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Creolization of identity in Caribbean texts: Towards the healing of the creole

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CREOLIZATION OF IDENTITY IN CARIBBEAN TEXTS:

TOWARDS THE HEALING OF THE CREOLE

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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Creolization became an important element to creole identity by explaining the development of cultural mixing in the Caribbean. While many scholars have focused on the marginalization of creole identity at the hands of the colonizer, this paper addresses the way creole subjects use creolization as a form of agency. Two specific post-colonial texts will be explored in the order of Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*. The essay begins with *Wide Sargasso Sea* to gain an early historical context of the treatment of creole women, and to establish the need of developing a voice against patriarchal hegemony. *No Telephone to Heaven* evidences a post-revolutionary historical context and enforces a stronger sense of identity formation and healing through the process of creolization. Across both texts creole women throughout the centuries are given a sense of self through developments of acculturation and interculturation.

DEDICATION

The completion of my graduate studies would not have been possible without the love, support, and most of all patience of my family and friends. My mother, Leticia Marin, my father Martin J. Marin, and my close friends, you know who you are, wholeheartedly inspired, motivated, and supported me by all means to accomplish this degree. Thank you for your love and constant understanding. I will never forget it.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Michelle Cliff's 1987 novel, *No Telephone to Heaven*, addresses the devastating effects of imperialism on the identity of Jamaica's mixed-raced women. Cliff tells the story of her Jamaican born protagonist Clare Savage, who finds herself caught between two domineering worlds, an imperial world that denies her racial belonging and a patriarchal presence that delimits her individual identity. Clare's story begins during the 1960s, a time period of political upheaval stemming from the independence of Jamaica from British rule. Throughout *No Telephone*, Cliff demonstrates Clare's struggle with her identity resulting from her father Boy Savage, who insists she "pass" as white after he transplants his family to New York. Clare is able to pass because she is of both black and white race, which puts her in a position of privilege. However, Clare cannot ignore the "burgeoning civil rights movement" taking place right in front of her, and she seems to feel the need to identify with the land she once lived in. As she becomes increasingly aware of these factors her father becomes upset with her unwillingness to forget her roots:

> "Girl do you want to labor forever as an outsider?"
>
> "I don't know, Daddy."
>
> "You are too much like your mother for your own good." His voice was ragged, sharp. "You are an American now. You need to realize what that means." (102)

Boy forces Clare to go against her matrilineal heritage in order to fit within the world he has created for himself. Like his European forebears, Boy believes Clare must forget the marginalized aspect of her identity in order to feel whole. Hence, Clare faces a double colonization though the presence of her father in that as an imperial and patriarchal presence he wants her to "pass" as a white woman and adopt a Eurocentric mentality in order to control the forming of her identity.

Thus, the world Clare comes from is what Aime Cesaire describes as "societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled under-foot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out" (62). Moreover, Clare's fragmented identity is parallel to colonized subjects as she is alienated from her motherland and forced to assimilate with a new world that rejects her as well. Further still, her identification as Creole separates her from both white and black races because she does not exclusively categorize herself with one specific race. Consequently, as a Creole, Clare must find a way to establish a self-directed identity that has not been marginalized by imperial/patriarchal influences.

Clare's struggle reflects that of the Caribbean, shaped inexorably by the forces of imperialism and patriarchy. Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair agree "there was undoubtedly a transformation of identities through cultural contact, a process of uneven psychic exchange between the dominant and the subordinate groups that was inevitable in the circumstances" (249). Desai and Nair hint at the unevenness of transculturation during the time of colonization, and suggest the dominant European race provided zero opportunity for marginalized subjects to use their roots in this process of cultural sharing, and were forced to only adopt imperial views. Instead, the need to suppress identities of the colonized superseded any wish to perpetuate beliefs

and customs native to the Caribbean. One group that has suffered dually at the hands of the colonizer are subjects known as Creoles. Considered second-class citizens because of their ambiguous race, Creoles have consistently been subjected to harsh treatment by both whites and blacks from the Caribbean who were the ex-slaves of Creole plantocracy.

In order to accurately understand the burden placed on Creoles it is essential to establish the historical development of the meaning of the term *creole*. Having no specific origin, the term *creole* has developed and altered through different histories. In Barnor Hesse's essay "Symptomatically Black: A Creolization of the Political" he describes the different developments of the term *creole* and begins with its early establishment in the sixteenth century:

> The term *creole* was used to refer to particular people. From the sixteenth century onward, initially in the Spanish, Portuguese, and French American colonies, *creole*, in its different versions, specified Europeans born in the colony as distinct from the metropole; Europeans whose European culture was compromised and curiously shaped by the cross-cultural environment of the colony. Underlying this was an informal distinction between pure Europeans and impure Europeans. Second, *creole* by the eighteenth century came to describe colonized people born in the colonies, partial descendants of slaves, whose African ancestry was mixed with European slave owners, and whose European culture and lighter pigmentation was born of colonial life. (37-38)

The evolution of the term *creole* expresses how profoundly imperialism has affected the development of Creole identity. Since the meaning of *creole* has evolved continuously it suggests the mentality held by imperialists, which is that Creoles are a group who compromises the purity of the European race. Their attitude is problematic to Creoles because it makes it difficult for Creoles to form a strong sense of identity.

Another concept I will be referring to is creolization, a term that privileges process and for the perpetual change occurring with Creole subjectivity. It should be noted that creolization is a term that applies to those in the Caribbean and as Bill Ashcroft explains, applies "more

loosely to those postcolonial societies whose present ethnically or racially mixed populations are a product of European colonization" (69). At times theorists have relied on the use of the term hybridity in place of creolization; however, hybridity does not lend itself to the specificity needed to describe the process faced by Creoles. As pointed out by Shu-mei Shih and Francoise Lionnet in the introduction to *The Creolization of Theory*, hybridity "can become too pliable, like any other concept that might too easily be decontextualized" (24). Instead, it's important to appreciate the history behind creolization to strengthen its meaning. Stuart Hall has described the history of creolization as "forced transculturation under the circumstances peculiar to transportation, slavery, and colonization….in creolization, the process of 'fusion' occurs in circumstances of massive disparities of power and the exercise of a brutal cultural dominance and incorporation between the different cultural elements" (25). Hence, the use of creolization is imperative to this thesis in order to fully establish the disparities faced by those identified as Creole.

Shih and Lionnet further acknowledge the value of using the term creolization, recognizing the limited meaning of hybrid/hybridity versus creolized/creolization as hybrid and creolized undermines the colonized Other. Additionally, the term hybridity has been oversimplified to only define a cross-cultural exchange. Using the term in such a manner "usually implies negating and neglecting the imbalance and inequality of the power relations it references" (Desai, 136). Consequently, hybridity minimizes the act of identity dissolution faced by the colonized. Robert Baron and Ana Cara describe creolization "as a concept for processes of cultural encounter and emergence of new cultural forms," or in other words, a place where different "cultures meet and create new expressive forms" (6). Therefore, in contrast to

hybridity, creolization becomes an important framework for the colonized other by explaining the developmental process of those who are identified as Creole.

Hence, the creolized subject is never actually establishing an autonomous sense of self, but this is just one, albeit dominant, part of creolization as the term also acknowledges slave and indigenous cultures. Through the process of creolization and transculturation, a term referring "to the reciprocal influences of modes of representation and cultural practices of various kinds in colonies and metropoles", identity formation within Creole subjects is dictated by imperialists/patriarchy (Ashcroft, 263). However, Creoles can choose to take part of different cultures that allow them to create a heterogeneous cultural identity. Therefore, creolization does not have to be viewed as a negative concept, as Françoise Vergès explains:

> There is something in the process and practices of creolization that can teach other groups and individuals who are caught in the maelstrom of globalization today…There are strategies that have emerged…strategies of resistance, of inventiveness, of creativity in the arts, music, and even in the political discourse that would give, or rather allow comparisons, or transfers of tools…exchange rather than hegemonization. (209)

Vergès takes the process of creolization and redefines it as a liberating idea that allows creolized subjects to shape their own identity. Furthermore, while creolization represents a process of uneven transculturation, Verges suggests it can be claimed by the colonized and enslaved as a form of agency.

According to Pheng Cheah creolization is "the active process of the genesis of a new form of culture from colonial population flows, as the result of the transformation of European cultural forms as they are transposed in another space beyond their established frame of reference" (83). Hence, it is important to recognize creolization as a larger societal process, but one that can be embraced by creolized subjects to form a sense of empowerment. I look at two post-colonial texts, including Jean Rhys' 1966 novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Michelle Cliff's *No*

Telephone to Heaven. These texts approach the process of creolization as a form of agency instead of adopting the imperialist mentality that the process is debilitating or oppressive. The protagonists of these texts, Antoinette Cosway and Clare Savage have been told by the imperial/patriarchal forces in their lives to deny any cultural mixing in that it creates racial impurity. However, neither woman wants to forget this influence. Thus, I argue that Antoinette and Clare consciously acknowledge the process of creolization has taken place and that it should not face a form of erasure, which imperial/patriarchal influence demands. Consequently, by not ignoring the process and agreeing that it should be a dynamic course they embrace creolization as a form of agency.

My thesis focuses on these two aspects: Creole identity and the embracing of creolization as a form of agency. I look at the process of creolization as analyzed in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *No Telephone to Heaven*. These texts exhibit ways that Creole identity has been viewed by the plantocracy, black slaves, and Caribbean subjects. A significant element to contemplate is that Rhys' protagonist Antoinette Cosway, an ostensibly white woman born in the Caribbean, is Creole in the earliest iteration of the term, and Clare Savage represents a later manifestation of *creole,* which is that of Caribbean citizens who are of both black and white race. My thesis focuses on how the novels work comparatively to establish the complexities resulting from characters who are identified as Creole. Additionally, each novel comments on the debilitating presence of imperial and patriarchal hegemony and each protagonists need to develop a method that allows them to gain independence.

