ISSN 2349-7831

International Journal of Recent Research in Social Sciences and Humanities (IJRRSSH)
Vol. 3, Issue 4, pp: (6-12), Month: October - December 2016, Available at: www.paperpublications.org

The In-between Space- Alienation and Psychological Trauma: A Critical Look at Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Velma Pollard's *Homestretch*

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Abstract: **The focus of this study is examination of in-between hybrid identity and the consequent alienation on marginal groups with close reference to Rhy's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Pollard's *Homestretch*. Minorities that live in alien cultures choose hybridity as strategy of resistance against discrimination. Although it is an effective strategy of coexistence, young migrant characters experience alarming levels of psychological instability. Erik Erikson observes that adolescents who migrate during years of "identity crisis" (220) to foreign countries experience complicated cultural transition marked by ambivalence and identity split. As a result, these children attempt to incorporate *here* and *there* into a meaningful sense of *self*. The constant shift from one end of the identity continuum to the other in young migrant characters causes internal fragmentation that may lead to insanity. Depression, stroke and madness are recurring motifs in migration literature owing to tendency of characters to choose the in-between space. Older migrant characters are comparatively stable in spite of facing same discriminatory experiences like youthful immigrants. This study analyses levels of hybridity and their effect on the inner life of migrant characters. Using Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity it explores the impact of in-between hybrid identity on the mental health of characters in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Velma Pollard's *Homestretch.***

Keywords: **Rhy's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Pollard's *Homestretch*.**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem:

Minority communities at the margin of dominant majorities in foreign communities experience a lot of discrimination and some choose the middle ground to negotiate their existence in the alien environment. To elude the possibility of polarity and violence, minority groups choose the middle ground to coexist with the dominant group. The hybrid space however comes with side psychological effects on the migrant characters. This study analyses levels of hybridity and their effect on the inner life of migrant characters. Using Bhabha's postcolonial concept of hybridity, it explores the impact of in-between hybrid identity on the mental health of characters in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Velma Pollard's *Homestretch*

1.2 Definition of terms:

In- between identity: used in the study to refer to an extremely unstable personality.

Hybridity: used in the study to refer to a cultural mix to survive in a cosmopolitan society.

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2. THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

Bhabha defines hybridity as the ambivalent site where attributes of two essential groups are synthesized. He refers to hybrid identities as "in-between" identities, defined as identities in which humans are not "this or that" but are both "this or that" and neither "this and that". He stresses that hybridity is "a constant state of contestation and flux caused by differential systems […] the unstable element of linkage" (227). At one point they behave like white characters and other times like black characters thereby vacillating on the identity continuum, which results in psychological problems.

3. IN- BETWEEN IDENTITIES IN RHYS' *WIDE SARGASSO SEA* AND POLLARD'S *HOMESTRETCH*.

3.1 Introduction:

In his thesis on construction of identity among Kurdish immigrants in Sweden, Areen Sulyman implies that there are three levels of hybrid identities: *Shared sense, in- between, Western skewed and More ethnic hybrid identities.* Some Kurdish immigrants exhibit *shared sense* hybridity in that they appreciate both Kurdish and Swedish culture in equal measure while others are more inclined towards Kurdish culture hence referred to as *More ethnic* hybrid identities. Sulyman suggests that *In- between* identities are those immigrants who vacillate between the culture of host community and that of their countries of origin. He comes across a Kurdish immigrant, Shilan, who having migrated to Sweden at the age of six months sometimes feels "full Kurd" and other times "in- between" and other times just "different" (28-29). In *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Homestretch*, there are migrant characters that depict the various levels of hybridity, and those with the in-between hybrid identity experience alienation and psychological trauma.

Set at Coulibri Estate in the Caribbean after the Emancipation Act, Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a moving novel about the plight of black minority groups in white dominant majorities in the Caribbean. After the end of slavery in 1833, the freed slaves underwent harrowing experiences in the Caribbean. The relations between the white slave owners and black slaves resulted in half caste children with a double identity who found it difficult to fit in the highly polarized society; as a result, they suffered from heightened levels of ambivalence. To the blacks these children were repulsed because they were not black enough. To the whites, they were repulsed because they were not white. The result was profound pain, anguish, and deep- seated fragmentation that drove some to psychological distress and madness. The same condition dominates Velma Pollard's *Homestretch.* Characters that emigrate from Caribbean to England and Americas after the Second World War experience a cultural clash and in their attempt to negotiate their existence get tremendously alienated. The rootlessness and lack of a sense of belonging in a culturally hostile environment causes far -reaching psychological problems. These psychological problems are consequence of anomalies in the identity formation process which demands that ethnic identity precede hybridity for stable personality development (Jaspal and Cinnirrella, 510). The in-between hybrid identity bypasses ethnic identity to cast the young characters in an ambivalent space: the arena of rootless fluidity and unending struggle in search for identity.

Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Pollard's *Homestretch* depict the struggle of minority black groups at the margins of a dominant white society undoubtedly bringing the texts under the postcolonial criticism. Poujafari Fatemeh and Vahidpour Abdolali define post-colonialism as a theory "concerned with persons from groups outside the dominant groups" (686) and therefore places marginal groups in a position to subvert the authority of those with hegemonic power. Ascroft Bill and colleagues note that post-colonial theory entails "migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation and influences to discourses to imperial Europe" (2). In the two novels, the novelists depict migration, slavery, suppression and resistance, which are pertinent to post-colonial criticism. In *Wide Sargasso Sea,* characters like Antoinette choose the hybrid space to resist discrimination with no vestige of success. In *Homestretch,* migrant characters such as Brenda, choose the in-between identity to negotiate their existence in England and United States with varying degrees of success.

The principal characters to be used in this study are Antoinette, Annette, Daniel Cosway and Rochester in *Wide Sagasso Sea* and David, Brenda and Laura in *Homestretch.* Antoinette, born of a white father and Mulatto mother, is the heroine in Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Pitted against black racism and white racism, Antoinette undergoes intense internal fragmentation resulting in lose of sanity. Annette is Antoinette's mother who is hated by black people in Coulibri Estate for marrying Cosway, a slave owner. Soon after her husbands demise, the black, free slaves turn hostile against Annette.

Daniel Cosway is Antoinette's step brother, born out of Cosway's affair with a black slave woman. His failure to reconcile with his father's brutality and hostility of the black race devastates his mental health. David is the hero in Pollard's *Homestretch.* He migrates from Jamaica to England after independence during the *S.S Windrush* of 1948 to heed the call of rebuilding the Mother Land after the Second World War (Lau, 2). Laura is David's niece that migrates to England for further education and returns to work in Jamaica. Brenda is Laura's friend; she meets in England in one of her lectures. Brenda goes to the United States to live with her father and later migrates to England when her father gets married to a British nurse. The study focuses on the manner in which these characters employ hybridity to negotiate their existence in the maze of cultures and how it impacts on their inner life.

3.2 The In-between World and Alienation:

While investigating ambivalence among adolescent immigrants in the diaspora, Zubida H. et al remark that immigrant children face conflicting social contexts in which they attempt to incorporate "here" and "there" into meaningful sense of the "self". Citing Alejandro Portes and Rumbaut Rubiin, they write:

Among adolescent immigrants, this process is more complex and often entails the juggling of competing allegiances and attachments. Situated within two cultural worlds, they must define themselves in relation to multiple reference groups (sometimes in two countries and languages) and the classifications in which they are placed by their native peers, schools, the ethnic community and larger society. (304)

Pollard's and Rhys' characters find themselves in two cultural worlds and struggle to identify themselves with the two Worlds. Brenda, having arrived from Jamaica to the United States finds the education systems of the two countries very different. Although she had maintained a brilliant academic record in Jamaica, the American teacher said "she could make no sense of the reports from home," (59). Her love for American education underscores her appreciation of Western values. Her mother insisted that she had to get good education from, America. The glaring differences between Jamaican education and repulsion from the West are a clash Brenda has to reconcile with to coexist. The American tutors hold a contemptuous or rather spiteful attitude towards Caribbean migrant children, for instance the teacher counselor "wanted to know everything about her life, from how many grand mothers she had to how she felt about her step mother" (59). Brenda is subjected to Placement Tests and Diagnostic Tests and taken to a lower class than the one she had been in Jamaica. In the class, her learning is interrupted by occasional transfer to the home school to interact "with West Indian children," (59) for psychological adjustment. With her previous detest for American tutors, we expect Brenda to like the home school due to its composition- Caribbean children. On the contrary, she perceives the decision to send her to the home school as discrimination and is unsettled by depression. In Brenda, vacillation between love for Jamaican and American culture is observed; an attribute that is typical of the in-between world. When Mrs. Saul, a visiting teacher from Jamaica, visits the school, Brenda's love for the mother country reasserts itself. The writer says, "Brenda didn't know that she was homesick. She was glad to hear the woman's voice and felt she was going to cry," (60). With Mrs. Saul, she experiences a strong sense of belonging and intimacy to signify her connection with Jamaica. She opens up to her but starts complaining about the home school, the supposed source of psychological connection to the mother land with children of Caribbean origin. "She was wasting time with the group in the home room," (61), Brenda said, and asked Mrs. Saul to talk to the American tutors to place her permanently in the ninth class. The reader is left to wonder to which identity Brenda belongs. At one point, she misses Jamaica and the next moment she craves American education; hence is the nature if in-between or ambivalent identities. The fluctuation of the migrant characters on the identity continuum causes alienation, defined by Encyclopaedia Britannica as "a state of feeling estranged or separated from one's milieu of work, products or self". Sidney Finkelstein defines alienation as a psychological phenomenon, "an internal conflict, a hostility felt towards something seemingly outside oneself, which is linked to oneself, a barrier erected which is actually no defense but an impoverishment of oneself," (7). Finkelstein is making a reference to internal fragmentation, which is reiterated by Erich Fromm who observes, "[t]he meaning of alienation is that process of feeling in which anyone feels estranged from self," (10). The in- between space that Brenda occupies upon arrival in the United States is the beginning of an internal conflict that causes inner turmoil in the greater part of the story.

