# Agency of Silence: An Intertextual Study of Identity Construction in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*

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**Abstract**

*A major theme in Caribbean literature is the search for an identity and a place of belonging in the face of a colonial past and its damaging consequences. This essay takes a unique stance on identity formation and discusses the role of silence as agency in the construction and expression of female creole identity in Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) by Jean Rhys and No Telephone to Heaven (1987) by Michelle Cliff. It argues that for the female creole characters in these novels, agency is expressed through silence, which forms their identities as fragmented and conflicted. In discussing agency as an integral part of identity construction and expression, this essay further argues that historical factors such as colonialism and imperialism do not passively define colonial subjects; rather, the agency of these characters also plays an essential role in moulding their identities. The essay employs an intertextual approach to create a historical trajectory and trace these character's agency of silence in a post-emancipation and post-independence Jamaica, linking their experiences across space and time. In doing so, it demonstrates the manner in which external silencing forces such as patriarchy are turned by these women into deliberate silence as agency. This silence is reiterated in their characters, the narration, and the structure of these texts, and further shows a lack of significant change in the condition of these creole women across time.*

**Keywords:** Caribbean Literature, identity, *Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), No Telephone to Heaven (1987)*

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The subject matter of Caribbean literature has [not] changed substantively over the years—there are common threads running through the literature from the forties and fifties which are still there in the work that is being produced today—that is the search for an identity both personal and national. (Rowell)

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) explore the issues of female creole identity in post-emancipation and post-colonial eras respectively. *Wide Sargasso Sea* has played an integral role in rehumanizing the creole woman through rewriting Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* from the point of view of the mad creole - Antoinette/Bertha, who is imprisoned, in *Jane Eyre*, in the attic of the English manor house, Thornfield. Rhys has provided this "mad" and othered Bertha with a story and an identity in Antoinette's form, which establishes her as a product of the colonial project. This novel dwells on Antoinette and her mother Annette's slave-owning origins on the Caribbean Island of Jamaica. Their story, which is set one year after abolition, explores the realities of post-emancipation Jamaica for these once influential, and now isolated and impoverished creole women. On the other hand, Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* set in the 1960s, one year after the independence of Jamaica, picks up the story of the creole women a hundred years after the events of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. *No Telephone to Heaven*, while exploring the conditions of the Jamaican population, narrates the story of Clare Savage—a light skinned creole woman and her mother Kitty. Clare like Antoinette is conflicted about her place of belonging and identity both due to her creole heritage and displacement. Read together, these novels form a historical trajectory that explores and illuminates the far-reaching and damaging effects of colonialism and racism on individual lives and personal identities of these doubly marginalized women.

Both novels are set strategically on the eve of different kinds of liberation in Jamaica; *Wide Sargasso Sea* after the abolition of legalized slavery and *No Telephone to Heaven* after the end of a long British colonial rule. Liberation generally carries positive connotations of freedom and happiness, which ironically is not the case for the creole women in these two

novels. Liberation also implies agency and self-determinism which leads to personal development; constituting a self and an identity. Agency plays an important role in identity development and, depending on circumstances, can find expression in multiple ways. Côté and Levine attribute identity development to both external and internal factors while highlighting the ways in which internal factors or "agentic" factors, though overlooked, are "essential for a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of human self-definition" (119-123). I argue that for the creole women in these two novels, agency finds expression in silences which are reiterated in their characters, the narration, and the temporal structure of the novels.

Silence, which is both an integral aspect of these novels and the history of colonialism, can be divided into two types. The first type refers to the silencing of such characters (and by extension people) by the patriarchal colonial structures set in place in the Empire. This kind of silencing not only pervades historical "factual" accounts, it also manifests itself in fiction which is celebrated for its feminist individualism like *Jane Eyre*. The second type of silence emerges when the characters internalize and own the silence consciously as defiance and ultimately, rebellion. This is a performative owning of the imposed silence which defines the liminality of their identities more effectively than any speech can. It can also manifest itself as an authorial comment on historical elision, subjugation, and the unchanging and inexpressible liminality of their position. Therefore, silence becomes agency when it traverses the boundary of imposition and becomes a conscious act. It has consequences for identity formation because it embodies the ongoing struggle of the creole women to reach an understanding about belonging to both places and people. A sense of self always emerges in relation to people and places (Côté and Levine 9) and heightened recognition of this lack is both experienced in silence and expressed with it, through a silent agency—turning silence into a critique and a challenge. This leads to an identity which is fragmented, conflictual, and indeterminate. In making this claim about agency, I am aware of Michel Foucault's assertion that agency is also predetermined by the discourses at

play, but I believe complete determinism does not make allowance for the birth of counter-discourses, such as silence, which in themselves become critique. Therefore, an understanding of the types of silences and their manifestations, with regard to history and its representation in these novels is essential to my argument.

