1 Identity in the Postcolonial Paradigm:
Key Concepts

1.1 Cultural Identity and Diaspora

In this subchapter, I explore identity and as an adequate term to use when referring to cultural identities in the Caribbean region. Ultimately, I intend to argue that these cultural identities fit diaspora in all senses of the term. Firstly, I discuss the term identity itself, exploring arguments by different critics on the concept. Secondly, I apply the concept of diaspora to the cultural identity formation in an attempt to compensate for the western perspective. The concept of identity is complex and different meanings of it are evident to offer good starting points for an investigation of the concept of identity.

If in need of a definition, one looks first to dictionaries. Here is the most relevant entry for identity in the Oxford English Dictionary (10th edition, 1999): “the fact of being who or what a person or thing is” or “the distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity” (Oxford English Dictionary, 705). In addition to this, Beller and Leerssen also assert that: “Identity becomes to mean being identifiable, and is closely linked to the idea of ‘permanence through time’: something remaining identical with itself from moment to moment” (Beller and Leerssen, 2001, p. 1). They reveal “the other side” of identity by referring to what they call the synchronic meaning of the concept of identity. This refers to the “unique sense of self” (Beller and Leerssen, 2001, p. 4) that a person has about his own. This type of identity, also called “ipse identity” (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 78) implies a first person perspective. From this point of view, this sense of self is representing one’s autobiographical narrative with the ever-changing actions and reactions experienced in the real life. The process of rewriting the story of somebody’s life enables the person to reinterpret past experience and is essential for acting as a person with a sense of self in the present and the future. Moreover, the identity of a person (ipse identity) cannot be captured in typologies of roles or of fixed (group) characteristics used to describe the identity of individuals (idem identity), which takes a more objective, or third person perspective. The way somebody identifies himself/herself and is categorized by others – does influence their identity. The narratives people invent to each tell the story of their life and negotiate this self-construction; narratives are largely determined, of course, by their interactions with others. However,

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1 Diaspora (namely a collective memory and myth about the homeland) refers to those social groups which share a common ethnic and national origin, but live outside the territory of origin. These groups have a strong feeling of attachment to their “homeland”, making no specific reference to ethnicity, or to a particular place of settlement. All diasporas, either independent of national and ethnic background or treated as a single group in which ethnical boundaries are crossed and considered as being hybrid and globally oriented.
from the point of view of the individual sense of self, people need a certain amount of control over the borders between self and others.

Following the analysis above, I would argue that identity could figure into the explanation of action in two main ways, which parallel the two sides of the word’s present meaning. Recall that either “identity” can mean a social category or, in the sense of personal identity, distinguishing features of a person that forms the basis of his or her dignity or self-respect.

The use of different theories and methodologies by different critics has affected the ways in which researchers conceptualize identity, and it has resulted in the simultaneous use of different terms that describe identity as a socio-cultural construct. In agreement, I opted for the term cultural identity, which was defined as “an individual’s realization of his or her place in the spectrum of cultures and purposeful behavior directed on his or her enrollment and acceptance into a particular group, as well as certain characteristic features of a particular group that automatically assign an individual’s group membership” (Sysoyev, 2001, p. 37-38). In this respect, individuals’ cultural identity as a construct consists of a countless number of facets. Most commonly referred to and described in literature are the following facets or types of one’s cultural identity: racial, ethnic, social, economic, geopolitical, gender, religious, ability/disability, language, professional, etc. (fig. 2.1). Each of these facets represents a specific category of which a person has specific membership(s).

Following the concept of cultural identity, Stuart Hall’s thesis is that rather than thinking of identity as an “already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent” (Hall, 1996, p. 145), we should instead think of “identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete but always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, 1996, p. 167). Hall points out that there are two leading ways for thinking about cultural identity. The traditional model views identity:
“[...] in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common...” (Hall, 1996, p. 393).