In England, Brenda finds herself terribly isolated and internally fragmented. She was always lonely and never had one positive word for England. Pollard writes:

Apart from being new, she had two strokes against her. She was black and she spoke English with an American accent. She felt that the teachers did not like her, that they were prejudiced in spite of their smiling. And the students, the black ones who were mostly Jamaican, didn't want to talk to her much. Perhaps her shyness and insecurity came over to them as stand-offishness. If they had let her into their little groups, they would have found that nothing was wrong with her. (75)

In this passage Pollard illustrates an instance of the in-between identity, which as Bhabha observes is characterized by instability: neither "this" nor "that" (227). Brenda neither likes the Jamaican students nor British teachers owing to her internal fragmentation. Her exposure to a mosaic of cultures in the United States has ruined her ethnic identity formation which would have contributed to her psychological stability. Brenda feels more isolated and "buries herself in books" (76). Finkelstein refers to this as "estrangement from the self", a personal reaction to the segregation she confronts in England. She tells Laura that she detests the hypocrisy of the English teachers, citing that they are the kind that will "shake your hand go and wash afterwards" (77). The inner turmoil, emptiness and psychological trauma compel her to join a radical group in the FE College in England. Laura observes that "she was in full African Regalia and allowed her hair to go dread" (79). It is after an intimate friendship with Laura that Brenda leaves the group to symbolize a reconnection to her ethnic identity and end to alienation. Citing Albert Camus, Abdul Saleem sums up the fate of immigrant characters as a lost people: "[c]ut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd and useless (21). Brenda is uprooted from her mother culture, Jamaica and does not know who she is. Her decision to join a radical poetry group in England is an unconscious search for her roots in order to find meaning in life. But even when she comes in contact with Jamaica, she shows elements of instability, vacillating from a dislike to a liking for her. On one hand, Brenda loves Jamaican food, and tells Laura that she likes "Potato pudding" (87), and loves her mother so much that she is building her a flat in Kingston. On the other hand, she prefers the English works habits (88), and European clean cities: "Scandinavian cities are notoriously clean," (53), she says after arrival at Kingston. Brenda is unnerved by the tendency of the Jamaican taxi driver to flout traffic rules, something that could hardly occur in the West. Brenda's oscillation between the love and dislike for Jamaica and the West is quite eccentric. While conversing with Laura, she observes that Jamaican teachers are more dedicated than American teachers because they labour with meager pay to prepare students for performances und and in the next utterance describes it as "disorganized compared to England and America" (88). She then plunges in an emotional tantrum saying "is a feeling deep down that it (Jamaica) rejected me" (88) and gave me England.