In this essay, I use Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality to explore this agency of silence and its role in identity formation for the creole women characters. Intertextuality here refers to the way texts not only refer to other texts and invoke them in a relationship of affirmation and challenge but also the way they always bring in the texts of history and culture (Kristeva 36-37). This is essential because an intertextual study essentially invokes history, society, and culture, therefore, creating a space of ambivalence1, where a text is seen as a product within a bigger text or as Foucault says, "a node within a network" (Foucault 25). The use of this lens is important because these novels not only foreground intertextuality by their very design, but also enable a historical trajectory for these characters by placing them in an ancestor-descendant relationship. As Cliff writing about Clare says: "The protagonist … is named Clare Savage… Bertha Rochester is among her ancestors" ("Caliban's Daughter" 43). This historical trajectory sheds light not only on the role agency plays in constituting identity for these characters and the kind of identity conflict it generates, but also the lack of any major change across time. This is an area which has largely been overlooked by critical discussions on these novels.

Critics, over time, have situated identity formation within the historical contexts of imperialism, capitalism, and neocolonialism etc. These historical contexts help situate the protagonists of these novels as historical subjects who are formed by and through the social, cultural, and political situation of their time. Critics like Gayatri Spivak, Carine Mardorossian, and Missy Dehn Kubitschek view Antoinette as Bertha's re-inscription. For Spivak, she is both marginalized as well as a marginalizing colonial subject "produced by the axiomatics of imperialism" (Spivak 247); for Mardorossian, she

is a character who is "(unconsciously) ensnared by colonialist assumptions which she unsuccessfully and often grotesquely attempts to replicate" (Mardorossian, "Shutting up the Subaltern" 1071); and for Kubitschek, she is a character who submits to victimhood and, therefore, is not a successful feminist individualist. Katherine C. Henderson brings in the possibility of conceptualizing a pure Caribbean or English identity to this critical debate. She makes the English country house a site for it but contends that a pure identity is simply not possible as the history of colonialism in the form of Antoinette or the products of imperialism will always be locked in the attic as memory and material consequences (Henderson).

As in the case of Antoinette, Clare's identity formation in *No Telephone to Heaven* has been variously attributed to the detrimental effects of colonialism with its foundations in the historical "wounds" which have never healed (Tease 94) and displacement which causes identity to fragment and lose any sense of cohesion (Nge 78-122). Other critics embed Clare's identity development within the discourses of resistance where she "struggle(s) for and with identity" by virtue of matrilineal resistance (which she is per force a part of and cannot avoid) going back to the Maroon leader Nanny (Smith 142) or by becoming a part of the nationalist rhetoric which finds its outlet in Fanon's principles of armed revolution (Richards 20-24). Shirley Toland-Dix places this identity development within the confines of racial categories (and their fluidity) and discusses the constructed and "fabricated" nature of these constructions. She considers racialized identities to be damaging and isolationist and locates Clare's lack of rootedness in racist identity formations (Toland-Dix 39). All these approaches vividly draw a map which navigates the construction of identity to factors external (or sociological) to the female body which nevertheless work upon it to mold it. Hence, postcolonial critics like Spivak claim that "so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism" (Spivak 250).

Though the impact of these external forces on individual lives cannot be denied, for they become the reason for the emergence

of silence in the first place, critical commentaries do overlook the role of agency and its expression in molding identities in these novels. Agency plays an integral role in the formation of individual identities and subjectivities, and its elision reduces any reading to the exploration of history in passive subjects. Therefore, identity formation remains incomplete without reference to it as this is something which helps characters situate and negotiate their individual experiences within a historical context. Furthermore, discussion on identity formation for these two novels has almost exclusively focused on the two protagonists: Antoinette and Clare, thereby leaving other characters like Annette and Kitty unexplored. As both Annette and Kitty are also creole women and are intimately tied to the lives of the two protagonists, I believe that a discussion which includes these characters gives a more cohesive picture of identity formation and the role of silent agency in it.

## ***Wide Sargasso Sea*** **(1966)**

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is written in an inherently intertextual manner as Deborah A. Kimmey states that it "necessarily foregrounds intertextuality by the novel's very design [and] refers back to the text of *Jane Eyre* in ways that are both patently obvious, or univocal, and subtly ambivalent"[i] (Kimmey 114). It, therefore, deliberately invokes and challenges the texts of colonial history, and its fictionalized account (*Jane Eyre*). Intertextuality, though it deals with the "linguistic units" on a page, always invokes history in a "translinguistic" manner, therefore, creating links to the bigger "texts" of "culture" (Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 37). This is essential for an understanding of the first type of silence mentioned above, which fundamentally depends on these historical factors. In the same way, *No Telephone to Heaven* also forms translinguistic or intertextual links to both history (textualization of it) and fiction (*Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*), highlighting their role in silence as subjugation and silence as agency. Thus, both the texts and their characters attest to their production's historical underpinnings and their various representations.