Stuart Hall disapproves the view of cultural identity as something that can be defined “in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Hall, 1996, p. 393). For Hall, however, it is better to envision a “quite different practice, one based on ‘not the rediscovery but the production of identity’”. Not an identity grounded in the archaeology, but in the re-telling of the past” (Hall, 1996, p. 423). Such a viewpoint would entail acknowledging that this is an “act of imaginative rediscovery” (Hall, 1996, p. 425), one which involves “imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas” and leads to the restoration of an “imaginary fullness or plentitude, to set against the broken rubric of our past” (Hall, 1996, p. 428). Africa, he stresses, is the “name of the missing term, (...) which lies at the centre of our cultural identity and gives it a meaning which, until recently, it lacked” (Hall, 1996, p. 432).

The second model of (cultural) identity acknowledges ‘what we really are’ or rather ‘what we have become’. From this point of view, cultural identity is a:

“[...] matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.” (Hall, 1996, p. 394)

To be precise,

“[...] the uprooting of slavery and transportation and the insertion into the plantation economy (as well as the symbolic economy) of the Western world [...] ‘unified’ these peoples across their differences, in the same moment as it cut them off from direct access to their past.” (Hall, 1996, p. 396)

Difference “challenges the fixed binaries which stabilize meaning and representation and show how meaning is never fixed or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings” (Hall, 1996, p. 397). The question is where “does identity come in to this infinite postponement of meaning?” (Hall, 1996, p. 397) Thus, “meaning continues to unfold beyond the arbitrary closure which makes it, at any moment, possible. There is always something left over” (Hall, 1996, p. 396).

Drawing upon the notions of both displacement and deferral, Hall implies that the Caribbean is neither an isolated and autonomous place, which exists in a social and historical vacuum, nor the past separable from the present. The Caribbean identity is a “‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always con-
stituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, 1996, p. 91); a symbolic journey which a Caribbean or black Diaspora must discover.

Thereby, the concept of identity defines itself in terms of sameness vs. difference. More particular, difference (in the sense of difference, according to Dérrida) is always there within apparently ‘similar’ identities; though temporary fixity is necessary in the process of identification, “there is always something ‘left over’” (Hall, 1996, p. 55).

In understanding the concepts of identity and assimilation, terms such as “diaspora” and “hybridity” become other ways to analyze the nature of identity. Thus, we can see home and exile as two dynamic ends of what Byfield comments as “the creation of diaspora is in large measure contingent on a diasporic identity that links the constituent parts of the diaspora to a homeland” Byfield, 2000, p. 2). However, the discourse about identity looks like a clash between those who see a relatively fixed, coherent and racialized identity and those who perceive identities as multiple, provisional and dynamic. This latter group (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990) prefers, instead, the metaphor of hybridity to capture the ever-changing mixture of cultural characteristics. Early studies of diaspora were largely anthropological and focused on the ‘survival’ of cultural traits from Africa in the New World.

To a large extent, this issue of displacement and authenticity sets up the background for what follows. Some sustain that there was an annihilation of cultural characteristics during the middle passage and did not consider Africa as a reference point, while others consider the African culture as being a surviving one and took this as an evidence of a desire to return. These returns connect to a racialized and gendered hierarchy: “we must always keep in mind that diasporic identities are socially and historically constituted, reconstituted, and reproduced” (Patterson and Kelley, 2000, p. 19). The circumstances in which this takes place are highly organized within the imperial cultural configurations, but one fixed thing is that “the arrangements that this hierarchy assumes may vary from place to place but it remains a gendered racial hierarchy” (Patterson and Kelley, 2000, p. 20).

In what concerns the dynamics of identity within diaspora, several typologies were adopted during the nineties, in order to understand and describe the diasporas. In this perspective, for Alain Medam, the typology of the diasporic structure should be based on the opposition between the “crystallised diasporas” and the “fluid diasporas.” From the point of view of homeland, Robin Cohen created a new typology of diaspora based on diversity, namely: “1. Labour diasporas; 2. Imperial diasporas; 3. Trade diasporas; 4. Cultural diasporas (the Caribbean case)” (Cohen, 1997, p. 85).