As mentioned in the beginning of this introduction, Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* is a novel made up of different pieces, mimetic of the fragmented nature of those identified as Creole. The novel follows Clare Savage, with flashbacks throughout, as she

struggles to negotiate a sense of belonging in society. As a Creole woman, Clare goes through multiple psychological and emotional transformations in pursuit of healing her broken identity. Her return to Jamaica serves as a tool for her healing and formulating a sense of self. Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* vividly portrays an experience of alienation resulting from Antoinette Cosway's Creole identity. Rhys depicts Antoinette's struggle to maintain her altered self, resulting from her close connection to the Caribbean. Consequently, we witness the psychological, emotional, and physical breakdown caused by her white European husband, who deliberately finds a way to terminate Antoinette's transculturation. Both novels can be looked at comparatively in their depiction of the Creole subject and the alienated feeling found in each female protagonist. The characters are equally imbalanced by the dual nature of their existence and find it difficult to establish an identity on their own without imperial/patriarchal influence. However, there are clear differences in how these women come to deal with their Creole selves. As a woman of European decent born in the Caribbean, Antoinette is muddled by the influence of Caribbean culture and specifically residual slave culture, which is evidence of her own creolization. That is, Caribbean identity, wittingly, becomes a part of her through adoption of multicultural beliefs and she no longer has a line that wholly differentiates her from the black community. Antoinette's husband, modeled on the Rochester figure from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, comes between her transculturation and shuts down her identity completely by removing her from the land she closely identifies with. Consequently, as Creole women, Clare Savage and Antoinette Cosway struggle with issues associated to their identity and embracement of creolization, which is why it becomes essential for them to acknowledge the dynamic process of creolization

Many scholars have expanded upon the nature of both Clare Savage and Antoinette Cosway's Creole identity, and its confounding ambiguity. Hence, the following literary review examines the insights provided through different readings of these novels. Gayatric Spivak focuses on the affects of imperial and patriarchal hegemonization as she refers to the problematics of Rochester renaming Antoinette saying, "that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism," which serves to elucidate the extremity of control imperialist England possessed (242). Spivak examines the role Antoinette's husband takes in his altering the identity of Creole subjects through forceful means. His action is parallel to imperialists in that he uses his power as a pure white European to exact his authority on Antoinette. He thus reduces Antoinette's identity by referring to her as some other person she does not relate to. Additionally, Spivak effectively points to the dehumanizing action of the colonizer in altering the Creole identity and on the dual nature of the Creole as a people of a mixed race. Antoinette exists within these confines "as a white Creole child growing up at the time of emancipation in Jamaica, caught between the English imperialist and the black native" (242). Antoinette cannot establish her own sense of self because she does not fully identify with either the white imperialist or the black ex-slaves. Instead, as implied by Spivak, Antoinette has a creolized identity qualifying her as part of the cultural and societal diaspora, and she must find a way to come to terms with this.

In "Race and Caribbean Cultures as Thematics of Liberation in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea"* Sandra Drake declares Rhys' novel a strong testimonial to Caribbean identity in its historical context, thus, suggesting its association to Jane Eyre is unnecessary to confirm the novel's validity. So strong are the references to the dissolution of the colonized self and the strains on the Creole identity through Antoinette's character that the novel stands as a theoretical

piece all on its own. Drake suggests "the struggle for Antoinette's survival—for the survival of the Caribbean—against European patriarchy and empire, the struggle for a voice to reinscribe a past history and construct a future out of genuine indigenous cultural materials—to become something other than a copy—is the struggle Christophine" loses, and that Antoinette fights and finds ultimate liberation from (195). However, other scholars conclude Antoinette's acceptance of her fate and ultimate decision to commit suicide only points to an unresolved Caribbean and Creole identity. Evelyn O'Callaghan's article "Interior Schisms Dramatised: The Treatment of the 'Mad' Woman in the Work of Some Female Caribbean Novelists" poignantly relates Antoinette's actual role as finding "herself divided between cultures, between emotions, between roles/false-selves, between places…, until she become a 'zombie'" (103). Before Antoinette has the opportunity to reconcile her lost identity she is confined, imprisoned, and ultimately dominated by the colonizer. Consequently, Antoinette can be viewed as a muted Creole subject.

Furthermore, Antoinette's treatment by the black population and the English whites is important to the dissolving of her identity. Scholars suggest part of Antoinette's problem exists because she is "considered socially inferior by the English whites, and a 'white cockroach' by the black population" (O'Callaghan, 96). From the onset of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys develops Antoinette's character as already fragmented and broken. In her adolescence she is portrayed as an unstable and insecure personality. Further, she has "a history of rejection by one or both parents, and there is little evidence that physical affection was shown [to her] in childhood" (O'Callaghan, 90). Her perilous history does not end there. Instead she faces the "rejection and betrayal by her husband," which advances the fragmentation of her identity, as she is never given an opportunity to form a sense of self. Antoinette's identity is destabilized by her husband's decision to extract her from her home and lock her up in his imperialist "prison."

Furthermore, in the novel she is considered a "white nigger," and can be interpreted as her being no better than the black population. Even more, her alienation reaches its peak as the Black community denies her any privilege despite her whiteness. Although she adopts their traditions and customs, Antoinette and her mother remain outsiders to those of African descent. Thus, "Antoinette does not fully belong to a stable cohesive social class, and this factor contributes to her insecurity" (O'Callaghan, 96). O'Callaghan suggests Antoinette loses herself through mental breakdown and no longer has a way of forming a sense of agency within the Western world.

Michelle Cliff's novels convey parallel ideas to *Wide Sargasso Sea* in that Clare Savage is dominated by imperial/patriarchal mandates. Cliff's *Abeng* provides a historical reading of Clare's family and demonstrates the consistent struggle she faces imposed by imperialism and patriarchy. Carole Boyce-Davies expands on the issues faced by Clare in *Abeng* and states that Clare is "caught on the border between two cultural-areas and of exile and movement" (72). Cliff's novels bring up exile because it examines the displaced sense of self the Creole must contend with. The contentious nature of Clare's identity results from cultural displacement and feelings of "being privileged, yet poor, white-skinned but culturally Caribbean" (64). To that affect Clare does not identify with one specific world, which culminates into issues of finding a way to establish her autonomous identity as seen in *No Telephone to Heaven*. "Race, Privilege, and the Politics of (Re)Writing History: An Analysis of the Novels of Michelle Cliff*"* by Belinda Edmondson acknowledges Clare Savage's disorientation from being both black and white. She also suggests Clare slowly seeks to reconcile her true self in *Abeng*, but does not fully understand the process until the novel's sequel, *No Telephone to Heaven*. According to Edmondson, in the sequel Clare does "much soul-searching" in order to contend with "her paradoxical identity" (183). However, one cannot deny that *No Telephone to Heaven* is steeped

in ideas of racial ambiguity, marginalized creolity, patriarchal dominance, and the like endured by colonized subjects. In this novel Clare migrates from Jamaica, to America, then to England, and back to Jamaica all in an effort to find a way to reconcile her Creole identity. Her migratory journey suggests Caribbean women along with Creole women are stuck in an in-between situation. As Simon Gikandi asserts there is a "suspension between the white and black traditions that have socially determined [Caribbean/Creole women], but that they cannot wholly embrace" (238). The state of mind Gikandi depicts emphasizes the exiled feeling of such subjects and moves towards the issues they face. Thus, as seen in the works of Jean Rhys and Michelle Cliff both female characters face a multifaceted brokenness, and are in search of a form of either empowerment and/or reconciliation as a way of collecting the pieces of their psychological, emotional, and cultural identities.

The broken mother-daughter relationship is another commonality Antoinette Cosway and Clare Savage share. Antoinette Cosway seeks a form of matrilineal presence as her identity is being lost through the harsh treatment of her husband, who clearly symbolizes the colonizer. When she becomes cognizant of losing a part of herself, Antoinette flees to Christophine's home. Antoinette's decision to escape to Christophine's home is an interesting element because Christophine is not only a black woman she is also a non-native, and rejected by Jamaicans. Additionally, Rochester views Christophine as a threat and Antoinette's decision to have Christophine serve as a substitute mother is a direct attack to Rochester's symbolic role as colonizer and patriarch. However, the power of the white imperialist supersedes, as Rochester does not allow Christophine to fill the role of mother Antoinette seeks as a way of maintaining her Creole identity. Instead, he completely dissolves the matrilineal lines and, in essence, Antoinette's own self.

Like Antoinette, Clare is abandoned by her mother Kitty and must deal with feelings of matrilineal displacement. Kitty's inability to "pass" as white forces her to return to the Caribbean and at the same time creates a negative shift in her relationship with Clare. The absence of motherhood also causes Clare's inability to find closure within her own identity. Missing the elements of a matrilineal relationship causes a separation in her female self and becomes a burden to her psyche. As Shirley Toland-Dix observes, Clare Savage's father tries to manipulate his racial identity and forces "Clare to accept injustice, inequality, and exclusion as constitutive of her privilege," because of her "whiteness" (40). Her father's necessity to fabricate their identity pushes Clare's mother Kitty away from her; and, despite Boy believing "passing" as white serves as a form of agency, it only fosters Clare's alienation. Toland-Dix believes "the color privilege that Clare is assigned is both qualified and costly," as it both gives her power, but distances her from her "matrilineage" (41). Clare's desire to have a connection with her mother and grandmother are two things she is not granted because her "whiteness" separates her. Her grandmother "believes that Clare has inherited the 'inbred degeneracy' of the Savages," and Clare again becomes exiled from her Jamaican roots (42). Carole Boyce Davies suggests "the definition of female self for Afro-Caribbean female protagonists within the larger exploration of cultural identity" is dependent upon "the mother-daughter relationship" (69). Furthermore, Boyce Davies affirms the connection between "heritage and identity" and points to the effects it places on the development of a stabilized self.