The character of Antoinette Cosway is Rhys's attempt to give Bertha, the mad creole woman in the attic of Bronte's Thornfield an identity and a story. As Rhys says: "I thought I'd try to write her a life" (qtd. in Spivak 249). Therefore, Antoinette's narrative begins in a linear first-person narrative mode, where she herself details her and her mother's life. As it is Antoinette's voice which narrates the story, Annette is silenced by the narrative itself. Her story only reaches readers through Antoinette's narrative, which describes her as slowly growing "thin and silent" (Rhys 19). This mode of writing questions and challenges the silencing of creole women in history by using silence intertextually to invoke the act of their silencing itself. First-person narration is generally taken to signify control and an active and vocal agency on the part of the narrator, yet Antoinette is never really allowed to speak. Her comments are never completely her own as she replicates the opinions and values of others around her while never giving her own opinion. Her narrative detailing her and her mother's life is, thus, interspersed with the authority of others, like Christophine, the black obeah woman and her nurse whose comment on Annette, "because she pretty like pretty self", is repeated by Antoinette to begin the story. A significant point within this kind of narration is that like Christophine's comment, many opinions are presented within quotation marks, signifying their direct restatement without her own comment. She quotes her mother's hopelessness, "I've learned to let sleeping curs lie", and her stepfather Mr. Mason's blindness, "They're too damn lazy to be dangerous", in the same way (Rhys 17-33). This kind of narration factors in her subjugated position as a white creole child who speaks without speaking because of the patriarchy.

This first kind of silence portrays her as a person who seems confused and uncertain. Mardorossian explains this: "*Wide Sargasso Sea*'s protagonist appears fragmented, insecure and disoriented so much so that she seems to function only by internalizing others" ("Shutting up the Subaltern" 1072-73). Though she functions by internalizing others and rarely gives her opinion or asserts herself, she nevertheless conveys the incomprehensibility of her position more effectively through

this silence than any words. She achieves this by reiterating that she cannot be understood, so there is no point in speaking—slowly making the transition from enforced silence to conscious agency leading to the formation of a fragmented identity. The consciousness of her silence is an act of agency and it reveals her own understanding of the impossibility of her own positioning as a creole child, not belonging to either of the worlds she is materially in. And this liminal position and lack of belonging lead to her fragmented identity or sense of self.

Annette and Antoinette's position as white creoles in an emancipated Jamaica is a colonial legacy. This legacy not only marginalizes them but puts them in a position where they face a lack of understanding from those on the island. Antoinette and her mother's efforts to claim understanding from others meet with no success especially in the face of the patriarchal structure of Jamaica to which the narrative makes references, and which are, therefore, both re-inscribed and challenged in this ambivalent space. As Kristeva writes in "The Bounded Text" a "text is … a productivity" which has a "redistributive (destructive-constructive)" relationship with language. Furthermore, it "is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality" (Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 37). Thus, in order to challenge the forces of patriarchy and colonialism in *Jane Eyre*, Rhys re-inscribes them in a destructive/constructive medium, affirming their original representation to bring out the silencing and the silences in an act of challenge.

In this vein, she portrays Mr. Mason (Annette's second husband) as lacking empathy and understanding for the position of these women. He stifles Antoinette's initiative when she tries to explain the moral position of her Aunt Cora, (with regard to slavery and privilege) leading her to think, "None of you understand about us" (Rhys 30). She knows this and thinks about it, but she never says this to him for she recognizes the futility of such an action. She sees this futility in her mother's constant requests to Mason to move from their estate Coulibri, which she delivers "persistently" and "angrily", but he does not "understand at all" or give importance to his wife's very real concerns (Rhys 33). For Annette specifically, the end of

slavery, loss of prosperity, and the patriarchy function as historical and cultural realities which contribute towards her being silenced (the first kind) and labelled as mad. They re-inscribe her in history as a product of colonial designs rather than the "infamous" mother of Bronte's Bertha. Intertextually, these external factors imbue her position with liminality and subjugating her, but it is her conscious will to employ silence in her interactions with others, especially Antoinette. At each stage in the novel, due to external forces, silence keeps transitioning into conscious choice and contributes towards a conflicted identity. Eventually, a lack of understanding on Mason's part results in Annette's son Pierre's death and her eventual madness, thereby her complete silence.