The last type of diaspora – the cultural diaspora with the Caribbean case became one of the most stimulating and productive types. In its one cultural dimension, the diaspora discourse emphasizes the notion of hybridity, used by post-modernist authors to mark the evolution of new social dynamics seen as mixed cultures. One of the most important metaphoric designations of roots for diasporic hybridity is the rhizome, a term developed by Guattari and Deleuze. The rhizome becomes thus a useful motif because it describes root systems as being a continuous process that spreads continuously in all directions, from random nodes, creating complex net-
works of unpredictable shapes that are in constant process of growing. In this sense, the French Caribbean is a good example of the occurrence of the concept of hybridity. Edouard Glissant presents a clear reference to *rhizome* identity.

In this respect, James Clifford also developed a reference to “travelling cultures” founding its correspondence in the Black diaspora and in the work of Paul Gilroy (see the concept of the ‘Black Atlantic’). In this perspective, this current was concisely expressed by Cohen in his quotation: “diasporas are positioned somewhere between ‘nation-states’ and ‘travelling cultures’ in that they involve dwelling in a nation-state in a physical sense, but travelling in an astral or spiritual sense that falls outside the nation-state’s space/time zone” (Cohen, 1997, p. 95).

As Paul Gilroy describes, the nation-state is the institutional means to finish diaspora dissemination (diasporic translocation), on one side, through assimilation and, on the other side, through return. I am also at a converging point because all these researches lead to different questions about the connection between trans-nationalism and diasporas. In Gilroy’s view, the concept of diaspora is foreground as an antidote to what he calls “camp-thinking” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 84), which involves oppositional and exclusive modes of thought about people and cultures that rest on basis of purity and cultural identities. In contrast with this approach, the diasporic identities are conceivable as being “creolized, syncretized, hybridized and chronically impure cultural forms” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 129). Notably, the diaspora concept can be “explicitly antinational” and can have “de-stabilizing and subversive effects” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 128). It offers, “an alternative to the metaphysics of race, nation and bounded culture coded into the body, diaspora is a concept that problematizes the cultural and historical mechanics of belonging” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 123). Diaspora is also “invariably promiscuous” and challenges, “to apprehend mutable forms that can redefine the idea of culture through reconciliation with movement and complex, dynamic variation” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 129-130).

To conclude, if we turn back to Hall’s notion of diasporic identity we can see that his type of identity is one based upon difference and hybridity. It rejects old “‘imperialising’ and ‘hegemonising’ forms of ‘ethnicity’” (Hall, 1996, p. 401). It is “defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity... hybridity” (Hall, 1996, p. 402). Therefore, the diasporic identity can more often express the experience of migrancy and settlement, of ‘making’ one’s home than a fixation to a ‘homeland’ of diasporic cultures. For much of this subchapter I have suggested that a diasporic consciousness as classically conceived is opposed to the process of creolization.

As the story of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set in Jamaica and Dominica only a few years after the abolition of slavery, coming to terms with its consequences is one of the key themes in the novel. Although slavery is already over at the point of the beginning of the novel, both the black and white people have to face the consequences of the shared history of slavery. The novel analyzes the black people even further, following the shift from slavery to freedom.
1.2 Types of Cultural Identity

If multiple identities have to be conceived as a cultural pattern, according to the four primary axes that allow cultural identities to form described by David Winterstein, we can identify four types of cultural identities: “nested or embedded identities (conceived as concentric circles), ‘marble-cake’ or mixed identities (where the components are inseparable at different levels and they influence each other), cross-cutting or overlapping identities, separate or exclusive identities. The first axis is the inclusion, a set of attributes that an individual uses to communicate with a group. The second is the exclusion or the ensemble of means by which the group differentiates itself from others and the third defines itself as a point of identification within a culture’s value system. The fourth axis is related to space, which helps to associate a cultural group with a specific territory” (Winterstein, 2003, p. 123). Within these four axes, the cultural norms are implied and meanings that work together to create the phenomena are known as cultural identity.

