hybrid is not let into any social community because of the threat he or she poses to the community's identity, and can never live up to the idea of a pure European, for example. This creates a human being who very easily falls into depression, Hodge and Mishra suggest.

In many cases, reaching a state of hybridity requires that we cross a border of some kind. The border can be a physical one or an imaginary one, but the importance of borders is very central, because it is here that the conflict of thought begins. According to Bhabha, at borders past and present, black and white, east and west are no longer as clear as they were before, but are mixed

together and create ambivalence. Borders shape us in many ways. “The border is a place where conventional patterns of thought are disturbed and can be disrupted by the possibility of crossing” (McLeod 217). Many who cross a border and move from one country to another face questions like who am I? Where do I belong? Re-building an identity might take centuries, and generations can pass without the migrants finding an identity of their own. Children to these migrants who crossed borders to arrive at their destination might be struggling with the same problems of hybridity as their parents, although they never crossed a single physical border themselves. Questions of identity were central for those who were – and those who still are – affected by colonialism and slavery. The unequal status of people and racism as a norm contributed to the split between *us* and *them*; if there is such a thing as a person who is somewhere in-between us and them, the colonizers argue that he or she is surely wicked in some way, an alien, unknown and someone who cannot be classified, and therefore a threat. The process of colonization did not only cause transportation of people as slaves from one place to an other, but it also made Westerners move away from Europe into places they now learned to call home. As time passes Europe seems further away than ever for the former Europeans, while the new location is not a home either. Is a second generation colonizer a European or something else? Even if these people never crossed a border in their lives, they might still be living on the margins of different nations, trying to make sense of who they are and where they belong, feeling ambivalent as Bhabha would say. The same applies to the second generation of slaves shipped from Africa to all corners of the world; returning to Africa would probably not solve the issues of identity, but neither does remaining in the current country of residence.

Antoinette – A Hybrid Without a Home

Wide Sargasso Sea opens with the following words: “They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks” (Rhys 1). To be in-between, ambivalent and not knowing which way to go or turn and not having a clear direction or advice to follow is what

the main character of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette, has to struggle with throughout the novel. Described as a Creole, she is neither black nor white, but somewhere in-between Europe and the Caribbean, a slave and a master in a world where, due to decolonization, new identities and roles have to be formed in ways never experienced before; in Antoinette this creates an uncertainty of identity and belonging. At her mother Annette's wedding she overhears the guests discussing Richard Mason's choice to marry Antoinette's mother.

'A fantastic marriage and he will regret it. Why should a very wealthy man who could take his pick of all the girls in the West Indies, and many in England too probably?'

'Why *probably*?' the other voice said. '*Certainly*.' 'Then why should he marry a widow without a penny to her name and Coulibri a wreck of a place? Emancipation troubles killed old Cosway? Nonsense – the estate was going downhill for years before that.'

(Rhys 13)

Antoinette's family is not part of any of the dominant social groups; neither are they physically a part of the Europe they once used to look up to. Antoinette's sex and status, geographical location and alleged state of mind all alienate her from the world around her, but at the same time she is bound to it, making her unable to change her situation. She does not belong to any sphere, yet cannot avoid being affected by all; with relatives both within the white and black community she is a hybrid both in a social and physical sense.

While Antoinette represents the ambivalent hybrid, her husband Edward plays the part of an Englishman without the complexity of a mixed background. The narration of the novel is split between narrators Antoinette and Edward, shifting between the two as the story unfolds, introducing the reader to both Antoinette's and Edward's views on each other. In the first part of the novel, Antoinette is telling us her story, and thus gives us her view of the way her family was excluded

from the society. As a daughter to former slave owners, it might have seemed natural for her family to belong to the white community, rather than the black, but as the very opening words of the novel suggest, they were not in their ranks due to the Cosway's Creole background. The white community did not accept them, but neither were they welcome among their former slaves: "They hated us. They called us white cockroaches" (Rhys 8). Antoinette finds herself in a gray zone between the dominant blocks of power, not belonging to any of them, but instead forced to become a hybrid.