Building on this scholarship, my thesis investigates the way Antoinette Cosway and Clare Savage, both consciously and subconsciously, embrace their Creole identity represented by racialized matrilineage through the process of creolization. I try to demonstrate the authorizing of agency, accomplished through creolization by Antoinette and Clare as Creole women. I also

focus on how this is a perpetual process that has been evidenced through different historical time frames supported by the characters and the authors themselves. In my second chapter "Creolization As Agency in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea,"* I highlight Antoinette's battle with her husband who seeks to sever her connection to the Caribbean. Furthermore, I focus on how, despite Rochester's many attempts to deconstruct Antoinette's Creole identity, she finds a way to empower herself as evidenced through her creolization. Therefore, I argue that through Antoinette's adoption of Caribbean culture and her connection to a matrilineal presence, as witnessed through her relationship with Christophine, she asserts a form of agency over her identity by defying imperial and patriarchal demands. My third chapter, "Becoming Whole Through Creolization in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven,*" addresses Clare Savages return to the colonized land in search of rehabilitating her destabilized self, which becomes a quintessential aspect of her creolization. This chapter begins with a focus on Cliff's *Abeng* in order to establish Clare Savage's beginnings and to witness the process of her identity breakdown. Through the imperial/patriarchal presence represented by her father, Clare is forced to deny significant aspects of her creoleness and becomes emotionally and psychologically conflicted. Like Antoinette, Clare fights her father's domination through her returning and embracing the identity of her matrilineal ancestry. Aligning herself with Caribbean identity forces Clare to reject her father's connection to Eurocentric ideologies and more importantly she finds a way out of the chains of patriarchal supremacy. Defying patriarchy allows her to re-establish her identity that has faced erasure at the expense of colonization. Clare's creolization is ultimately witnessed through her decolonization of her mind and the minds of future generations by reestablishing historical and cultural aspects of their African descent. Hence, in this chapter I argue that Clare Savage uses creolization as a form of self-governing/empowerment in that she

recognizes the power of continuing the dynamic process of creolization. Unlike Antoinette, whose creolization only serves a singular development, Clare savage deems the process as something that can be used consistently in order to maintain individual autonomy amongst the influential presence of imperialist/patriarchy.

CHAPTER II

CREOLIZATION AS AGENCY IN JEAN RHYS' *WIDE SARGASSO SEA*

Jean Rhys wrote her post-colonial novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, during a time where contentious feelings towards Creole identity were still potent. Through many letters and her own autobiography, Jean Rhys candidly expresses her own profound issues with race and most of all her Creole identity. In one of Rhys' unpublished manuscripts, entitled *Black Exercise Book*, she shares her insecurities about her identity and the way blacks perceived Creoles:

> It added to my sadness that I couldn't help but realize that they didn't really like or trust white people. White cockroaches they called us behind our backs. (Cockroach again.) One could hardly blame them. I would feel sick with shame at some of the stories I heard of the slave days told casually even jokingly. (155)

Rhys poignantly examines the critical issues faced by Creoles during her time and how that heavily influences her decision to write *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a way of speaking for the community of Creoles, and in her case Creole women. Her words speak of the villainized position Creoles were placed in; although, Rhys does admit some of those feelings were justified because of the very raw wounds of slavery.

Associated with the plantocracy because of her ancestry, Rhys could not help but feel, ironically enough, the constant burden of her color to the extent that she "longed to be identified once and for all with the other side which of course was impossible. [She] couldn't change the colour of [her] skin" (Raiskin 156). Thus, like her own characters, Rhys endured brutal treatment resulting from the history of her ancestors. This idea hints at why she felt compelled to

give voice to Jane Eyre's muted Creole subject, Bertha. To some extent, Rhys felt Charlotte Bronte did not have knowledge of the historical context necessary to fully comprehend the struggle of women like Bertha/Antoinette. In a letter to an editor she says:

> I believe and firmly too that there was more than one Antoinette. The West Indies was (were?) rich in those days for those days and there was no 'married woman's property Act'. The girls (very tiresome no doubt) would soon once in kind England be Address Unknown…If Charlotte Bronte took her horrible Bertha from this legend I have the right to take lost Antoinette. (143)

Hence, as readers we must assume Rhys work gives voice to herself, as a Creole woman and voice to Antoinette who is emblematic of all other Creole women from the West Indies. As Rhys states there were many others like Antoinette who were at the mercy of affluent Englishmen who viewed them as a commodity, as a way of afflicting more dominance over their identities and their motherland. Consequently, the time frame of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is significant because it opens right at the abolition of slavery and helps Rhys to address the lingering issues facing Creole subjects. Although Rhys's novel is meant to write within the narrative context of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Rhys does not follow the same time frame. Bronte narrates her novel between "1818 or 1819 and describes events taking place between 1798 and 1808" (Raiskin, 31). Rhys alters the time frame in order to situate her piece during the period of full emancipation of slaves. Rhys chooses to change the setting in order to further her focus on the aftershocks of the end of slavery on the plantocracy, the slaves themselves, and most importantly to Creoles.

Thus, in this chapter I address the central need for Antoinette to find a way to resist the imperial/patriarchal demands as seen through the presence of Rochester. Antoinette will use the process of creolization as a way of gaining agency over her identity. Her creolization is evidenced through the established connection to Christophine who inhabits a matrilineal quality

for Antoinette. I argue that Antoinette's relationship with Christophine is key to her using creolization as a form of agency. This is realized in different ways: one Christophine confidently identifies with her black Caribbean culture, two she continues to embrace African traditions such as the practicing of obeah, which the plantocracy feared because of its power, and finally she is not confined by imperial/patriarchal control, but maintains a truly autonomous sense of self. Hence, Antoinette is able to maintain a self-governing attitude like that of Christophine.

To broaden our historical framework keep in mind the movement that led to complete abolishment of slavery took place in 1807 when the trans-Atlantic slave trade ended. Those against slavery felt halting the slave trade would be less burdensome to slave owners and that it would eventually lead to the Emancipation Act of 1833. Thus, *Wide Sargasso Sea* encapsulates a moment in time when blacks were transitioning between slavery into an unaccustomed form of "freedom." With the Emancipation Act in 1833 new political and social formations were being introduced. Despite a new sense of empowerment newly emancipated group was not allowed to fully implement their new state of autonomy. Instead, as Caribbean historian Gad Heuman relates ex-slaves "remained the object of social discrimination and…. much of the structure of plantation slave society continued, even though slavery ended" (104). Thus, despite their emancipation, newly liberated West Indians still faced the domineering presence of British imperialists who continued to oppress them.

Angered by the continued mistreatment from the British colonizers, ex-slaves took different types of measures such as "strikes and riots…. another was challenging the political domination of the [plantocracy]" to fight against them (Heuman, 113). Thus, the emotions of the ex-slaves were conflicted because there was little room to enjoy their recent freedom and yet

there was the joy of a newfound purpose. Through their will to fight, the ex-slave ironically began to replicate tendencies of the British imperialists. Unwilling to be marginalized more than had already been done by the white man, former slaves "abused other groups lower down on the social hierarchy" (Heuman, 104).

The emancipation of slaves made the presence of Creole subjects more profound in that the group faced marginalization by both blacks and whites, whereas formerly only those considered purely European had cast a discriminating eye towards the Caribbean born Creoles. As indicated previously, the meaning of the term *creole* has changed over time. With respect to Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the time period it deals with, "the most common use of the term in English was to mean 'born in the West Indies', whether white or negro. Although, the term had 'no connotation of colour' (OED), it increasingly conjured, in European eyes, the 'threat' of colonial miscegenation" (Ashcroft, 68). Focusing on the idea of "colonial miscegenation" is crucial to understanding the mentality held by both British imperialists and even ex-slaves towards Creoles. Throughout this time period the term *creole* assumed exceptionally negative connotations because of the specter of miscegenation. Thus, European-born whites, who were referred to as Creole, were considered to be tainted attributable to their close connection with the black community. Additionally, the black community and ex-slaves marginalized Creoles because of their discriminatory and exploitative treatment of them. After all, Creoles still mistreated the African community by using them as slaves even though they themselves suffered at the hands of the British. Hence, once the ex-slaves were liberated they were gives more freedom to relish their hostility towards Creoles emanating from centuries of savage treatment. More importantly, the British maintained an unfavorable outlook towards Creoles due to the ambiguous nature of their race. Rhys frankly addresses this issue in the

beginning of her novel when Antoinette describes herself as a "white cockroach", pointing directly at the revolting opinion of Creoles. What separated the Creoles from the British and ex-slaves was that there was no questioning the purity of the British's European decent or the connection to Africa by the black West Indians. Thus, what Creoles lacked was a sense of origin.

Rhys, likewise, found herself in a situation similar to her protagonist's feelings of ostracism and marginalization as a Creole woman. Like her character, Rhys never favored "England and English culture and [she] perceived herself to be, as a displaced colonial, the object of English disdain and hatred" (Raiskin, ix). The idea of displacement is significant as it demonstrates why Creoles felt psychologically and culturally displaced from black and white communities. Rhys felt Brontë's Bertha suffered the same issues of displacement and also dislocation. Moreover, these two issues are what cause the complete muting of her voice. No longer part of her land, Bertha/Antoinette loses all connection to some form of cultural and psychological identity. Rhys expands her opinions on Bertha's situation in a letter to Diana Athill:

> Of course Charlotte Brontë makes her own world, of course she convinces you, and that makes the poor Creole lunatic all the more dreadful. I remember being quite shocked, and when I re-read it rather annoyed. "That's only one side—the English side" sort of thing.
>
> (I think too that Charlotte had a "thing" about the West Indies being rather sinister places—because in another of her books "Villette" she drowns the hero, Professor Somebody, on the voyage to Guadeloupe, another very alien place—according to her). (144)

Thus, looking at Brontë's *Jane Eyre* it is clear she puts a spotlight on the British perception of Creole identity through Bertha.

Briefly, *Jane Eyre* deals with a naïve English woman named Jane who becomes involved with Edward Fairfax Rochester, symbolic of British imperialists. As the relationship progresses

Jane stumbles upon the woman in the attic, known as Bertha Antoinette Mason. Rochester marginalizes Bertha's heritage by saying, "Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard" (337). In her description of Bertha, Brontë evokes a strong notion of prejudice and animosity towards Creoles, held by Europeans at the time. Brontë adopts a similar attitude by not establishing Bertha's identity; she is only termed a *creole,* but not given a racial identity. There are several instances that hint at her whiteness; for example, when her brother Richard Mason's complexion is said to be "white". However, the exclusion of a definite race is a problematic aspect of Brontë's novel. As scholar Carolyn Vellenga Berman suggests, *Jane Eyre* "forces us to consider what Brontë stands to gain rhetorically from maintaining Bertha's racial ambiguity" (123). Berman further indicates "whether or not Brontë thought of Bertha as nonwhite, she decided not to reassure the reader that her antiheroine was white, thus playing on the racial ambiguity that had begun to attach itself to the figure of the Creole" (206). Hence, Brontë intentionally avoids ethnic specificity to suggest Creole racial impurity. Rhys hinted at Brontë's anxieties about the West Indies, and perhaps it is the quality of the unknown with respect to this land that led her to portray its inhabitants in such a harsh light. One way her fear is manifested is by her continuous focus on Bertha's color. When Jane first takes sight of Bertha she describes her as a "fearful and ghastly" creature with a "discoloured" and "savage" face. She adds, "purple the lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed: the black eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes" (327). Brontë's focus on Bertha's physical characteristics only further complicates Creole identity by disclosing the inability of the British to see past race. Brontë, also, seems to embrace the mentality of white imperialists by treating Bertha with such

harsh indifference. Moreover, by making Bertha a bestial character she concludes Creoles were unable to display elements of humanity.