David, like Brenda undergoes a harrowing experience in England as a result of discrimination by the dominant white majority. Upon return to Jamaica, he tells people, "[t]he white people them not easy. You have a hell of time to live with them and still remember that you are a person" (20). He reveals that the West Indians living in England are not treated like human beings at the work place. David could teach the white workers practical skills in the factory but when they met outside, they could not greet him (31). The racial discrimination and pressures at the work place caused them deep seated emotional wounds such that they never enjoyed their marriage. In a flashback, David says, " [s]omehow, now, he felt that he was a lone. Inside. Somewhere, some how, they had lost it. Whatever it was," (7). Unlike Brenda who vacillates between love and dislike for England, David categorically dislikes England and prefers Jamaica. Whereas the young migrant characters experience terrible psychological problems, David does not. The Jamaican villagers observe that people who go to England return when mad (20). They give the example of Avis, Miss Betty's daughter, and Miss Gerald's son. David remarks, "[t]he young people you mention were children when they went to England. May be they couldn't stand it". (21). Pollard implies that young immigrants who go to foreign countries are more vulnerable to in-between identity formation because they lack an ethnic identity to be located in the foreign environment, which results into instability and psychological trauma. Jaspal and Cinnirella's observe that "identification with the ethnic group (among immigrants) has positive implication" (510), since identity is constructed by way of difference. Older immigrants like David and Laura leave Jamaica to England having developed an ethnic identity and therefore merely borrow a few attributes from the foreign culture to negotiate their existence. As a result, they develop an *ethnic skewed hybrid* identity that is more stable than the in-between identity among young immigrants who suffer a lot of ambivalence.

Michael Billing observes, "[c]ommon sense contains conflicting and opposed themes or values, for instance, people should be merciful and justice should be dealt," (238). Billing expounds that these conflicting situations, otherwise referred to as ambivalence, give rise to dilemmas. Rhys' characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* exhibit ambivalence because

they occupy the middle ground in a racially polarized setting. Antoinette, the prime mover in the novel, is a child of mixed parentage who struggles to adjust in racially charged community after the Emancipation Act of 1833 (Rhys, 19). She disapproves the negative reaction of the black people towards her mixed race family after the demise of her white father. All the black population around Coulibri Estate refuse to visit them and Antoinette's mother, Annette is compelled to lie to children that the road is bad. Antoinette says, "[m]y father, visitors, feeling safe, horses- all belonged to the past" (15). When Annette rides the horse around the estate, black people "stood around in groups to jeer at her especially when her clothes grew shabby" (16). Antoinette is hurt by black people after they poison their horse to death. Her choice of the word "negro" while referring to black people is evidence of her spiteful attitude towards the black race: " I never looked at any strange negro- they hated us. They called us white cockroaches," (22). One day while walking on the way, a black girl follows her singing, "[w]hite cockroaches go away…go away, nobody wants you!" (23). The black community, former freed slaves, feel vindicated when Antoinette's family descends into poverty. Tia tells Antoinette, "[w]e hear all we poor like beggar… you run like calabash to catch water" (23). This rejection by the two essentialist groups has a harrowing effect on Annette. The writer observes that "she talked loud to herself" (23) and fell in love with solitude. After the death of her idiotic son, Pierre, she ran mad and threatened to kill her second husband, Mason. The black community lays siege to their home in Coulibri, burns the home, and including the parrot. They shout, "[l]ook at the damn white niggers" (30). Antoinette is stoned and bears a scar. Myra, the house maid escapes leaving Pierre behind. He dies of the injuries he sustained in the arson attack. Pierre's death alienates Annette farther from herself after she fails to accept the reality that her only son had passed on. She runs mad and threatens to kill Mason. She was confined in prison and later died. The collision between black and white cultures and the failure to reconcile the two worlds from the middle leave an incurable psychological wound on Annette's life.

After Annette's death, Mason, Antoinette's foster father, married her off to an English man. The marriage was stage managed to conceal Antoinette's "bad background". The narrator says, "[t]he Mason's family planned and married Antoinette to an Englishman who knew nothing of her background (she has bad blood of madness from both sides)," (81). They hurried and did it while Rochester, the prospective husband, was ill. Readers observe different behavior in Antoinette during this marriage. Contrary to our expectation, she becomes a defender of the black ethnic group and its ways. She detests the white race, for instance, dislikes Rochester right from the engagement party. She tells Richard, Mason's son, that "she won't marry Rochester" (67). But after persuasion, the marriage commences but proceeds with conflicts that are a consequence of the instability typical of in-between identities. The characters behavior in these identities depends on "social circumstances" (cooper, 10), including the choice of words by his opponent. When Rochester looks down on St Pierre, a city in West Indies, Antoinette blurts that "it is the Paris of West Indies" (67). She even hastens to add that the England and London that Rochester reveres is "a dream- a cold dark dream" (67) respectively. Antoinette further sympathises with Christophine, their black servant. When Rochester reprimands her for leaving her dress to flow to the ground, Antoinette tells him that black women leave their dresses to flow as a sign of respect. Despite Antoinette's earlier spite for the black race, she now trusts black people. She even "trusts black servants and gives them gifts" (75), which is misconstrued by Rochester as extravagance.