Antoinette, on the other hand, functions not only within these forces but also other pressures which include her mother's neglect and ultimate rejection, the absence of any consistent playmates of her age, and her interactions with the grown-ups in the novel. As a misunderstood and neglected creole child born at the end of slavery, she neither belongs to the freed slave population nor the Europeans. Nagihan Haliloğlu, in discussing the term creole, calls attention towards "the porousness of creole categories" in Caribbean literature, explaining them as fluid, moving from "white people" or the colonizers within a colonial setting to "those slaves born on the island" as well as the by-products of both white and the black population. She states that the colonial powers perceived a difference between a creole of "pure European blood" and those who were viewed with a "paranoia" about "miscegenation" (Haliloğlu 45-50). In either case, the position of the creole turns out to be a contested, liminal, and 'neither here, nor there' position. Therefore, Annette and Antoinette as the white creole protagonists and ex-slave owners are not accepted by the freed black population or the Europeans for whom they are not "'the real thing' due to their imperfect reproduction of English culture" (qtd. in Haliloğlu 45).

This historical liminality is foregrounded by Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* through the medium of silence. As the narration progresses, Rhys makes Antoinette inherently focus not on her

own speech but on her own silence at crucial junctures. This focus is important because it denotes silence at this stage as her own conscious choice. As a young girl, when she pays the ill-fated last visit to her mother (who had lost her mind to grief), she comments on this consciousness: "All the way back to Aunt Cora's house we didn't speak" (Rhys 48). Her silence is firstly informed by her mother's repeated rejection and negation of her presence and, secondly, by her own internalization of it. In this second step, her silence transcends into agency because she uses it to deliberately call attention to her position. She expresses agency through it and with it because only silence has the capability to express her position and, in doing so, construct an identity which factors in her lack of belonging.

The fact that her silence at this stage has become conscious is reinforced by her bringing attention to it in phrases such as "but I could not answer" and her belief "Say nothing and it may not be true" (Rhys 51-59). She is deliberate in remaining silent, which is partly defiance in face of adverse circumstances and partly her way of expressing agency by using it as an intertextual device to invoke her silencing in textualized history. It develops her identity as an amalgamation of fragments such as the natural feelings of a daughter conflicting with a lack of belonging to any one place. A good example of this is the way she remembers her mother's death:

I remember that after my mother's funeral, very early in the morning, almost as early as this, we went home to drink chocolate and eat cakes. She died last year, no one told me how, and I didn't ask. Mr. Mason was there and Christophine, no one else. Christophine cried bitterly but I could not. I prayed, but the words fell to the ground meaning nothing. (Rhys 61)

It is interesting to note that she recalls mundane details such as the eating arrangements and then simultaneously juxtaposes them with her own silence on the event itself. Nobody had told her about the circumstances of her mother's death, and she does not ask about it. Yet, what she remembers is her act of not asking, as if by flouting the regular conventions surrounding

such an event which include a child's interest in the parent's demise, she is openly defying the structures which place her in her marginalized position. She also makes comparisons between herself as the daughter who could not cry, and the black nurse who could. Again, conventionally a daughter's grief would be more than her nurse's (who had previously been a slave to the woman), but she inherently recognizes that sound and words, or even her prayers in this case, lack the power to express her position. Thus, she chooses silence which forms and then shows her identity as a conflicted and liminal figure.

Antoinette's position as a white creole who is regarded with hostility by the black population and suspicion by the Europeans is expressed through this silence. It shapes her identity as a fragmented individual with each shard or fragment of her person representing a different sphere but never the whole thing. She expresses this dilemma of liminality when she says: "so between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all (Rhys 102)." This highlights the dilemma of the creole and sheds light on far-reaching consequences of colonialism for these liminal characters. As the first part of the book concludes, Antoinette's fragmented narrative of silence, transcends into the narrative structure of the text when the unnamed narrator of the second section of the book takes up the story. It is interesting to note that at one of the most important junctures in the story, she stops being the narrative voice. This choice on Rhys's part is of course deliberate as it intertextually invokes Antoinette's first silent representation as Bertha as well as the silencing of women like her in history. This reiteration of silence furthermore forms an intertextual connection to Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* where the narrative fabric itself is an ambivalent space, teeming with silences.

***No Telephone to Heaven* (1987)**

As a sequel to her 1984 novel *Abeng*, *No Telephone to Heaven* uses third person narrative voice to transcribe the life of Clare Savage who moves between Jamaica, the United States, and Europe in search of an identity and a place of belonging. This search for a place of belonging places her right next to Antoinette as both characters experience this dilemma in silence. In contrast to Rhys's novel though, Cliff's text introduces silence in the very texture of her fragmented narrative through both fragmented third-person narration and a play with temporal markers, which create an ambivalent space where speech is replaced deliberately with silence by challenging and upending Eurocentric concepts of time and space. European classics like *Jane Eyre* adhere to linear narration in the rationalist tradition (to which Rochester transcribes) which Rhys only partly destabilizes through narrative silence and which Cliff subverts completely. Her narrative goes through multiple shifts in time while echoing both the historical silencing as well as the reclamation of silence as agency.