Hybridity among the Creoles in the Caribbean is not uncommon, claims Aisha Khan in "Sacred Subversions? Syncretic Creoles, the Indo-Caribbean, and "Culture's In-between"": "Caribbean intellectuals have long been concerned with the in-between—as creolization—approaching it as a specifically Caribbean issue that defines the region" (Khan 168). Even if Antoinette's situation is not unique, it nevertheless does not make her life less problematic. The exclusion Antoinette has to deal with does not only come from the outside world and its people, but it also lives within her own family. Antoinette's mother is very distant and cold towards her daughter, depressed by the loss of her wealth, status and husband. She is laughed at by her former slaves, which also underlines the shift of power that has recently taken place on the island. She is at several points throughout the novel accused of being mentally unstable, which also reflects the way people view Antoinette; being the daughter of a mad woman will probably not go unnoticed and undiscussed.

Instead of crossing a physical border, and having to deal with the questions of belonging from a traditional immigrant perspective, the Cosways are immigrants within a society, forming their identity through the crossing from one system of power to another. Indeed they are second and third generation immigrants, now sharing a Creole background, which is even intensifying the questions of identity and belonging because of the difficulty they have in identifying themselves as either white nor black. These questions were perhaps not as pressing in colonial times when the Cosways could grow wealthy and powerful through the abuse and slavery they occupied themselves

with and even were dependent on. But as the social structure changed and they no longer were by default on the top, new questions of identity arise. They were suddenly not in the white people's ranks due to their loss of economic status, their racially mixed, and allegedly mentally unstable background, but neither were they in the favor of their former slaves. It is this crossing from one system to another that changes the way they perceive their identity, and also changes the way they are seen by others.

There are many theories as to why it is so important to exclude such people as the Cosways from the white community. Peter Barry in *Beginning Theory* provides a few relevant ideas. In his discussion over the Western view of the East he raises a few interesting points: “the East is seen as a fascinating realm of the exotic, the mystical and the seductive” (Barry 193). Although the Caribbean is not technically part of the East, it is neither part of what is often referred to as West either. If the idea of East is expanded to include areas that are outside the European sphere of thinking regardless of geographical location, then these qualities of exotic, mystical and seductive perhaps reflect Antoinette and her mother's beauty. Interestingly, Barry continues by stating that “their emotions and reactions are always determined by racial considerations (they are like this because they are Asiatics or blacks or orientals)” (Barry 194). In other words, Antoinette can never change in the eyes of the English, because of her Creole background. At the same time, East also “becomes the repository or projection of those aspects of themselves which Westerners do not choose to acknowledge” (Barry 193). Antoinette's husband, Edward, several times reflects upon the differences between himself and his wife, never realizing that perhaps they share more than he is willing to admit. Perhaps Edward is acting in the way Barry suggests; he sees Antoinette as a Creole who can never break away from her background of mental instability and everything he does not acknowledge in himself. Instead of understanding the flaw in his thinking, he grows possessive and chooses to exclude her from the rest of the world – and finally even from himself.

Exclusion of those who we are not familiar with is not a new strategy within the Western

world, argues Richard Kearney in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*. It is by drawing a line between “us” and “them” that we learn to see the difference between good and evil, right and wrong and it also provides easy solutions for ethical problems: either you are one of us, or you are one of them:

Ever since early Western thought equated the Good with notions of self-identity and sameness, the experience of evil has often been linked with notions of exteriority. Almost invariably, otherness was considered in terms of an estrangement which contaminates the pure unity of the soul. (Kearney 65)

In other words, the other is a threat to what is treasured as the pure and original and can potentially destroy it. Kearney continues by looking at the concept of otherness from the perspective of a nation-state and argues that when faced with a threat, the state will respond with hostility. “Most nation-states bent on preserving their body politic from 'alien viruses' seek to pathologize their adversaries. Faced with a threatening outsider the best mode of defense is attack. Again and again the national *We* is defined over and against the foreign *Them*” (Kearney 65). The relationships Antoinette has throughout the novel are undermined by these problems caused by her not being defined by the world of “we”, but instead being a threat to all. She cannot be let in, because as a hybrid she can potentially destroy everything identity is built on.