As Fig. 2.2. shows, there are certain identities nested or embedded within others. I will refer to those identities towards the bottom as lower order identities (marble-cake or mixed) and those toward the top as higher order identities (separate or exclusive identities). Nested identities form the end of the chain to a higher order identity and the end of a lower order identity.
The nested identities (e.g. personal identities) have at least three key dimensions: inclusive/exclusive, abstract/concrete and distal/proximal. Because higher order identities are more inclusive, abstract and distal, there tends to be at least some overlap in the range of nested identities. The degree of inconsistency and conflict between nested identities may fluctuate in time as new identitarian issues arise. Ironically, such flashpoints may facilitate shifts by rendering multiple identities, although such shifts are likely to trigger heightened anxiety. A second reason that shifts between nested identities is that identification with a given level tends to generalize to other levels such that the subjective importance of the implicated identities tends to generalize as well. Because the culture provides the context in which local identities may flourish, culture may come to be seen as one’s ‘home’ or the ‘vehicle’ for expressing one’s local identities. The cross-cutting identities (e.g. social identities) include formal and informal collectives. The larger rings depicts identities that cross-cut multiple nested identities, including identities that extend beyond the boundaries. Although the rings converge on the ‘marble-cake’ or embedded identities, cross-cutting identities may converge on any nested level.

The traditional conceptions developed in order to study individual identity form a useful basis to analyse the possibilities of new postnational collective identities. At the individual level, the first approach to be taken into account is essentialism. Taking into account the collective level, according to which identity is given by social attributions, another level, the individual one arises, according to which identity is given by natural features building an identitarian essence. Another approach to individual identity is constructivism, which creates, builds and rebuilds identities, rather than being culturally pre-ordinate. Another view to discuss is the model of narrative identity that considers the biographical structure as a condition for thinkability of collective identity.

Within the context above, the social structure and culture contrast two notions of individual identity. In the former, identity is ascribed, inheriting in the social and family several roles the subject occupies; in the latter, identity is chosen and responsibilities are freely taken up. Deprived of structure, the subject is driven into culture; denied an identitarian role, he or she demands an individuality which will make up for that which has been relinquished. Furthermore, cultural identity is considered to be the identity of a group or culture, or of an individual as far as he or she is depend upon by his/her belonging to a group or culture.

On the other hand, Mouffe states that:

“When we accept that every identity is relational and that the condition of existence of every identity is the affirmation of a difference, the determiners of an ‘other’ that is going to play the role of a ‘constitutive outside’, it is possible to understand how antagonisms arise. In the domain of collective identification, where what is in question is the creation of a ‘we’ by the definition of a ‘them’, the possibility always exists that this ‘we/them’ relation will turn into a relation of the friend / enemy type” (Mouffe, 1993, p. 2-3).

The condition for collective identification (we vs. them) - ‘my blood, my family, my kin, my clan, my nation, my race’ - is an ever-present and potentially violent expulsion of
those who are not ‘my blood, my family, my kin, my clan, my nation, my race’. The existing of one nation presupposes other identical nations, with the consequences that cause Hegel such anxiety and which might be phrased as “if the other is so like me, the other is within” (Hegel, 2001, p. 89).

I, thus, consider that the individual, then, is an effect of multiple identifications. For example, if I was born and brought up in England, I may mainly identify myself as English; but if, as a child, I am taken for some time to Jamaica, I will have to live into that identity. Paul Gilroy writes: “I am not against the nation…I am against the rhetoric of cultural insider(ism), because I think it is too readily limited to unacceptable ideas of homogeneous national culture and exclusionary national or ethnic belonging” (Gilroy, 1994, p. 72). Thus, if identity is understood as an effect of discourse, national identity in a national culture can never achieve the unified homogeneity it wishes for itself. In this case, I have to admit that there can be no escape from identity; and further that all identity defines itself precisely by establishing an inside (in-hereness) and an outside (out-hereness), so that all identities, to a certain degrees, practice insiderism together with an exclusionary force. In this case, Anthony Smith concludes that:

> “Of all the collective identities in which human beings share today, national identity is perhaps the most fundamental and inclusive. Not only has nationalism, the ideological movement, penetrated every corner of the globe; the world is divided, first and foremost, into ‘nationstates’ – states claiming to be nations – and national identity everywhere underpins the recurrent drive for popular sovereignty and democracy, as well as the exclusive tyranny that it sometimes breeds. Other types of collective identity – class, gender, race, religion – may overlap or combine with national identity but they rarely succeed in undermining its hold, though they may influence its direction.” (Smith, 1991, p. 143)