The novel begins with a description of Clare, (who is unnamed at this point) moving with a group of guerilla fighters in a truck. She is described as "[a] light-skinned woman, daughter of landowners, native-born, slaves, emigrés, Carib, Ashanti, English, has taken her place on this truck, alongside people who easily could have hated her" (5). Cliff, by virtue of this introduction, already places Clare in the contested creole position which has strong intertextual links to history, colonialism, racism, neocolonialism, and their fictionalized renditions like *Jane Eyre*, *Abeng*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Her narrative thus intertextually brings up the colonial past and its consequences. In making Clare's origins so complex, Cliff makes her at once similar to and different from Antoinette. She is different because unlike Antoinette, she is not a creole of "pure English descent", and she is similar because she remains in the liminal creole position due to her complex origins, which include European descent—imbuing her with fair skin. Thus, her identity from the beginning is problematized, raising

questions of belonging. As Haliloğlu claims: "[t]he experience of colonialism deeply affects the subjects' connection to space, raising questions of ownership and belonging" (Haliloğlu 41). Therefore, like Antoinette, Clare, too, in spite of a difference in time and space faces the challenges of her position and expresses her agency through silence.

The novel moves back and forth in time, and in one of its forays into the past, it is revealed that Kitty Savage (Clare's mother) and her family moved to the United States to escape the growing unrest against "backra"[ii] people in Jamaica. It is interesting to note that, at the very historical juncture when Jamaica had become liberated from colonial rule and stands alone as an independent country, its people are not liberated at all. Some have to flee the country for safety, while social and racial stratification separates the elite and those who exist in the "dungle". Kitty (who is a comparatively dark-skinned creole woman) is not happy about the move to the US while her husband (a fairer man) like the typical patriarch does not care about her "quiet apathy", which has its roots in her feeling "homeless" and conflicted about her identity (Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven* 54). One of the first things the family witnesses, on reaching America, is a notice of a recent lynching which Kitty reads for the family. This incident is significant because it raises questions of identity for both Kitty and Clare and though Boy explains lynching "as a form of punishment for wickedness" to the fourteen-year-old Clare, the incident is not fully explained. Kitty does not identify with the new country or Boy's explanation of lynching but like Annette she expresses her disagreement without words. This is exemplified by the sentence: "Kitty sucked her teeth at his (boy's) explanation but offered her daughter nothing more" (55). The silence which she maintains in this scene becomes her attitude towards Clare, who is fair-skinned unlike her sister. Boy and Kitty both know that he is creating an illusion of an America without racism, but Kitty cannot communicate this to Boy as the same barrier of patriarchy which existed between Annette and Mason is replicated in Boy and Kitty's relationship. Unlike Annette though, Kitty is not completely dependent on her husband (a result of change in time and values) and her agency (expressed

through silent action rather than speech) is more pronounced: "Silence between them then. *Home* was different. She would hold to that as long as she lasted. She who was cut from home" (60). Kitty's sense of self is grounded in Jamaica, and she identifies with the dark-skinned population of the place. In spite of this, she had married a light skinned man, and her identity conflict thus emerges in the way she views and ascribes values to her fairer-skinned daughter.

Kitty's experiences in the US allow the reader to see her as a modern-day equivalent to Annette where the change in time and space give her a certain mobility but her liminality does not make for a vivid change in her position. As a result of the rampant racism in America, she initially asks her husband to move back to Jamaica in an ironical reverse to Annette, but he doesn't listen and even stops her from going to places which might lead to questions being asked about their race. She does not stop going to these places, but she stops mentioning them and makes sure he doesn't find out. Like Annette, her circumstances transform her from a woman of affluence (in Jamaica) to a racially ostracized minority (in the US). In the face of these challenges, she, a woman working to supplement her husband's income, does exactly what Annette did. She exercises her agency in silence, and this defiance adds new dimensions to her identity as a person, a woman, and a Jamaican. The novel describes her as going to all those places which Boy had told her to distance herself from—places like Jamaican stores which can lead to questions about the "purity" of her race. The ostracization she faces at work for being different also escalates her internal conflict about her identity and her place in a world where her only outlet is wearing the mask of Mrs. White, a fictitious woman who does not exist. Thus, Kitty can be viewed as Annette's present in this trajectory of female identity development, whereby the status quo does not change dramatically. In her position as a Jamaican creole woman, she is as effectively silenced as Annette in the US by social forces (the first kind of silence). Her agency in the form of silence is expressed at multiple places like her refusal to openly challenge her husband about his beliefs but

maintaining her secret visits and her refusal to communicate with her white-skinned daughter (Cliff, *No Telephone To Heaven* 55-77). This results in her finding a deeper identification for herself within Jamaica, making her position in America untenable. Ultimately, she leaves for Jamaica with her dark-skinned daughter, leaving Clare with her father. This develops her as a person who does not belong (spatially) in the US and (socially) in Jamaica, as half her family remains in the US. Kitty's decision to actually move to Jamaica shows mobility which Annette did not possess. Yet, at the same time, it also places her in exactly the same position, as her end is the same as Annette's; separated from her husband, living and dying in isolation and unable to really reap any benefit from a change in her position across a span of a hundred years in Jamaican history.