With the ensuing clash of culture, Antoinette becomes a victim of rejection by her husband. When she sings songs, he blurts that her songs "only haunted him" (76). As a consequence, she experiences terrible feelings of isolation or rather social-alienation. McClosky defines social alienation as "loss of significant social relationships" (15) that results in harrowing psychological consequences on the person. With the lapse of time, she stops chatting with Rochester and substitutes this with conversations with Christophine in Patois. Depression gets the better of her and the husband realizes that death is the sole subject of her conversations. When he wants to know why she is never happy, she replies, "I am not used to happiness. It makes me afraid," (77). Rochester's hatred for her becomes evident when he says:

> I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love.
>
> I felt very little tenderness for her.
>
> She was a stranger to me,
>
> a stranger who did not think or feel as I did." (78)

Rochester reveals his internal fragmentation or self alienation in a marriage bedeviled by clash of cultures. He loses his sexual feelings for her and spends his "nights in the dressing room" (90). He sees his wife as a doll, devoid of any feelings. He says, "I could see Antoinette stretched on the bed quite still… like a doll" (123). Christophine tries to apply Obeah methods to treat Antoinette but the psychological trauma is on the rise. Rochester is also affected by hybrid identity, though of the *ethnic skewed* type. Striving to survive among Creoles and black people at Coulibri, Rochester has more appreciation for the English culture. For example, he does not want his wife, Antoinette to kiss and hug Negroes (76). In his conversation with the wife, it is clear that he detests St. Pierre and Jamaica but loves Paris and England. He tells Christophine, "I would give my eyes never to have seen this abominable place," (128). Rochester's marriage to Antoinette's was a ruse hatched by his family to get rid of him from England. This symbolizes a rejection by Western culture and when he marries a woman of colour, he is rejected (by African civilization) and plunges in a state of alienation. He is estranged from the self and hence devoid of the feelings that can sustain a romantic relationship. Antoinette tells him, "[y]our mouth is colder than my hands" (117). He does not miss his wife when she is away and loses his taste for the fine things of life. He says "I hate poets and poetry now, as I hate music, which I loved once" (129). While talking of his harrowing experiences in England, David refers to this inner emptiness and coldness in his relationship with Edith in *Homestretch (7).* It is the result of deep seated fragmentation that results from psychological trauma from hostile cultural environment. He distrusts Antoinette's relatives and reserves no vestige of feeling for her. He says:

> However much I paid Jamaican servants
>
> I would never buy discretion. I would
>
> Be gossiped about, sung about.
>
> They make up songs about everybody-
>
> You should hear one about governor's wife. (127)

Rejection of Antoinette and Rochester by the two essentialist cultures result in self alienation that has disastrous consequences on their psyche and marriage. The rootlessness causes them to oscillate between white and black but Rochester is more stable because he developed his ethnic identity in England. However, Antoinette who grew lacks an ethnic identity succumbs to the alienation and runs completely mad.

In spite of his strident criticism towards Antoinette, Daniel Cosway, exhibits symptoms of insanity. He is reckless in his treatment of his step-sister and even goes further to write a derogatory letter to Rochester with the intention of wrecking the marriage. He for instance makes the wild accusation that Antoinette had a promiscuous background because he had a boyfriend called Sandi. "You are not the first to kiss her pretty face" (106), he tells Rochester, which makes him doubt Daniel's sanity. He is internally fragmented because of his identity crisis. He is neither white nor black and his desire to locate his white heritage is thwarted by Old Cosway's arrogance. At sixteen, he goes to old Cosway to borrow money only to be cursed and disowned. The ensuing trauma had deals a blow to Daniel Cosway and he is full of bitterness. He tells Rochester, "[t]here is a marble table in the English church to commemorate him; I hope that stone tie around his neck and drag him down to hell in the end" (101). Daniel equally shares his hatred for blacks and whites leaving the reader wondering where he belongs. Old Cosway was wicked, Antoinette is promiscuous and Christophine, Rochester's black servant " the worst, she have to leave Jamaica because she go to jail," (103). As a result of his tattered feelings, Daniel Cosway leaves in isolation. He hates women because they are "demons incarnate who say 'buy me this, buy me that" (103).

4. CONCLUSION

The degree of alienation and trauma largely depends on the nature of hybrid identity chosen by the migrant character. Older characters develop the *shared sense* or *ethnic skewed* hybridity and therefore experience more psychological stability than young characters that enter the in-between space that is characterized by intense alienation and psychological instability. The missing ethnic identity that ought to have occurred in their ancestral land leaves a void that casts them in the quagmire of identity formation.

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