All collective identities (clan, nation, region, ethnic group) identify its-self by denying the other, demarcating inside from outside and stretching a distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

To summarize, the relationship between individual identity and collective identity focuses on two directions of thought: one that claims that individual identity and collective identity are conflicting and that collective identity is not likely to replace the individual one; and the other that argues that collective identity is constructed on an entirely different basis than individual identity and the two can coexist. On one hand, I argue that collective identity cannot compete with individual identity because it does not have deep-rooted memories that can induce a sense of loyalty the same way individual identity does. On the other hand, I emphasize that individual identity and collective identity do not clash, because their bases for allegiance are different.

Because these are not fixed, there is no reason to believe that these new constructs cannot become as powerful as the national ones and that, indeed, they can override national identity. Second, although collective identity is to a large degree based on principles of popular sovereignty and civic rights, it still needs a shared ‘culture’ to connect people at an emotional level.
Another aspect I want to emphasize here is that nation is a form of collective identity, which becomes possible only in the conditions of modernity. Hence, national identity is an ‘object’ of modernity. It is widely known that nation is a form of social philosophy, a way of thinking focused on promoting the interests of a particular social group. In this respect, Anderson is right to emphasize that nation, like the rest of human culture, is ‘imagined’ in the sense that it is constructed rather than being the result of a natural process:

“I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” (Anderson, 1991, p. 5-6)

What is very interesting for me is that Anderson’s work refers to anthropological data, as he maintains that the concept of “nation” is truly a cultural construct, a manufactured artifice. Thus, for Anderson, it is “imagined”. Nation and identity begin with one’s family and closest friends, and slowly move out from this center. An example, two residents of the same country may live in completely different geographical climates, having very little in common with each other. Furthermore, Raymond Williams also comments that:

“‘Nation’ as a term is radically connected with ‘native’. We are born into relationships which are typically settled in a place. This form of primary and ‘placeable’ bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance. Yet the jump from that to anything like the modern nation-state is entirely artificial.” (Williams, 1983, p. 180).

Subsequently, by repeating this internalisation of an idealised reflection of itself, the subject aspires to a homogeneity and permanence identifying its unity in an image of the body as a unified whole and fearing a corresponding image of the body in pieces. The individual, then, is an effect of multiple identifications.

Nation is almost certain to be more heterogeneous in its membership than a pre-national grouping, more mixed by race, class, gender, regional loyalty. At the same time, it is composed of two separate aspects, a modern state and a culture. It occupies a “symbolic rather than territorial space” (Samuel, 1989, p. 16). In this sense, national cultures provide discursive narratives.

In National Identity, Anthony Smith explains the concept of national identity by setting forth five essential characteristics: a historic territory or ‘homeland’, which becomes “a repository of historic memories” (e.g. Caribbean homeland) (Smith, 1991, p. 14). On the one hand, a colonial order imposed the myths and symbols of national cultural identity and caused the conquest of European civilization; on the

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2 See Breuilly’s statement: “To focus upon culture, ideology, identity, class or modernization is to neglect the fundamental point that nationalism is, above and beyond else, about politics and that politics is about power” (Breuilly, 1993).
other, the negation of these myths and symbols associated with the popular culture and resistance to a system of oppression. In short, the national cultural identity is largely a hybrid of European, African, Amerindian and Asian cultures: in other words, essentially Creole.

Therefore, the struggle for cultural identity involves struggling for the hegemony of the popular Creole culture over a culture associated with European traditions and the recuperation of myths and symbols largely suppressed by the local elites. Culture here takes both the narrow sense of creative expression and its wider anthropological meaning, and the way of life of a distinct population.

It becomes possible for me to say that, on the one hand, “nationalism... is an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining the autonomy, unity and identity of a nation” (Smith, 1991, p. 74). On the other, there is a national credo against a colonial power: “nationalism is a reaction of peoples who feel culturally at a disadvantage” (Plamenatz, qtd. in Kamenka, 1976, p. 24).