Jean Rhys felt it incumbent upon her to address the woman in the attic who remained voiceless for over one hundred years. In many letters to different friends she expressed her desire, "It is that particular mad Creole I want to write about, not any other mad Creoles" (Raiskin, 136). Additionally, Rhys fully understood "the mad Creole heiresses in the early nineteenth century, whose dowries were only an additional burden to them; products of an inbred, decadent, expatriate society, resented by the recently freed slaves whose superstitions they shared, they languished uneasily in the oppressive beauty of their tropical surroundings, ripe for exploitation" (Raiskin, 6-7). Rhys' acknowledgment of the despotic nature of imperialist views suggests the need for a voice from the perspective of the Creole. Thus, through her novel she excavates hidden history of the mad woman in the attic and provides her with a voice during a transitional historical period. More importantly, she also provides the Creole woman with a sense of agency by giving her a history and not just resigning her to the position of a discolored savage.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Antoinette's agency does not only reside in the history she is given, but it is evidenced through her creolization. Throughout the novel there is a clear embracing of black Caribbean culture through Antoinette's relationship with Christophine, her reliance in African cultural traditions such as obeah, and her close bond with the land itself. Her dealings with these attachments embody her whole identity and become evidence of her creolization. As a process creolization involves "incorporating aspects of both acculturation and interculturation" (Ashcroft , 69). Thus, creolization includes close contact with different cultural groups eventually leading to assimilation, adoption, and an amalgamation of different cultural

identities and customs. In Liz Constable's "Material Histories of Transcolonial Loss" she states "creolization's starting point lies in the initial encounters of *métissage*—the intermixing of groups, languages, and cultural forms produced through the social organization of colonialism and slavery" (121). Antoinette participates in the act Constable terms as *métissage,* which she consciously chooses to do in order to use it as a response to the colonizer for their years of unjustified cruel treatment toward those labeled Creole. Thus, Antoinette's creolization is an active/conscious process. In essence, Antoinette no longer chooses to remain a muted subject. Instead, she provides herself with a sense of agency through the method of creolization. With this type of agency she can shake the system implemented by British imperialists and, also, calls into question their right to marginalize the identity/self of white Creoles.

In Part I of *Wide Sargasso Sea* we are introduced to Antoinette right after the emancipation of slaves. At this historical moment, Antoinette's family no longer holds a prominent social or economic position, which allows ex-slaves to communicate with Antoinette and her family more freely because their privilege no longer poses a threat. For example, when Antoinette begins to associate with Tia they get into an argument and Antoinette accuses Tia of being a "cheating nigger". However, knowing Antoinette no longer hold the upper hand Tia responds, "Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money…Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger" (14). Tia's statement addresses two things: first she refers to Antoinette's lack of economic and social status and more importantly she points to Antoinette's creolity and the possibility of her racial impurity. Thus, Tia also sheds light on the reason behind Antoinette and her mother's ostracism from society. Furthermore, we see the struggle Antoinette faces with respect to her race. Since she is identified as Creole a decision has to be made as to whether she will embrace her

European roots or the land that she resides in. As Antoinette struggles with this decision she faces the pressure from her mother to claim and assert her European ancestry.

As Part I progresses Antoinette expresses the conflict she feels as a result of her Creole identity when she returns from a trip to England, "I was glad to be like an English girl but I missed the taste of Christophine's cooking" (21). However, as she is surrounded with the presence of Mr. Mason, Annette's new husband who is emblematic of "the English who brought new capital to the ruined estates previously maintained by slave labor", Antoinette builds a disdain for his inability to see the danger he is putting them in by believing he can exert his imperial/patriarchal dominance without upsetting the ex-slaves (16). Her anger towards him is evident when she refers to him as "white pappy", which is how slaves would refer to their masters "not so much as a sign of respect as a veiled but mocking form of aggression" (20). Thus, when the ex-slaves attack Mr. Mason's home, burning it down, after learning of his plan to import labourers from the East Indies, Antoinette finally decides she can no longer consciously associate herself with Europeans. She sees Tia and her mother in the distance and remembers the life she had prior to Mr. Mason's arrival and runs to her thinking, "she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river." In this moment there is strong evidence of Antoinette's choice to embrace her creolization viewing Tia as a sister, as family. To Antoinette, Tia represents the authentic African roots belonging to the Caribbean, ones she identifies with after having lived there all of her life. As she runs to Tia, escaping the patriarchal dominance of her stepfather and the influence of her mother, Antoinette explains:

> I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her 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 was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (27)

Lee Erwin clearly highlights the significance of this moment between Antoinette and Tia in his work entitled "History and Narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*" as he says "Having been subjected both to her mother's attempts to make her 'white' and to the metropolitan view that the effort is a failure, Antoinette will try to be black, not an anomalous 'white nigger.' But the violence with which her wish is met closes off that position as well" (209). Hence, in Part I there is vivid proof of Antoinette's conscious choice to fully creolize herself by wholly embracing the life and cultural identity of the Caribbean in choosing to leave with Tia. However, as Erwin suggests, Antoinette is brutally rejected by the African community and has to pause the process of her creolization. Yet, through further reading of Rhys' novel it is obvious that Antoinette does not give up on creolizing her identity.

Scholarship suggests *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not demonstrate the strength of Creole women or their ability to possess themselves. Instead, scholars feel female Creole identity is completely controlled through the domination of patriarchy, and only relates a tale of loss. Looking at Rhy's whole oeuvre, Mary Lou Emery proposes her characters are "lacking authentic selfhood in European terms" and "do not appear capable of overcoming difficulties; they seem weak, lacking in courage, and willingly exploited. They continually miss opportunities for epiphany or self-awareness" (164). Moreover, Emery questions Rhys' standing as a feminist due to her feeble female characters. Some even point to Rhys' failure in adequately revealing the process of creolization. Maria Cristina Fumagalli suggests the characters focus on their "profound sense of alienation and isolation" and do not seek a form of agency, but allow the situation of imperial hegemony to become a psychologically and culturally debilitating situation (198). Although Emery contends Antoinette's character is too fragile to form any fight against

her white imperialist husband and Fumagalli suggests *Wide Sargasso Sea* does little to represent the process of creolization, both ignore the conscientious decisions made by Antoinette to fight for her identity given the historical constraints which confine her freedom to choose.

Although Antoinette is a recognized as a dispossessed woman and one lacking in cultural identity I argue that she assumes possession of her own identity and makes a purposeful decision to seek a form of agency. From the outset of the novel Antoinette is forced to decide what her role as a Creole woman means to her. Antoinette initially struggles against the established notions thrust upon Euro-Creole women of the time by British imperialists. However, she eventually finds a method. Antoinette defies her race as a white European, by embracing African traditions. Essentially she is not afraid to deny ties to Eurocentric systems. Antoinette uses the process of cultural mixing to embrace Creole society and identity and invents a unique way of liberating herself from the unbearable burden created by British imperialists and patriarchal ideologies. Mary Lou Emery points to an important task Antoinette sets upon herself, which is "a quest for identity that is also a quest for 'elsewhere' as an alternate history and community" (172). After losing her home in Coulibri as well as her mother, Antoinette does not allow herself to get lost amongst the brutal treatment of ex-slaves nor the overpowering presence of her new husband Rochester. In reality, she does what Emery proclaims is necessary; she seeks a sense of belonging within the Caribbean. Her quest is revealed through her decision to accept the process of acculturation in the connection she has with Christophine. Essentially, Antoinette chooses to associate herself with a woman who is completely entrenched in African culture and customs as a way of completely cutting her ties with her European heritage.

The process of creolization is seen in Antoinette's faith and trusts in Christophine in that Christophine's methodologies are reliant on African spiritual practices such as obeah. As

Rochester begins to distance himself from Antoinette because he believes she has become fully creolized she seeks the refuge of Christophine and believes in Christophine's power to mend her fractured relationship:

> "Christophine," I said, "I may do as you advise. But not yet." (Now, I thought, I must say what I came to say.) "You knew what I wanted as soon as you saw me, and you certainly know now. Well, don't you?" I heard my voice getting high and thin."
>
> "Hush up," she said. "If the man don't love you, I can't make him love you."
>
> "Yes you can, I know you can. That is what I wish and that is why I came here. You can make people love or hate. Or . . . or die," I said. (67)

Antoinette's desperate pursuit of Christophine's help elevates her reliance on African cultures and medical practices and serves to mark her repudiation of European beliefs. She exemplifies a strong sense of creolization in this moment because she accepts African rituals as her own. Essentially, through her embracing of Christophine's cultural beliefs in such elements as obeah, she emasculates Rochester because he does not have control over her. Mona Fayad explains the effect Antoinette and Christophine's relationship has over Rochester as she says, "he finds in Christophine, the 'source' of her evil magic. Right from their first encounter, Christophine emerges as stronger than he, a towering figure whom Rochester perceives as a 'phallic mother' who 'castrates' him" (235). Consequently, whether consciously or subconsciously, Antoinette understands the power Christophine can maintain over Rochester

Part of why Antoinette's creolization acts as a form of agency is because she is faced with the burden of double colonization. According to *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* double colonization "refers to the observation that women are subjected to both the colonial domination of Empire and the male domination of patriarchy. In this respect, empire and patriarchy act as analogous to each other and both exert control over female colonial subjects,

who are, thus doubly colonized by imperial/patriarchal power" (89). Thus, the Rochester figure is clearly emblematic of both imperial and patriarchal power and in this position he possesses the ability to make Antoinette lose her identity/self completely. Knowing this Antoinette chastises and condemns him for his dual Eurocentrism and brings up her the unjust treatment of both ex-slaves and Creoles:

> "…I thought you liked the black people so much," she said, still in that mincing voice, "but that's just a lie like everything else. You like the light brown girls better, don't you? You abused the planters and made up stories about them, but you do the same thing. You send the girl away quicker, and with no money or less money, and that's all the difference."
>
> "Slavery was not a matter of liking or disliking," I said, trying to speak calmly. "It was a question of justice."
>
> "Justice," she said. "I've heard that word. It's a cold word. I tried it out," she said, still speaking in a low voice. "I wrote it down. I wrote it down several times and always it looked like a damn cold lie to me. There is not justice." She drank some more rum and went on, "My mother whom you all talk about, what justice did she have? My mother sitting in the rocking-chair speaking about dead horses and dead grooms and a black devil kissing her sad mouth. Like you kissed mine," she said. (88)

This moment between Antoinette and Rochester is crucial in establishing the major power struggle between the Creole and European/patriarchal hegemony. One fundamental concern Rhys demonstrates through her words is the indifferent attitude held by British settlers towards the ex-slaves and Creoles. As Antoinette attacks Rochester and the British imperialists that he represents, she hones in on their hypocritical conduct. Moreover, she receives a moment of clarity that opens up her eyes to the danger the white man exhibits concerning Creole identity. It is at this moment that Antoinette establishes a wholly conscious need to challenge Eurocentric ideologies and contemplates the need for justice after its long held absence.