For Clare, Kitty's abandonment, conjoins intertextually with Annette's neglect of Antoinette and adds to her identity conflict. In her case, the first type of silence emerges due to external forces which include displacement, her mother's abandonment, rampant racism, colonialism, and a patriarchal order. *No Telephone to Heaven* consciously invokes all these discourses intertextually to challenge them. Exploring the intertextual relationship between these two novels and the way they invoke other texts, exposes the ways in which meaning is informed and appropriated. Kristy Butler explains this phenomenon:

[T]he intertextual is not simply stories building upon other stories. Intertextuality is a process, a fluid state of oscillating interpretations that seeks to expose the plurality of meaning, both in texts and, indeed, at the most basic level of the signifier. The value of intertextual readings or re-readings of stories lies in their ability to open up a text to new perspectives while at the same time avoiding hierarchical categorizations. (129)

Clare's conflict can thus be attributed to multiple factors through an intertextual reading. Her silence constructs her identity as a misfit in the social spheres she negotiates. Like Antoinette, her silence emerges in the aforementioned two

stages. Her voice is suppressed on the first level by the patriarchal system exemplified by her father's insistence on her hiding her 'blackness' behind a white façade: "Through all this… he counsels his daughter on invisibility and secrets. Self-effacement. Blending in. The use of camouflage" (Cliff, *No Telephone To Heaven* 100), and on the secondary level, her silence becomes a self-assumed habit; she passes through life unable to really communicate and form any meaningful and lasting ties as she cannot really identify with her whiteness and cannot discard her black heritage. Her communication with her father transcends into her being consciously silent around him because of his lack of understanding. It molds her identity as a misunderstood and fragmented individual. Through the account of Clare growing up in America in the novel, her voice never emerges; the text only gives the sense of time passing with each day alienating her from her father's principles, and thereby resulting in a total breakdown of communication between them, which comes to a head with Kitty's death.

Kitty's death again invokes *Wide Sargasso Sea* in a parallel to Annette's death. This reinforces the intertextual relationship between the experiences of the protagonists, Antoinette and Clare. Antoinette's inability to cry or ask questions about her mother is repeated in the way Clare reacts to the news of Kitty's death in Jamaica:

[A]fter the news arrived, Boy pressed her. "Have you cried for your mother yet?" He spoke behind eyes newly wet.

"No." Her voice did not break. (104)

Clare, like Antoinette, is unable to express grief because she is still trying to understand her mother's abandonment and its link to her skin color. This is reflected in her uncommunicated need to question her sister about her mother. Her identity conflict and her father's lack of understanding, however, render it impossible for her to express her position through words. Instead of trying to understand Clare, Boy reacts through violence and abuse while Clare realizes that any effort on her part to claim her mother's heritage would never be understood

or accepted by her father because in a parallel to Antoinette, he wouldn't be able to understand her. She had already had experience of this when she had tried to develop kinship with her dark-skinned ancestors through the photograph of a dead black child. Her inability to express grief strengthens the intertextual bonds in terms of experience and the resulting silence between Antoinette and Clare.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the second part of the book is taken over by the unnamed narrator, presumed to be Bronte's Rochester, who cajoles and coaxes Antoinette into marriage for her property but never accepts her or identifies her as English. His description of her is extremely revealing and explains his racially suspicious behavior towards her,

She wore a tricorne hat which became her. At least it shadowed her eyes which are too large and can be disconcerting…Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either. (Rhys 67)

Her husband views her as different and alien, which due to the patriarchal order of society proves to be detrimental for her. She does not know that he does not love her as a person, and she breaks her silence and even articulates her concerns about her fears and her identity to him revealing that speech actually divests her of her agency. The narrator does not understand or want to understand her differences of situation in a parallel to Mason and clings to the idea that she is mad like her mother when he gets the chance. Moreover, it is illuminating to note that her voice is really heard when Rochester is narrating the story and not her. This narration suggests that speech actually divests her of agency as it places her emotionally in a more vulnerable position where she has to beg for understanding. Whereas her silence denotes her understanding of this and her determination to express defiance by refusing to collaborate in her own subjugation.