Antoinette learns very early on that she cannot count on the help or support from people close to her. These “others” are represented by several people in the novel: servants, visitors, friends and husbands to name a few. When she is rejected by her only friend, the black girl Tia, who for a little money turns her back to Antoinette and calls her a 'white nigger', clearly stating that Antoinette's family is not part of the wealthy white community:

'Keep them then, you cheating nigger,' I said, for I was tired, and water I had swallowed

made me feel sick. 'I can get more if I want to.

'That's not what she hear, she said. She hear all we poor like beggar. We ate salt fish – no money for fresh fish. That old house so leaky, you run with calabash to catch water when it rain. Plenty white people in Jamaica. 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'. (Rhys 9)

Instead of questioning her friend's words and proving her wrong, Antoinette accepts what Tia says, claims Vivian Nun Halloran in "Race, Creole, and National Identities in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Phillips's *Cambridge*": "By not quoting her playmate directly, but rather repeating her words in third-person narration, Antoinette demonstrates that she has internalized and accepted her friend's criticism and reported gossip" (Halloran 91). Antoinette seems to feel that Tia is right and that she really is a white nigger, not part of the white community on the island, and therefore not anyone to be taken seriously. Carine M Mardorossian claims in her paper "Shutting up the Subaltern" that Tia's words reveal that race is a "historically and discursively constituted identity whose meaning varies according to one's economic status" (Mardorossian 1073). Antoinette can never be part of the real white people Tia talks about unless she has the economic status they have. Interestingly, Mardorossian also points out that Antoinette seems to take the comment personally, as criticism towards her actions and behavior, and not as a general comment about the situation of the white Creole minority at the time. According to Mardorossian, it seems as if Antoinette sees her outsidership as a result of her own actions, something personal – and hence also her own fault, not as a result of racial exclusion that she never had a chance to change. Antoinette views herself and her actions as the seed of something evil, which eventually affects also her mother. According to Antoinette, it is not the situation her family was in, neither the lack of belonging, but her own actions that made her mother unstable. "Then there was that day when she saw I was growing up

like a white nigger and she was ashamed of me, it was after that day that everything changed. Yes, it was my fault, it was my fault that she started to plan and work in a frenzy, in a fever to change our lives” (Rhys 102). The problem with Antoinette's view of her situation is that she does not understand that Tia's comments about her being a white cockroach also includes her mother and the rest of her family; it is not a personal comment. If her mother is already included in the comment, then Antoinette cannot carry the guilt of it all; it is not her fault. Antoinette's actions did not change anything, her personal problems are related to the political situation. Mardorossian summarizes the problem with Antoinette's view: “Antoinette cannot see that 'what Tia said' included her mother too, because she has no grasp of the historical and ideological barriers that separate classes in West Indian postslavery society. *Her* personal is not political” (Mardorossian 1073).

Antoinette's feelings of not belonging anywhere are gradually intensified and she chooses to find comfort in the wilderness that surrounds her worn down home, Coulibri. As she walks away, she thinks to herself: “And if the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would think 'It's better than people'. Black ants or red ones, tall nests swarming with white ants, rain that soaked me to the skin – once I saw a snake. All better than people” (Rhys 12). It is people that leave her outside and alone, although she never did anything to harm them. It seems that she does not understand the reason for her exclusion, but is very saddened by this. Indeed, the exclusion she faces is not based on her actions, but on her background of not belonging and being seen as a threat, although perhaps not openly admitted of being one: how can a young woman be a threat to a mighty nation? Antoinette carries these feelings of abandonment as she grows older and as she in her teens attends a school run by nuns she is once again struck by the fact that people near her do not see and understand her situation: “They are safe. How can they know what it can be like *outside*” (Rhys 40). The other girls do not share Antoinette's experiences of abandonment and cannot understand her.