Christophine's presence in *Wide Sargasso Sea* was methodically constructed by Jean Rhys in order to fight against her own issues with imperial/patriarchal attitudes towards Caribbean subjectivity. Rhys intentionally separates Christophine from imperial/patriarchal

presence and Creole subjectivity, and creates a realm solely for Christophine through her powers of obeah. Obeah allows Christophine to hold reign over her own identity as a black woman. Rhys addresses the power of obeah in a letter she writes to Francis Wyndham, and shares that it was through a poem she wrote where her ideas came full circle:

> Only when I wrote this poem—then it clicked—and all was there and always had been. The first clue is Obeah which I assure you existed, and still does…The second clue was when Miss Athill suggested a few weeks of happiness for the unfortunate couple—before he gets disturbing letters. As soon as I wrote that bit I realized that [Rochester] must have fallen for [Antoinette]—and violently too. The black people have or had a good word for it—'she *magic* with him' or 'he *magic* with her'. Because you see, that is what it is—magic, intoxication. Not 'Love' at all…From the start it must be made clear that Christophine is 'an obeah woman'. (139)

Therefore, Rhys intentionally labeled Christophine as "an obeah woman" in order to make her existence separate from the other characters and to suggest that she is not confounded by the same demands as other women in the text. Instead, Christophine is a woman who is free from the law as she relates to Rochester as he tries to assert his imperial/patriarchal authority over her. Gayatri Spivak also explains Christophine's significant role in that she "is the first interpreter and named speaking subject" in the novel (245). Spivak adds, when Antoinette tries to use obeah as a way of controlling Rochester Christophine tells her "that black ritual practices are culture-specific and cannot be used by whites as cheap remedies for social evils, such as Rochester's lack of love for Antoinette. Most important it is Christophine alone whom Rhys allows to offer a hard analysis of Rochester's actions, to challenge him in a face-to-face encounter" (245). Consequently, Christophine is a necessary presence for Antoinette because she defies all imperial/patriarchal attempts to dominate.

Allied with the black woman, Antoinette rebels yet further against the imperialist Rochester. From the onset of Rochester's meeting Christophine he feels she is a threat to his authority over Antoinette. Sandra Drake enlightens readers on Rochester's anxieties stating:

> [Rochester] fears that Christophine [possesses the power to] intervene on Antoinette's behalf when Antoinette appeals to her for help. She does so in the honeymoon house and, much later, in the corridors and on the battlements of Thornfield Hall. After the scene in the honeymoon house, Rochester concludes that he must separate Antoinette from Christophine, from the Black Caribbean." (201)

Drake's observation addresses two ideas: one being that Rochester is threatened by Antoinette's connection to Caribbean culture and two Antoinette's choice to rely on these marginalized traditions is an attempt at her forming a sense of female agency. However, the white community, represented by Rochester fervently seeks ways to deny Antoinette her gendered process of creolization. The more Rochester realizes the threat Christophine poses the more he seeks a way to rid the obeah woman of her power. Mona Fayad explains Rochester is "satisfied to discover that he has some legal power over [Christophine] which he can exercise to put her into jail. By threatening her, he is able to break the 'pact' that she has with Antoinette and, therefore, to weaken the power of both women" (235). Consequently, allowing Christophine to serve as her protector and denying the protection of her husband, Antoinette exerts another level of agency over her being. She breaks the confines of her double colonization in keeping her association with the Other, evidenced through Christophine as a Black woman and a Martiniquean. Thus, this is a double blow at Rochester's imperialist and patriarchal presence. Accordingly, Rochester removes Antoinette from the Caribbean in order to cut her process and to continue the job of muting her identity, voice, self, psyche.

By locking Antoinette up Rochester replicates actions used against Antoinette's mother, Annette Cosway, in order to muddle her identity and completely force her to forget any

connection to the Caribbean. Although Annette's husband, Mr. Mason, differs from Rochester in that he looks to stay in the Caribbean to retain the privileges of the plantocracy, he exercises a similar form of patriarchal power. After their marriage Antoinette relates a conversation she overhears explaining Mr. Mason's true intentions "He didn't come to the West Indies to dance—he came 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" (Rhys, 17). Hence, Mr. Mason sees opportunity in Annette and is willing to marry her even though she is a Creole woman. However, he does not ignore opportunities to mute Annette, just like Rochester attempts to do to Antoinette. Mason's domineering position is symbolized in his treatment of Annette's green parrot Coco. With no real explanation Antoinette mentions Mason clipped the wings of Coco. In Rhys' novel birds are emblematic of human struggle and point to Annette's fight in maintaining a form of freedom or identity. However Annette's defeat is witnessed during the burning of her home when Coco tries to escape, but he cannot because "his clipped wings failed him and he fell screeching. He was all on fire" (25). Therefore, like Coco, Annette loses all attempts to gain a sense of freedom or power because of her exhaustive struggle with patriarchy. Moreover, attention to the treatment of Annette by Mr. Mason furthers the never-ending inferior position placed upon women. Like her mother, Antoinette is viewed as a colonial other in Rochester's eyes and he sees her as someone lacking in Victorian values, but one whose mentality is more like those who imperialists viewed as uneducated and without culture. Furthermore, the closer Antoinette gets to Christophine as a way of holding onto her creolization, Rochester deems it necessary to cut her off from this potent land and put her away.

Thus, the end of Part II of the novel Rochester enacts his strongest authority over Antoinette by removing her from the Caribbean and towing her away to England. He increases

his power over her by locking her away in the attic, as witnessed in Brontë's *Jane Eyre.* However, the culminating scene in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is highly symbolic of Antoinette's final moment of creolization as a form of agency. Rhys assists in giving Antoinette a form of agency by allowing her the last word in the novel, it becomes highly symbolic of Antoinette's ability to reassert herself as a woman and more importantly as a Creole. Moreover, Antoinette, once again, seeks refuge in her mother figure Christophine as she calls out "help me Christophine help me", but Christophine responds as Antoinette narrates, "looking behind me I saw that I had been helped. There was a wall of fire protecting me" (112). Hence, Antoinette embraces two forms of agency by clinging to her Creole roots and by seeking the help of a woman. Therefore, Antoinette's creolization becomes gendered as she opposes the dominance of imperial/patriarchal forces through the influence of Christophine. Moreover, Christophine's ability to create a wall of protection confirms Rochester's earlier fears of being emasculated by the obeah woman. Effectively, Antoinette creolizes herself by choosing to exact the same mentality as the ex-slaves do by expressing her anger towards the white man who has spent hundreds of years dominating the spirit of the African community and European Creoles. As Lee Erwin states, Antoinette's "leap represents a celebration of or fantasized union with a blackness finally seen to have been the desire of her narrative all along" (154). Therefore, Antoinette/Bertha can no longer remain voiceless and authorizes a strong moment of both literal and metaphoric rebellion against Rochester and more importantly against his exemplification of British imperialism. Consequently, her choice to set fire to Thornfield Hall provides her with her strongest sense of agency.

CHAPTER III

BECOMING WHOLE THROUGH CREOLIZATION IN MICHELLE CLIFF'S *NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN*

Like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* serves as a testament to the struggles of Creole identity. *No Telephone to Heaven* revisits and concentrates on a fractured group who, through years of influence from British colonizers and Hollywood cultural imperialism, lose sight of their strong African ancestry. In this chapter I focus attention on Michelle Cliff's protagonist Clare Savage, who self-identifies as a Creole woman. In my first chapter I identified creolization as a method used by Antoinette Cosway to exact a form of agency against British imperialists and patriarchal hegemony. Like Antoinette, Clare seeks a more unified and less fragmented identity through processes of creolization. However, unlike Antoinette, Clare faces fewer constraints than Antoinette and is ultimately more successful. Thus, this chapter illustrates Clare's conscious choice to elevate the process of creolization in that she does not see it as only an individual use, as Antoinette does. Instead, Clare institutes a more forceful acceptance of creolization by symbolically adopting it as continuous process used by Caribbean subjects in order to perpetuate a self-governing identity against imperial and patriarchal hegemonization. Consequently, Clare's creolization does not work as an individual process, but one she uses to transform her society as a whole.