Her effort to explain the real situation of her mother and her past in the face of allegations of madness, remains unsuccessful as she does not speak in the same axioms as he does. This does

not mean that she speaks in another language, it simply means that her mode of speaking focuses more on impressions rather than facts: "For five years. Isn't it quick to say. And isn't it long to live, And lonely … you can pretend for a long time, but one day it falls away and you are alone … they poisoned her horse…Many died in those days… they are forgotten, except the lies" (Rhys 130-131). His colonial orientation and patriarchal values make it impossible for him to relate or understand her ideas and her fragmented narrative. This phenomenon is explained by Haliloğlu:

Disenfranchised white creole women are at a disadvantage when speaking the 'English language', meaning a whole body of semiosis, from oral communicative skills to dress codes… a task which colonial education only barely prepares them for… (therefore she) introduces her own epistemology and semiosis… Thus, she seeks restitution in alternative meaning/ signifying systems… such as dream logic. (59-60)

This explains why her efforts at explanation remain misunderstood as her manner of communicating her thoughts is shaped by her own signs and symbols. Moreover, her agency is given direction through silences, not speech, so when she overcomes the self-imposed silence for a while and tries to speak, she is at her most vulnerable and is of course misunderstood. Even her bright colored clothes are seen by her husband as an anomaly and an aberration. While talking about shifts in feminist criticism, Mardorossian explains this: "Antoinette's seemingly 'natural' incapacity for rational (and causal) thought (cannot be) reduced to the concept of essential femaleness according to which, by virtue of her gender, her way of knowing is subjective and functions in a simple opposition to masculine rationality" (Mardorossian, "Double Decolonization" 81). This is true as such a reduction simplifies her complex liminal position and her agency as female irrationality. Her manner of communication as well as her silences are intertextually linked to the discourses of colonialism and patriarchy within which she functions. Thus, her silence is a response to these factors, and it exposes her to

be a highly fragmented and marginalized character who exercises her agency through her silence.

These historical facts of colonial legacies and neo-imperial projects become the reason why Clare keeps being displaced across the world in search of a place where she actually belongs. Her modern-day mobility allows her to wander in search of a place of belonging and she passes through England and most of Europe discovering that the mother country is not really a mother for her. Her ability to pass as a white is supposed to be a blessing and in Cliff's terms, "she is not meant to curse and rave and be a critic of imperialism; were she to do so she would be considered at least deviant, possessed perhaps by a rogue gene" ("Caliban's Daughter" 44). Yet Clare does exactly that because her mother's blood in her makes her identify with her black heritage as well. In the novel, during her college education, Cliff sketches a demonstration by the National Front, which disturbs Clare, and she tries to voice her disturbance in the form of a dialogue to a British class fellow:

"I mean to me it felt . . . dangerous"

"Oh . . . I'm sorry. But you needn't take it personally, you know"

"Why do you say that?"

"I mean you are hardly the sort they were ranting on about."

"That doesn't make it at all better … Besides, I can never be sure about that … and I'm not sure I should want … ah, exclusion." … Which is that I am ... by blood … the sort they, and she, were ranting about." (Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven* 139)

As the dialogue exhibits Clare's speech is inadequate for communicating her dilemma to Liz, and she reverts back to her silence. The gaps between her uttered words further highlight both her difficulty in expressing her position in words and her refuge in silence. This silence is echoed by the text which

moves through a disjointed narrative behavior that reinforces Clare's identity, referring intertextually not only to the racial and colonial history but also to the textualized (fiction) of her past. This multidimensional view of identity construction opens up discussions of the female identity not only in colonial and patriarchal terms but also in psychological spheres. Her lack of identification and her fear of never really belonging anywhere is manifested through her agency of silence (as she deliberately remains silent), and this silence in turn reveals her identity as a troubled and conflicted individual. Cliff herself sheds light on this in *No Telephone to Heaven*:

You knew her also as the girl left behind in the Brooklyn apartment…Crouching. Not speaking for years. Not feeling much of anything, except a vague dread that she belongs nowhere. … Her loss remains hidden – over time a fine thick moss covers her skin. She does not speak of it. She does not speak of it. (91)

It is essential to note that Cliff does not write that Clare cannot speak. Her repetition of the sentence "She does not speak" indicates both choice on Clare's part and stresses that choice.

Her fear of not belonging anywhere and of being rejected is an essential part of her identity because it directs her actions and her life. It is because of this that she is unable to function as a normal individual who has a sense of belonging. And this fear is perpetually being informed by and expressed through her silence. Moreover, Clare's ambivalence is not only reflected by the text and its arrangement but also intertextually in Antoinette's fear of being rejected. Her need for security, belonging and love make her ask Christophine to use obeah to help her husband fall in love with her but, in the end, she realizes the futility of this. Silence is her only agency which extols the lack of belonging experienced by the creole women. As the narrator in *Wide Sargasso Sea* puts it: "I looked at her. She was staring out to the distant sea. She was silence itself… She was only a ghost. A ghost in the grey daylight" (Rhys 168-170). The narrator recognizes Antoinette's choice of not speaking because silence is the attribute which carries her

agency—the thing that finally gets her noticed by him, something which her speech and pleading had failed to do. His later actions of imprisoning her demonstrate that he sees this silence as defiance. Ambivalence of this kind best describes the manner in which intertextuality connects the experiences of these women across time and constructs their identity within the broader framework of the texts of history, culture and society but also agency.