As Antoinette drifts somewhere on the border of belonging to the white European, and the Creole Caribbean sphere, she is pulled back into the model of a European woman as her father in-

law presents her to a man interested in marrying her, for money. Antoinette is more or less sold into a marriage none of them had planned or desired earlier. Now she is expected to be something she is not and she will pay a high price for it. Edward senses her doubts about the marriage immediately and he is constantly reminding himself of the differences between them, of how she is not like him. He reacts by rejecting her and creating an image of her as a mad girl, which she also slowly starts to turn into. Edward never dares to ask himself if he perhaps also is not as “pure” as he would like to be, that maybe there is no such purity to begin with. For Edward, Antoinette seems to be a great mystery; she is not white, but not black either, therefore she must be crazy. It is Antoinette's hybridity and ambivalence that confuse him.

The newly married couple spend their honeymoon on the Windward Islands, a spot Antoinette loves for its beauty, but a place that haunts Edward. He does not feel comfortable and everything seems strange and unknown to him. “Everything is too much. I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger. Her pleading expression annoys me” (Rhys 49). He has clearly arrived to a place very different from England, but instead of trying to understand the difference and that this too might be an important place for someone, he simply thinks it is all too overwhelmingly alien, and therefore of no value for him. Indeed, if he was to recognize the nature and colours of the island as beautiful, he would be questioning the validity of England as the most supreme nation.

Despite Antoinette's feelings of outsidership, there are still people around her who probably feel as much in-between as she does, for example Sandi, a relative to Antoinette. Sandi is described as a tall boy, son to Alexander Cosway, who is also the father to Antoinette. Despite the fact that they are closely related, his mother's background raises questions and mixed feelings about how she should behave towards him. When Sandi unexpectedly shows up and helps Antoinette on her way to school she thinks to herself: “Once I would have said 'my cousin Sandi', but Mr Mason's lectures

had made me shy about my coloured relatives. I muttered. 'Thank you'" (Rhys 32). Richard Mason is a man who cares about wealth and appearances, and having his daughter-in-law spending time with people of mixed background could seriously threaten his superiority as a white man. The fact that Sandi is so closely related to Antoinette makes the threat even more real, leaving only one option to secure the name of the family: sealing him outside. Antoinette is told by her father-in-law to keep her distance from Sandi, to not be in contact. Mason has understood that Sandi is not just any black boy on the island, as the white people have servants and interact with black people all the time; it is not the colour of their skin that is threatening, but it is the knowledge of having someone in-between potentially within the family that creates a threat. Mason does probably not want Antoinette to be seen with people like Sandi, because he is so dangerously close, and his identity might question the family's status and identity, if too many people find out that they indeed have coloured relatives, and that they actually have contact with each other. While a black man could not pose a threat of this kind, a hybrid like Sandi can, because he forms the link between the white *us* and black *them*. Mason's interests lie in keeping his name as clean as possible, and since he now has responsibility for Antoinette, he does not want to risk getting his own name associated with someone of mixed background. Denying Antoinette her background and the few relatives she has, because they aren't socially acceptable, increasingly seals her – and Sandi – outside the society and community of people.

Antoinette and Sandi are both seen as outsiders of the two opposite social groups: they do not belong amongst the European elite, neither are they a part of the black community. They are seen as hybrids lingering in between, neither black or white, an unknown species that cannot be categorized or labeled. The uncertainty of their background and being opens up for many possibilities of speculation; maybe the two share something secret and forbidden, or perhaps they have more insight into the lives of others from their position of being in the middle. Daniel, also a relative to Antoinette, tells Edward about Antoinette's relationship with Sandi: "Your wife know

Sandi since long time. Ask her and she tell you. But not everything I think'. He laughed. 'Oh no, not everything. I see them when they think nobody see them. I see her when she. . .'" (Rhys 96). Daniel tells Edward this in order to warn him about what kind of woman he has agreed to marry and it is possible that any such event never occurred that Daniel speaks about, but that he is more interested in turning Edward against her. It is the possibility to draw in someone like Sandi into such a shameful statement that illuminates the way he is not part of Daniel's social sphere, but instead someone who one can freely leave outside. It is the same kind of exclusion that Edward applies to Antoinette, as he has trouble identifying her as one or the other.