Despite being known as an Afro-Caribbean writer, Michelle Cliff spent her life as a light-skinned woman who was taught to reject her African heritage. Her Creole identity put her in the

same privileged position as her protagonist Clare Savage since she could "pass" as white. Although Cliff closely portrays the identity crises a Creole woman would encounter in Caribbean society through her novels, this is a problematic issue from some scholars. Sally O'Driscoll suggest Cliff's identity is not authentic enough and "her work is 'deauthorized' or delegitimated for a Caribbean context" (60). O'Driscoll's reasoning stems from her belief that Cliff is not linked enough to Caribbean culture, lacking a sense of positionality in the framework of the Caribbean. She refers to Caribbean women writers Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson who "suggest that Clare's inability to find an authentic identity is due to author Cliff's lack of authenticity in a Caribbean context. Mordecai and Wilson locate the problems of Cliff's authenticity in her personal history: her color, her schooling, her removal from the island" (62). As O'Driscoll explains, "it appears therefore that color and class—access to schooling—are the factors that undermine Cliff's authenticity and cause her to be categorized with European-descended white (that is, with no African blood) writers such as Jean Rhys" (63). However, contrary to the opinion of these scholars, Cliff's novels take as their central thematic the troubles encountered by those of black and multiracial ancestry and culture. Thus, like their creator, Cliff's protagonists are uniquely Caribbean in their identity politics and their struggle with the geopolitics of her community. Furthermore, Cliff and Clare suffer the profound alienation that results from their racial position, in turn exiling them.

Spanning the period from the late 1950s, before Jamaica's independence, to the late 1970s, Clare's history begins more than one hundred years after Antoinette Cosway's, but similarly encompasses a time of historical, political, and social revolutions. Jamaica, like many Caribbean lands, sought freedom from the oppression of colonial ideologies. The people had already lost most of their cultural identity as the colonizer, and before colonization, the slave

owner dominated every aspect of their land. In Michelle Cliff's *Abeng,* a prequel to *No Telephone to Heaven,* Cliff relates the profound presence of British imperialism as she describes her homeland:

> In 1958 Jamaica had two rulers: a white queen and a white governor. Independence-in-practically-name-only was four years away…. The population of the island was primarily Black ('overwhelmingly,' some sources said), with gradations of shading reaching into the top strata of the society. Africans were mixed with Sephardic Jews, Chinese, Syrians, Lebanese, East Indians—but the large working class, and class of poor people, was Black." (5)

Furthermore, Cliff emphasizes the residual effects of slavery on the black community post-emancipation:

> There was no cash compensation for the people who had labored under slavery. No tracts of land for them to farm. No employment for the most part. No literacy programs. No money to book passage back to Africa. Their enslavement had become an inconvenience—and now it was removed. All the forces which worked to keep these people slaves now worked to keep them poor. And poor most of them remained. (29)

Relating such detail in *Abeng* communicates the important historical elements of Cliff's time, as her homeland slowly moved towards its independence, finally gaining some form of repayment after years of misappropriation. Her description addresses a critical moment as England has fully altered the identity of Jamaica in its ability to influence the mindset of those who, like Clare's father, Boy Savage, are of mixed race. She directly points toward the strong prejudices held by whites living in the Caribbean, and acknowledges the need for a historical and cultural revolution in order to reestablish Jamaican identity that faced erasure at the hands of imperialism. A side point to consider is the influence Jamaican independence had on the emancipation of other Caribbean lands. Through the fight and determination of Jamaica and its people, other territories were also able to exact their own freedom from British rule, with consequence of course. Although territories found their independence, they could not maintain

full sovereignty without the presence of former colonizers. Instead, lands like the French Caribbean continued to hold a "revised colonial relationship with France, one that favored the policy of assimilation of the territories into France rather than to move toward greater autonomy or independence" (Hunte, 3). Therefore, the consequence of freedom was that these Caribbean lands could not be self-sufficient without needing the help of the colonizer. In essence, the colonizer debilitated the colonized to the extent that their presence would always necessary.

Cliff's *Abeng* gives grander insights to the beginning of Clare's conflicted identity, resulting from the historical context of the Caribbean. She focuses on the affects of slavery and its responsibility for creating a community of broken descendants who lost their connection to their cultural roots at the hands of slave owners. From a young age, as evidenced in *Abeng*, Clare is cognizant of her African ancestry and conflicted by their marginalized history. One day Boy Savage and Clare spend the day together, and he takes her to an old plantation owned by his white forebears. Clare becomes overwhelmed by the history that no longer exists, but permeates through the plantation in small imperceptible ways. Focusing on the walls of the great home with their profound salty taste, Clare cannot help but wonder what had passed through the home over time:

> she sometimes imagined that the walls of certain places were the records of those places—the events which happened there….The walls might not be able to reveal exactly what they had seen, but perhaps they could indicate to a visitor something, if only a clue, about the time which had passed through them (33).

Thus, the visit to the plantation home is a pivotal moment for Clare as it serves to make her conscious of her close connection with the treatment of slaves in a twofold way. First, she is connected through her patrilineal history, a family of plantation and slave owners who treated slaves in a savage like way. Second, she connects with their history through her matrilineal

presence since her mother is of African ancestry. Hence, Clare cannot help but feel conflicted by her mixed identity. She feels a strong sense of guilt because she is ancestrally connected to the horrible treatment of slaves, and yet has a lineage to the slaves. Moreover, the salt on the walls becomes a literal and symbolic preservation of history and tragedy. Though not able to speak, Clare is hopeful the walls can whisper some piece of truth to future visitors so that the suffering faced by her matrilineal line is not forgotten. Additionally, this scene is evidence of Clare's early understanding, though not clear to her, of the need to connect with her matrilineal ancestry as a way of healing her strained psyche.

Part of the conflict Clare endures is that she identifies as both black and white. She is of mixed race, and her ancestry is blanketed with a history of miscegenation. Despite such racial mixing, Clare Savage's family exists in a more Anglicized community and privileges its whiteness. Possessing such a white complexion may seem inconsequential, but during the time Clare lives in, her whiteness allows her family to pass as white. Her father, Boy Savage, wholly denies he maintains traces of African ancestry. Instead, he preserves a mentality of racial superiority, closely linked to those of the plantocracy. As is established by Cliff in *Abeng*, Boy Savage held the same racial nuances as his familial line:

> The definition of what a Savage was like was fixed by color, class, and religion, and over the years a carefully contrived mythology was constructed, which they used to protect their identities. When they were poor, and not all of them white, the mythology persisted. They swore by it. (29-30)

Knowing the mentality held by Boy Savage and his European ancestors qualifies Clare Savage's own unstable identity in that she is of both black and white race, an important detail her father wants her to abandon. Instead, he forces her to disown her connection to the black community, which requires her to also reject her matrilineal beginnings. What makes Boy Savage's presence

more problematic is that his "whiteness" stems from his European ancestry who owned plantations and did not hide the savage treatment of their slaves, who are also Boy Savage's ancestors. Ultimately, Boy willfully erases the reality of his ancestry choosing to forget his direct connection with black Caribbean's. As Cliff describes in *Abeng,* when anyone asked the Savage family about "the knotty hair of a first cousin…the too-dark skin of a newborn baby…[or] about cousin so-and-so being mistaken for 'colored'" the Savages would immediately redirect the conversation to the Savage ancestor "who had 'done his duty' on-board the *H. M. S. Victory* with Nelson at Trafalgar"(30). Since Boy Savage can easily forget his forebears he expects Clare to do the same. Therefore, Clare relates to Antoinette in the erasure/denial of her blackness because it is akin to "Rochester's" efforts to sever Antoinette's identification with Black culture and community. As Boy Savage demands Clare to delete any bond she tries to uphold with her African heritage we are reminded of Rochester's obliterating any connection Antoinette held to her Creoleness. Hence, Antoinette and Clare fight the limitations imposed on them by imperial/patriarchal presence as they are both denied the right to connect with the African race.

Critic Shirley Toland-Dix explains Boy Savage's demand that Clare perpetuate notions of racial superiority:

> Boy and Kitty Savage illustrate the significance of nuances of color differences within the Jamaica system of colorism…. [Boy's family does] not acknowledge an African admixture. Staunchly identifying with his white forebears, Boy applies himself to teaching Clare to accept injustice, inequality, and exclusion as constitutive of her privilege, as they are of his self-definition. Boy is training his eldest daughter to pass. (40)

Boy fundamentally expects Clare to ignore the reality of her white ancestors just like he has done his entire life, and perpetuates a Eurocentric mentality during a time of civil rights movements. For Boy it is easier to remain in the past than to acknowledge any need for change. However, as

witnessed partly in *Abeng* and dominantly in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare communicates the strength provided by creolization in that it allows a true transformation of beliefs and ideologies. She refuses to accept the Eurocentric beliefs held by her father and finds "new ways of thinking, knowing and imagining that diverge from colonialist epistemologies and exclusionary identity formations based in fixed notions of race, language and nation" (Hesse 39). Thus, Clare revolutionizes her identity by denying the demands of old Eurocentric political ideologies.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff illustrates the insecure nature of Clare's psyche as she battles her racial identity. From the beginning of the novel Cliff links Clare's racial alienation and instabilities to imperialistic ideologies. We first meet Clare as a nameless, "light-skinned woman" described as "Someone's overseas cousin pale from compulsive intermarriage and northern lights", which forcibly places her color as a primary issue (21). Examining the issue of racial identification is an idea that Cliff addresses from the beginning of her novel in order to place Creoles in a position of exhibiting a destabilized sense of self. Facing perpetual issues with her mixed race makes it difficult for Clare to find a sense of belonging. Clare expresses her conflicted feelings to her boyfriend Bobby about her identity after their journey to Paris:

> I was raised by my father to be....the soft-spoken little sambo, creole, invisible neger, what have you, blending into the majority with ease...You know, there are people who look one way and think another, feel another. We can be very dangerous to ourselves, to others. Got to quell one side, honey, so I was taught. Amazing...amazing how the other side persists. (152)

The conversation between Clare and Bobby strongly relates Clare's inability to identify with any specific race. As she tells Bobby, her racial mixing is something Boy Savage has taught her to ignore, as he was taught to do. However, Antoinette admits she cannot shut her Creole identity on and off. She suggests that it is an invisible part of her identity. The conversation also discloses Clare's need to distance herself completely from her father's imperial/patriarchal

influence that has been imbedded into Clare's psyche. If she continues to adopt his mentality Clare fears she will lose herself entirely. More importantly, she fears she will forget any connection with her African self. Thus, Clare's words also exemplify the need for her to journey and seek a sense of space and belonging within a community who accepts her Creole identity.