Both Antoinette and Clare employ silence as agency to highlight the inexpressibility of their experiences as liminal figures in history, doubly marginalized due to being female. This consciousness of being silent and using silence as a means to explore their liminality and place of belonging defines them. It forms and molds their identities as individuals set adrift across time, trying to understand the social, historical, and personal spheres in which they operate. This silence forms their identity as conflicted individuals, without a place of belonging. In Antoinette's case, it forms her as a person who sees no roots or a place of belonging for herself. So, in the end it does not matter whether she is in Jamaica, the place of her birth or the cold cardboard mansion in England. Cliff discussing Rhys's characterization of this writes:

Rhys shifts the gaze, providing for Bertha an inner life. She draws a map of fragmentation, splitting inspired perhaps by her own knowledge of the origins of the woman-gone-mad in colonial settings … the woman who is defined from the outside, who … cannot be whole. (Cliff, "Caliban's Daughter" 42)

Although a hundred years later, Clare's silence informs her identity in a similar way making her conflicted about her place of belonging, she, at the end, takes affirmative action but only by abandoning her European roots and claiming a Jamaican identity for herself. This identity is predominantly liminal, and though it recalls her from years of exile, her end does not change. In this context, Cliff uses deliberate intertextuality when she mentions *Jane Eyre* in relation to Clare who sees

herself reflected in Bertha and not Jane, for she is a representative of all the Berthas over the years:

No, she could not be Jane. Small and pale. English. No, she paused. No, my girl, try Bertha. Clare thought of her father. Forever after her to train her hair. She held to her curls, which turned kinks in the damp of London. Beloved racial characteristic. Her only sign, except here and there where melanin touched her. Yes, Bertha was closer [to] the mark. Captive. Ragout. Mixture. Confused. Jamaican. Caliban. Carib. Cannibal. Cimarrón. All Bertha. All Clare. (Cliff, *No Telephone To Heaven* 116)

She is a woman, but she is never Jane, for she cannot be Jane who is confident in her space while Clare, as product of colonialism, does not belong to any one sphere and thus strives to find identification. She exercises her agency of silence by observing, disconnecting, and fragmenting till her silence becomes an essential factor for not only molding her identity but rather its basic building block. She takes this silence back to Jamaica in an act of resistance when she joins the guerrillas but dies in the effort due to the discord left by the colonial rule.

The structure of the two texts also reaffirms silence as agency by replicating it. The novels become agents for conveying the experiences of liminality and, therefore, it is not surprising that they carry this burden through a series of narrative silences. As mentioned previously, Rhys begins *Wide Sargasso Sea* in Antoinette's voice which is always already overshadowed by determining outside factors. Then at a crucial moment of change in Antoinette's life, she makes Rochester the narrator thereby silencing Antoinette and exploring her as an exotic alien instead of a person. This narration moves to Grace Poole and then to Antoinette again but now her identity is completely determined by her silence both psychological and literal as she has turned into Bronte's Bertha. The structure of the text itself thus uses ambivalence to make intertextual references to historical, cultural, social, and fiction texts, which enmesh within narrative events and reinforce the silence of the characters. Thus, Antoinette's subsequent death is intertextually

echoed in the fragmented narrative of *No Telephone to Heaven*, where the whole narrative is engulfed with silences. The third-person narrative voice not only distances the reader, but it also creates distance between the fragments of Clare's and other character's lives. This is because the characters in this novel are joined together with the threads of multiple events and images which are loosely connected and are dominated by a prevailing silence. No character other than Harry/Harriet really speaks, and all the stories are fragmented and open ended, forcing the reader to notice and feel the silence that characterizes the protagonist.

Furthermore, an intertextual reading of these two texts illuminates the manner in which at the junctions of political liberation for Jamaica, the liminality of position remains the same for the creole women, leading to a split and fragmented identity. In a hundred years, the changes in terms of movement may have made Clare more mobile and Kitty more determined but the change remains only surface deep. This is because they are still functioning under imperialism, racism, and patriarchy, which makes their position as liminal women even more precarious and conflictual. In terms of change in identity and social negotiation then, Kitty and Annette and Antoinette/Bertha and Clare remain at the same place where their only concrete expression of identity is through consciously remaining silent. Rhys's writing may have saved "the woman from the colonies (from being) sacrificed as an insane animal for her sister's consolidation" (Spivak 251) and Clare may have "become herself alone" (Cliff, "Caliban's Daughter" 43), yet their situation and the difficulties they face do not materially change and they remain stagnant as subjects of imperialism and patriarchy.

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**End Notes**

[i] The term "ambivalence" as explained by Kristeva refers to the way intertextuality operates to bring history into a narrative, therefore placing it within a cultural context.

[ii] Backra refers to the white population of Jamaica.