Edward's time in the Caribbean is characterized by his inability to appreciate its nature and people. Instead he grows possessive of Antoinette whom he does not love and is not afraid to say it either when Antoinette questions him: "Don't you love me at all? 'No, I do not', I said" (Rhys 115). Edward cannot undo the marriage, so instead he chooses to use the power he has in order to gain some sensation of power and superiority. Edward is the white colonizer trying to own something that should not be owned, trying to bend it into his own will and shape. He does this by changing Antoinette's name into Bertha, by taking her to England and making love to their servant. In this way he strips her of everything she could earlier claim as her own, as the cornerstones of her identity and being. "I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you have spoilt it" (Rhys 115) says Antoinette. By forcing Antoinette into a mold she will never fit in, Edward consciously leads Antoinette into a more and more desperate state where she cannot find peace. As she grows more unstable, he can simply claim that she is mad, which in turn gives him more power to rule over her. Not only is she a Creole now, but insane too, another reason to keep her at distance and see her as the *other*.

Antoinette tries to please Edward by acting as English and as appealing to him as she possibly can, her view of the woman he would desire, but in many cases her efforts are interpreted

as the opposite: when she tries to behave like an English lady, Edward only sees the untidy blackness in her, reassuring him of his suspicions that she is nothing like him. Mardorossian discusses a scene in the novel where Antoinette tries to simulate a girl from a painting she was very fond of when she was young, “The Miller's Daughter”. The painting represents a “lovely English girl with brown curls and blue eyes and a dress slipping off her shoulders” (Rhys 19). This image Antoinette seems to remember when she later tries to win her husband's heart, Mardorossian argues. To Antoinette, “The Miller's Daughter” is a representation of how an English woman should look and be, one of the few clues she has on how to appeal to Edward, but instead of appealing to Edward he now finds her even stranger and pushes her further away: “She was wearing the white dress I had admired, but it had slipped untidily over one shoulder and seemed too large for her. I watched her holding her left wrist with her right hand, an annoying habit” (Rhys 97). Mardorossian summarizes: “Antoinette herself is incapable of realizing that in Rochester's eyes, her attire actually associates her with (black) female wantonness and prostitution” (Mardorossian 1076). When Edward is faced with the problem of his wife not living up to the standard of his view of an English woman, he chooses to push her aside as an other and also remarks on her annoying habit of holding her wrist with her hand. Instead of helping her, he gains power from rejecting her, since understanding their differences would result in him being exposed to her alleged otherness and the possibility of having to understand and change his views.

Antoinette's mixed feelings of her own identity are illustrated by her relationship towards the servants in the household. She spends a lot of time with Christophine, a woman originally from Martinique, who was brought to the Caribbean when she was young and given to Antoinette's mother as a wedding present. Despite her history as a slave in the household, Christophine has stayed with the Cosways after the emancipation and is very close to Antoinette, being nearly the only person Antoinette can trust. Described as “not like other women” (Rhys 6), she does not have the same look as the rest of the black women on the island; she ties her handkerchief differently and

is described as blacker than the others. These differences are contrasted by the way she chooses to interact with others: although she could speak both English, French and patois, she still “took care to talk the way they talked” (Rhys 6). Evidently, Christophine wants to blend in and chooses to adapt her speech, probably one of the most important aspect of all human communication, to match the Caribbean way of speaking. These two, Antoinette and Christophine, can on some level understand each other, or at least sense that they both are outsiders, even if not within the same social spheres. The bond between the two is strong and Christophine is the only one who dares to stand up against her former masters if needed, even when Antoinette does not.