Opal Adisa questions Cliff about growing up in Jamaica and "the whole attitude toward color" that her family developed by living in multiple countries. Cliff describes a "weird situation" she and her family faced while migrating between New York and Jamaica. In order to protect themselves in America, Cliff's family was forced to "pass" as white; and, as she illuminated, the duality of her race led to a "strange and very schizophrenic" environment. Her own passing as white is reflected in Clare behaving as the good "little sambo, creole" her father taught her to be. The previous paragraph referred to Clare's statement about the danger of being Creole in that she contains a dual race and, therefore, a dual mentality. This points to the schizophrenic nature of her life. Therefore, being forced to pretend clearly demonstrates the tacit emotional trauma and social isolation faced by the Creole subject who is of mixed race. Cliff expounds on the difficulty, as a Creole, to maintain a fixed identity. Thus, her works undeniably point towards the need for Creole subjects, such as Clare Savage, to reclaim their identity.

Despite being taught to deny her heritage by her own father, Clare finds the strength to expose what he felt she should hide. Further still, Clare honors her mother's last request to change the history of her Caribbean people. In a final letter to Clare, Kitty Savage exhorts her to "'make something of [herself], and someday help your people.' A reminder, daughter—never forget who your people are. Your responsibilities lie beyond me, beyond yourself. There is a space between who you are and who you will become. Fill it" (103). Reflecting on Kitty's words is the catalyst that earlier motivated Clare to first leave the Americas and to begin her

migration. More importantly, it is Clare's identification with her blackness and, as is revealed toward the end of the novel, her possible Native American traces, that causes the beginning of Clare's creolization. Considering the centuries of discrimination towards her African roots by her Anglicized family, Clare has essentially suffered under the hands of the colonizer and has been forced to identify as white. However, after the death of her mother, Clare can no longer be "the girl taught to conceal unsettling evidence of herself" (157). Instead, she chooses to decolonize by identifying as a woman of color. Clare's separation from the white community is witnessed in an argument between her and Boy Savage, when Boy berates Clare's inability to cry for Kitty and says she has more sympathy "for niggers than for [her] own mother" (104). Astonishingly, Clare does not respond with the same cowardly attitude as Boy has taught her. Bravely, Clare empowers not only her mother, but also herself by identifying as a "nigger", just like her mother, and wholly embraces the hidden part of her self. The ability to claim her black identity in such a forceful way functions as a strong form of acculturation for Clare and it helps her to start accepting the different parts of her black identity. Additionally, Clare's moment of agency helps her to exact her identity as a woman against the binds of patriarchal dominance. Cliff's narrative structure also symbolizes Clare's unwillingness to allow patriarchy to dictate her identity through the removal of Boy Savage from the text. After Clare's exodus from America his character disappears from the text and Clare denies her connection with her whiteness.

The process of Clare's creolization does not end there. After the death of her mother Kitty, Clare's sister Jennie moves back in after having lived with their mother in Jamaica. With Jennie's presence Clare becomes more curious about her mother and asks whether Kitty left anything behind, whether she every spoke of her, something/anything to feel a connection to her

matrilineage. Jennie does not have much herself, but she is able to provide Clare with a few insights as she inquires:

> "Did she ever say why she left?"
>
> The girl just stared at the ring around her neck.
>
> "Why she left this place so suddenly? I know she couldn't stand it…could not make herself at home…and she had just lost Grandma…but did she ever say why she didn't take me as well?"
>
> The girl spoke without looking at her sister. "One time she say she feel you would prosper here. She say is because you favor backra, and fe you Daddy. Don't feel bad, man." (105)

Kitty's words seem to make Clare acknowledge the distance that has been put between her and any connection to her matrilineal line, a relationship she needs to reestablish in order to further her process of embracing the African heritage of her Creole identity. With that insight Clare can no longer live in a world, so far removed from her true identity, which forces her to disregard her ancestry. Therefore, when she finishes high school Clare decides to leave her family to being her exploration and, as Cliff narrates, "nothing held her" (106). Through her journey Clare begins to establish a sense of self by migrating to different lands in search of her history/heritage.

Initially Clare believes moving to England will bring solace to her fragmented self. Clare, admits to choosing London "with the logic of a creole. This was the mother-country. The country by whose grace her people existed in the first place. Her place could be here" (109). However, during her stay in England Clare confronts the reality that she is more broken than she imagined. When a friend named Liz asks Clare to accompany her on a visit to her old school, Clare joins her and wanders on her own towards an old church. She encounters a monument of Pocahontas and is captivated by its iconic glory, naïve to its being symbolic of colonial conquest. She walks further into the church and reads about "the bronze-woman" and finds out that "she had been tamed, renamed Rebecca" (136). As she learns more about this renamed woman, Clare faces an important moment where she becomes confused about her sense of belonging as she

thinks, "something was wrong. She had no sense of the woman under the weight of all these monuments. She thought of her, her youth, her color, her strangeness, her unbearable loneliness. Where was she now?" (137). Cliff uses this moment between Clare and the monument of Pocahontas as further revelation of historical dominance and a cycle endured by marginalized races. Just as the "bronze-woman" was stripped of her identity, Clare realizes how similar their worlds are, and is faced with a literal symbolic image of the genesis of European hegemony. Like her counterpart, Clare has no established sense of space, no recognizable racial identity, and in Clare's case no clear understanding or embracing of her Creole identity. Her conceptualization of these issues forces Clare to seek a form of reconciliation.

Through perpetual migration Clare becomes more aware of her Caribbean identity. While still in England Clare witnesses a march by right-wing nationalists against immigrants from from Britain's former colonies. Clare is completely unsettled by this march due to her identification with those who are being protested against. Her friend Liz tries to comfort her by saying Clare is not one of them. In that moment Clare can no longer bring herself to pass as white. She tells Liz, "I am…by blood…the sort they, [and others], were ranting on about" (139). Liz's response to Clare sheds light on the crucial issue Clare has been avoiding and battling when she tells her, "But your blood has thinned, or thickened, or whatever it does when…you know what I mean" (139). What Liz communicates to Clare forces her to make a decision with respect to her mixed identity. No longer able to find solace in England, Clare is forced to continue her migration towards reconciliation with her self. Ironically, before her next move, she receives a letter from her transgendered friend Harry/Harriet who asks Clare whether she's closer to making her choice about her need to reconcile her identity. Unable to fully confront her matrilineal history and process of creolization, despite Harry/Harriet's implying that she needs this process, Clare

escapes with her boyfriend Bobby to Paris. Despite multiple attempts, Clare cannot escape her issues. As Clare and Bobby discuss the burdens they cannot rid themselves of, Bobby tells Clare what she has not been able to admit to herself, "Baby, you got to get to the place where you are apart from your mother, your father, while still being a part of them. For they made you, like it or not" (153). After this moment Bobby leaves Clare, which forces her to return to her motherland.

Clare Savage's migration to her motherland thus leads to her strongest sense of creolization as it is there that she begins to reconnect with her cultural and matrilineal history in African, Native American, and Maroon cultures. Through creolization Clare is able to assess the fragmented nature of her ancestry. As Stuart Hall explains "creolization *always* entails inequality, hierarchization, issues of domination and subalternity, mastery and servitude, control and resistance. Questions of power, as well as issues of entanglement, are always at stake" (31). Thus, Clare's deliberate execution of creolization is profound as she chooses to endure a higher level of disparity through her cultural mixing. Lionnet and Shih point to a term Boaventura de Sousa Santos coins as "epistemicide". They suggest "epistemicide" deals with the idea that, historically, "structures of knowledge have been made hierarchical, privileging a perspective that is misconstrued as universal" (27). Hence, for Clare to begin a search for the origin of her ancestry and to find ways of revealing pieces that have been forgotten, challenges privileged epistemologies. She does not wish to accept the historical anecdotes provided to her through the biased lens of her father. Instead, she creates her own cultural and historical grounding by learning of her matrilineal history firsthand.

Having lost her mother and grandmother, Clare turns to Harry/Harriet as a form of matrilineal presence to help with her process of creolization. His vigor is what mobilizes Clare

to gather the strength to confront the burdens inflicted upon her by colonial influenced geopolitics of Caribbean culture. He helps Clare to understand a choice can be made as to whether she will allow her situation to dictate her identity or if she can find a means to gain control of her identity. Harry/Harriet helps Clare to recognize that by embracing her identity and forging past imperial/patriarchal confines she can gain agency. Nada Elia, an expert in African literature, emphasizes the situation Harry/Harriet finds himself in and relates:

> In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Harry/Harriet's complexity is represented physically in her/his bisexuality and biraciality, but also intellectually in her/his training, which combines western and non-western knowledge. But the most significant aspect of *No Telephone to Heaven* is that Harry/Harriet never undergoes a physical transformation, remaining ever dual in body, as indeed is the fate of all Creoles, diasporans and biracials for who transformation is impossible. The only option available to hybrids is a reconciliation with the various elements that make up their identity, a spiritual healing that gets these elements into viable wholeness rather than fragmentation. (353)

Thus, Harry/Harriet serves as a medium for Clare to be healed by forcing her to accept her transculturation. Nadia Elia additionally points out that, it is Harry/Harriet "who bestows that crucial power of self-definition upon Clare, who had found herself, an immigrant child in the U.S., as an unknown entity, unrecognizable to herself."

In order to fully embrace her process of transculturation, Harry/Harriet makes Clare cognizant of the need to know the land and how it works. She cannot embrace her African roots without acknowledging the battles her people have faced and continue to face. Harry/Harriet makes Clare contemplate vital issues occurring right in front of her as s/he states:

> Cyann live on this island and not understand how it work, how the world work. Cyann pass the Dungle, cyaan smell the Dungle, and not know this island is the real world...in the worst way. Even if you were to live your entire life on this island, and never see nor smell the Dungle, nuh mus' know it there? It nuh stand as warning for all a we--no matter how light? how bright? how much of dem labrish we master? Nuh mus' question? (123)

This conversation between Harry/Harriet happens before Clare actually moves back to Jamaica. However, it points to the fact that Harry/Harriet plays a significant role in Clare's process. His/Her words sit deep within her for many years. His/Her questions in the end are pointed directly at Clare, asking her whether she will truly embrace her homeland, whether she can find the strength to become a part of a movement that can alter the history of her people.