I shall start my analysis of the cultural identity asserting that culture in itself is not static; it is very fluid. Culture evolves, adapts and adopts. In this sense, traveling identities are part of an initiation step. The journey is an apparently linear and fixed path, while wandering/adventure has some unforeseen and sinuous implications. However, the apparent purpose of an imposing a trip overlaps the apparent lack of purpose that characterizes the adventures.

Within the oscillation between négritude and negriceness, the African-descendent experiences are the symbol of mobility. Involved in such a moveable identity, “[...] the subject develops different identities in specific moments. These identities are not unified around a coherent ‘self’” (Hall, 1992, p. 13). This mobility, which features the African-descendent identities, sustains the double consciousness of the existential experience that instigates the black subject to move within the westernized world. To sustain this, Du Bois explains that when he lives the double consciousness, the black subject “feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (DuBois, 1994, p. 2), thus creating a so-called ‘hyphenated’ cultural identity.

The concept of négritude refers to those traveling identities and cultures, coming from Africa, going to the Caribbean, and then advancing to Europe. In such an experience of leaving from one place to reach another, the ship turns itself into the metaphor of displacement, being able to develop a ‘traveling alterity’:

“Because the womb of the slave-ship is the place and the moment, in which the African languages disappear, as they never put together in a slave-ship, or in the plantations, people who could speak the same language. Thus, the persons found themselves dispossessed of all kind of elements of their daily life.” (Glissant, 2005, p. 19)

This consideration brings the concept of signifyin(g) which implies the idea of traveling and navigating cultures; influenced by cultural mobility, signifyin(g) intends to account for inter-
textuality in African-descendants' experiences. In the African-descendent literary scenario, *signifyin(g)* explains “how black texts ‘talk’ to other black texts” (Gates, 1988, p. 26).

Glissant is of the same opinion, when he suggests that the identity is open and develops a double root, which, according to him is the identity that comes from creoleness, “that is, from the rizome-like identity, from the identity no longer as one solitary root, but as a root moving toward and encountering other roots” (Glissant, 2005, p. 27).

However, in thinking about travel, the identitarian questions: what becomes the sense of home? Is home merely a place to depart from, or can we see travel as leading us to think about how homes must also be cultivated through movement? James Clifford argues that “Cultural centers, discrete regions and territories, do not exist prior to contacts, but are sustained through them, appropriating and disciplining the restless movements of people and things” (Clifford, 1997, p. 3).

*Home* is not a place that one leaves behind, but a geographical point of reference, a sense of place that serves as an anchor for the travel. According to James Clifford, the cross-cultural or ‘border’ experiences of travel are not viewed as acculturation, where there is a linear progression from culture A to culture B, nor as syncretism, where two systems overlap each other. Rather, Clifford understands these cross-cultural or ‘border’ experiences as instances of historical contact, “with entanglement at intersecting regional, national, and transnational levels” (Clifford, 1997, p. 7). Inspired by Mary Louise Pratt’s ‘contact-zones’, a contact approach emphasizes the intercultural interaction that takes place within these spaces of interaction and exchange.