Christophine possesses strength that Antoinette lacks, and is also in a sense more free to control her own life. When Antoinette cannot stand up against her husband's abusive behavior, but instead chooses to stay up in her room with a bottle of rum, Christophine takes Antoinette's side and dares to confront Edward. Christophine's daring stand marks the end of her time as a servant in the household, standing up against the master cannot be forgiven and she understands that it is time for her to leave after the incident. Already before the confrontation between Christophine and Edward, she was a problem for him with her influence on Antoinette and her alleged connection to obeah, a form of magic or sorcery. However, Edward never had a chance to get rid of her since she never did anything that would let him use his powers against him. It is in this moment of conflict that he successfully rises above her and forcing her to leave the estate. In addition to this, Christophine's strength in standing up against Edward and the way he is treating Antoinette also seals Antoinette's fate Mardorossian argues: “The moment she 'explains' herself to him and appeals to his humanity on Antoinette's behalf, he sets in motion the hegemonic legal and medical systems which will allow him to successfully silence both her and Antoinette” (Mardorossian 1079). In the confrontation, Christophine is at a disadvantage, allowing Edward to rise to a position which he hasn't experienced before when interacting with Christophine. In the novel, Christophine's words echo as Edward hears them, not to be taken as a sign of weakness, states Mardorossian.

Considering his expeditious dismissal of her, he rather seems to act as an obstructing free will from which Christophine's words bounce back unheeded. In fact, it is precisely when Christophine's free will and resiliency explode in Rochester's face that her powers are the most limited: he "no longer felt dazed, tired, half hypnotized, but alert and wary, ready to defend [him]self" (158). (Mardorossian 1079).

Edward understands that he now has a chance of getting rid of this problematic woman, with her gone she cannot pose a threat to him any longer, and she cannot affect Antoinette either. Christophine is the last person Antoinette has an important bond to in the novel, and taking this relationship from her seals her isolation. The life and identity she had before they got married are now beyond reach. The last step in alienating Antoinette from the world around her is taking her to the heart of the empire, England, and locking her up in the attic of Thronfield Hall with the servant Grace Poole looking over her. By doing this she loses the last bonds she has to the world around her and can no longer pose a threat to those around her. Sealing Antoinette away from both her own background and the world in which Edward calls his own underlines the problems she has faced all her life as a hybrid: she does not belong anywhere and does not fit anywhere and is therefore a problem that needs to be taken care of.

Conclusion

The life of Antoinette is a struggle from the very beginning of the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She is lonely and rejected by her mother and has very few people she can trust or turn to. In order to win her husband's heart she tries to act as English as she can, but fails because he only sees the Creole in her. From Edward's point of view, no matter what Antoinette does, she can never be good enough for him; it is a game she cannot win, since she cannot change her own background. In his eyes he

will always be superior simply because he is a white, English man and she just a Creole woman from the West Indies.

The life of Antoinette changes dramatically during the course of the novel, from her childhood as a girl on a beautiful Caribbean island, to a woman locked up in a cold attic with one of Edward's servants as her only company. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is bound to the story of *Jane Eyre* and there is no way for Antoinette to escape her narrative destiny that is waiting for her in England. The novel provides an interesting point of view for the possible background of the madwoman in the attic and sheds light on the life of a Creole hybrid during the 19th century.

Using Homi K Bhabha's theory of hybridity as a base for analyzing Antoinette as a character and the problems she faces in the novel provides ways of understanding her predicament. The very foundation for the hybridity she is experiencing lies in the colonial history between Europe and the Caribbean: the opposition between the hybrid and the dominating groups is intensified as the former colonial power allows the colonized area to gain independence. This weakens the position of those in-between, since it becomes increasingly more important to choose which side one belongs to. Not being able to belong to any of the opposing sides creates both practical problems as well as challenges the basis for one's own identity and belonging. The practical problems are related to how one is viewed by others belonging to the two dominating groups: the hybrid is not only an outsider, but also a threat, who by simply existing questions the validity of the opposing groups. Edward's reaction to this threat is expressed through the powers he has as her white English husband, which ultimately leads to her life as a prisoner in his attic and her complete erasure.

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