Therefore, after she returns to Jamaica, Clare becomes heavily involved in the politics of her homeland and is introduced to a guerrilla movement by Harry/Harriet. In a discussion with the leader of the group, the woman probes Clare and questions her connection to her homeland:

> "To whom do you owe your allegiance?"
> "I have African, English, Carib in me."
> "Can we trust you?"
> "I believe things must change…"
> "Truly?"
> "How could anyone not believe that?"
> "There are those who do not, as you well know."
> "Yes, of course. I…if anything, I owe my allegiance to the place my grandmother made." (189)

The dialogue between Clare and the woman establishes Clare's new sense of belonging. She no longer expresses trepidation when questioned about her identity and her origin. Clare, unabashedly, claims that she owes her life to her matrilineal beginnings, and that is what she wholeheartedly represents. Clare also states that she returned to Jamaica because it became a need, a need to heal and part of the healing was through her teaching of students. She explains to the woman:

> "I returned to this island to mend…to bury…my mother…I returned to this island because there was nowhere else…I could live no longer in borrowed countries…"
> "What history do you bring to your students?"
> "The history of their…our homeland."
> "How have you found this history?"

> "I have educated myself since my return. Spoken with the old people…leafed through the archives downtown…spent time at the university library…one thing leads to another. I have studied the conch knife excavated at the Arawak site in White Marl…the shards of hand-thrown pots…the petroglyphs hidden in the bush…listened to the stories about Nanny and taken them to heart. I have seen the flock of white birds fly out at sunset for Nannytown…duppies, the old people say."
>
> "Duppies?"
>
> "Ghosts; the spirits of Maroons."
>
> "What else…what other sources?"
>
> "Stories of Anansi…Oshun…Shango…I have walked the cane…poked through the ruins…rusted machines marked Glasgow…standing as they were left. I have swum underwater off the cays."
>
> "History can be found underwater."
>
> "Yes—some history is only underwater."
>
> "This is a departure for you."
>
> "Yes." (193)

Clare's description of the different studies she participates in point to her focus on slave experience, Native American archeology sites, and Nanny, the heroic female Maroon leader. Her emphasis on all of these aspects of her matrilineal ancestry helps create a synergetic history and creolized subjectivity. Clare also points towards her desire to use creolization as a dynamic process in that she will continue to rebuild the history of her matrilineal heritage. Thus, Clare's matrilineal ancestry liberates her from the confines of British imperialists, also felt through the presence of her father, and allows her to gain a full consciousness of her identity. In her metaphorical and literal journey towards reconciliation, Clare does not study her history at a superficial level. Rather, she builds a strong foundation of her historical origins. The quest for knowledge of her homeland has a well roundedness that studies philosophical, historical, geographical, customary, and ancestral aspects of the Caribbean. When she speaks of the different stories she has learnt, they point towards her search of African gods that long established the backbone of African spiritualties. They help Clare to gain an appreciation of the reliance on superstitions, legends, obeah, and other cultural practices and beliefes. Hence,

acknowledging the existence, as well as the influence, of the different parts of her heritage is a strong sense of creolization in that she whole-heartedly adopts an entire culture as a part of her being. Sophie Croisy's article "Michell Cliff's Non-Western Figures of Trauma: The Creolization of Trauma Studies" says Clare Savage "is both witness to the erased traumatic part of her Jamaican past (that is her maroon heritage, a heritage denied to her by her 'white' father) and victim of that erasure as she is unable to know herself and her history until she beings to recuperate her mother's and her maroon people's genealogical memory". Thus, Clare asserts herself in a similar manner to her counterpart Antoinette Cosway by breaking the bonds of imperial/patriarchal hegemony evidenced through her father and the lingering presence of cultural imperialism. Although Clare is not bound by marriage, she is bound to her father's European heritage through her blood. Hence, Clare continues to defy patriarchal demands that she forget her matrilineal presence. She is fundamentally choosing to creolize her identity, despite her European ancestry. She does not haphazardly learn about Jamaica, but does what H/H suggested she do early on, “know this island is the real world...in the worst way”.

Through the embracing of her history, Clare unearths the need to be a part of a revolution to free Jamaica once and for all from the confines of European hegemony and exacts her final process of creolization as a form of agency. When the revolutionary woman asks Clare why she feels compelled to be a part of this movement considering her mixed Creole identity, Clare reveals her mother’s request “to help [her] people” (196). For Clare, forgetting her history is logically easier than having to embrace memories of the brutal treatment of her ancestors. So when Clare chooses to identify with her matrilineal side she, in turn, is making a selfless decision. She takes all the consequences that come with accepting her past. Thus, this points to a strong sense of creolization because she, first, makes a conscious effort to acknowledge

African history and assimilate with it. Secondly, she uses this memory as "a productive but difficult progression towards a future that does not erase the memory of the past and uses it to think through possibilities for reconstructing one's identity (a group's, a nations, while keeping the past, its traumatic aspects, in mind" (Croisy 219). Furthermore, Clare's choice to be a part of a revolution serves a dual purpose in that she finds a connection to her missing matrilineal presence by embracing her mother's history and through her ability to fight against patriarchal dominance, evidenced through the colonizer. The woman admires Clare's desire to help those who are burdened by the effects of colonization and she helps her by telling her "to think of Bishop. Rodney. Fanon. Lumumba. Malcom. First. Luthuli. Garvey. Mxembe. Marley. Moloise" (196). The woman mentions these names and gives them dignity and honor because they are leaders who, like the revolutionary herself, fought to advance the process of desegregation, decolonization, and de-marginalization of their people. These revolutionaries posit the change Clare can participate in with respect to her motherland, and give her the inspiration she needs to help alter the history of her country. Hence, Clare's role as a revolutionary is a form of creolization in that it requires her to fully accept and adopt the political, historical, and societal ideologies of her African ancestors and her Jamaican home. Indeed, the process of creolization helps to give Clare a mouthpiece that speaks for all who have been muted by British imperial domination.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In my thesis I have acknowledged the consistent marginalization of Creole identity, specifically, women from the Caribbean. As witnessed in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *No Telephone to Heaven* the marginalization faced by Creole women comes from the domineering presence of imperial and patriarchal hegemony. Both novels have undoubtedly addressed the dissolution of their cultural and historical identity through the burden of double colonization. Due to these demands a major issue faced by Creole women is that they are never actually establishing autonomy, but forced to create an identity controlled by imperial/patriarchal dominance. However, as established in throughout my thesis, each woman has used the process of creolization as a way of forming agency over her own identity. A key element used by both women in order to resist the demands of imperialist/patriarchy is to formulate a close connection to a matrilineal presence.

Through the influence of matrilineal ancestry/heritage both Antoinette and Clare are able to use the process of creolization to adopt an aspect of agency. Though I argue that this is an empowering process, there are potential problems that arise by intertwining creolization with the matrilineage in that it can debilitate the role of women as seen through a feminists lens. In Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka's, "Black Feminist Criticism and Drama: Thoughts on Double Patriarchy," she addresses the encumbering presence of patriarchy, which also serves as colonial

imperialism "[intensifying] the already implicit idea of territorial control and sovereignty in patriarchies, and now, couples with racism which devalues both the male and female subject, colonialism shows to be a more intensive form of oppression to the woman" (163). Therefore, in order to contend with double colonization/double patriarchy African women liberate themselves by identifying with land. In Cliff's novel there is a strong example of land becoming gendered as female insofar as the farm is associated with Clare's grandmother. There is also the example of Nanny, who functions as the ultimate resistance figure and warrior for the slave woman, but as Clare points out "Now that we need her more than ever. She has been burned up in an almshouse fire in Kingston…Her powers are known no longer. They are called by other names. She is not respected" (164). Hence, by equating these women to such roles as epitomizing the land or as an African warrior as Ajayi-Soyinka explains, they are limited to "an image that denies [them] real experience and potentials, and locks [them] in a single role; any deviation from this mold contaminates the liberation struggle" (164). Consequently, their limited roles do not allow them to make a continuous contribution, but one that only serves a singular purpose.

Therefore, by romanticizing Caribbean/African women into a position of directly connecting/representing the motherland and seeing land as a gendered quality can perpetuate the dominance felt by imperial/patriarchal presence. Since land has always been viewed as something imperialists/patriarchy conquers, Caribbean/African women are placed in a position where they will never escape this authoritarian force. Through this romanticized view of women they cannot participate in the larger realms of society, but are "cast in an ideological bind that compromises their association with European and European-Americans," because they can only serve one delimiting role.

In order to escape the singular role adopted by Caribbean/African women as a form exacting power of imperial/patriarchal dominance a new mode is needed to disrupt the process. Chela Sandoval provides a possible solution, she alludes to what some feminist's texts have been able to accomplish:

> Examination of the feminist texts developed by U.S. third world feminist activists between 1965 and 1990 reveals their combined insistence on a structured theory and method of consciousness-in-opposition to U.S. social hierarchy that is capable, when all actors can agree to its methods, of aligning a variety of oppositional social activists with one another across differing gender, sex, race, culture, class, or national localities. (23)

Cliff's Harry/Harriet is a strong example of the needed oppositional social activist amongst Caribbean/Creole/African women. Harry/Harriet's presence causes the disruption needed because it challenges the role of women. Since s/he functions as the alternate "matrilineal" presence s/he serves as a subject that revolutionizes the role of woman in that he inhabits a dual sexuality, defies the confining imperial/patriarchal demands by fighting as a revolutionary, and by helping Clare in continuing the process of creolization. As Timothy S. Chin suggests "Harry/Harriet inhabits an 'interstitial' space—designated by the conjunction 'both/and' rather than 'either/or'—that, as he/she asserts, is 'not just sun, but sun and moon" (393). Therefore, a Harry/Harriet function as a gateway for Caribbean/African/Creole women in serving as an agent helping them escape restricting roles and truly breaks away from imperial/patriarchal dominance.

Despite the tension witnessed through Cliff's novel between the imperial/patriarchal world and the marginalized Creole subjects, Cliff finds a mode allowing her to transcend the domineering conflict. As suggested by Sandoval oppositional activism is a necessary element in order to forge through societal tensions and cause change. Thus, there is a need to privilege the

intersectionality celebrated by Sandoval. Privileging black slave women, as both Rhys and Cliff do, always runs the risk of problematic romanticization, but creolization, when embraced in the way that Antoinette and Clare do, works against romanticization. Rather, it asserts coalition and collectivity, process, and, above all, the agency of women of color.

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