In his study on rites of passage, Arnold van Gennep identifies three stages at work in transitional events such as births, marriages, and deaths: *separation* (the preliminal stage), *transition* (the liminal stage), and *incorporation* (the postliminal stage). While the passage itself involves an ambiguous threshold, the completion of a rite of passage establishes the individual’s identity within a new social category or phase of life. It is entirely fitting that in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette, who spends so much of the novel rejecting carefully constrained categories in order to inhabit conceptually blended spaces, would steal at the end of the novel a set of keys. She breaks from the contained space of a bedroom into a passageway – a dark passageway because it is a mysterious space that fulfills her earlier yearning for “shifting shadows” (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 48). Importantly, though, this passage has no destination. The candle is present, Antoinette says, “to light me along the dark passage”, but here the novel ends, without her being led anywhere (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 156). She remains caught in a space that ought to connect two particular states, but is itself neither here nor there. The perpetual liminality of a failed rite of passage mirrors the dissolution of discrete concepts by which metaphor verges on madness. While successful liminal transition reads as a metaphor for metaphor itself; entrapment within a liminal space is a metaphor for madness. If the inability to recognize the boundaries of the metaphorical space is the inability to maintain sanity by grounding experience in discrete concepts, then the breakages of Antoinette’s associative context leave her caught within the space of metaphor, where ‘this’ can no longer be distinguished from ‘that’.
In my opinion, this dark passage of the liminal space also echoes the middle passage of the slave ships, whose captive human cargo benefited Antoinette’s family for years before the abolishment of slavery. Dionne Brand, a member of the African-Caribbean diaspora, describes the diasporic experience as one of feeling disconnected from the lands on both sides of the ocean: “There is the sense in the mind of not being here or there, of no way out or in. [...] Caught between the two, we live in the Diaspora, in the sea in between. Imagining our ancestors stepping through these portals one senses people stepping out into nothing; one senses a surreal space, an inexplicable space. One imagines people so stunned by their circumstances, so heartbroken as to refuse reality. Our inheritance in the Diaspora is to live in this inexplicable space” (Brand, 2002, p. 20).

Wide Sargasso Sea, like metaphor, is a dark passage of shifting shadows that is useful to cross, but which, in the face of violent disconnections such as those that Antoinette experiences, can become its own desolate destination: “We are always in the middle of the journey” (Brand, 2002).

In what follows, I provide an exposition and comparative discussion on hybridity and diasporic creolization, as a way of understanding mixture and exoticness. By engaging with the historical moment and ideological structure of European colonialism, along with conceptualizations of race (whiteness), gender (femininity), and cultural location (creolité), I show how the central characters and their subjectivities are explicitly shaped and influenced by the conceptual and physical realms they inhabit.

1.3 Hybridity versus Cultural Alterity

There is a much more telling argument, which states that the rhetoric of hybridity associated with the Caribbean identity, and broadly speaking in particular with its ‘creolization’ counterpart, suggests a new framework that continues to mark Caribbean identity as an ‘exotic’ other. Transgression concepts can be applied to serve various interests just as it is the case with the idea of purity. Hence, we should always be attentive to the question of whose interests are served by articulating identity in terms of ‘hybridity’, rather than ‘purity’ in specific instances. In this sense, hybridity will be used to help focus our understanding of these diverse concepts which are against purity, focusing on the experience of the migrant/exiled as a particularly displacement experience of their position ‘on the margin’ of cultures, of dislocations and relocations. In the words of Stuart Hall: “You have to be familiar enough with it [the centre] to know how to move in it. But you have to be sufficiently outside it, so you can

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3 It is to be mentioned that culture works according to the following functions: one is Homi Bhabha’s ‘fixed tablet of tradition’ and the second is a location for the development of culture (referring to the process of cultural change and hybridization). In this respect, the former is not geographically dependent, whereas hybridisation is often specifically related to a place, locale or situation.
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examine it and critically interrogate it. And it is this double move, or what I think one writer after another have called, the double consciousness of the exile, of the migrant, of the stranger who moves to another place, who has this double way of seeing it, from the inside and the outside” (Hall, 1996, p. 381).

Hence, the formation of double consciousness is not simply a cognitive process of constructing self-knowledge or self-identity. Rather, DuBois’s conception of ‘double consciousness’ embraces a human reflexivity (a volitional human activity) that questions self as a supreme being. In short, the formation of double consciousness is a nexus of interconnected processes of generating and re-generating dialogical human relationships.

I should call attention to the fact that speaking of ‘mixture’ presupposes the existence of something that can be mixed. A counterargument to this could be that hybridity is not about mixture in nuce, since purity never existed; rather, hybridity is about displacement. That is, focusing on hybridity involves focusing on Hall’s concept of ‘positioning’, rather than on ‘mixing’ of cultural forms. It involves focusing on the relation between the ‘centre’ and the ‘margin’ in one way or the other, be it the relation between the West and the rest or between majority and minority or on how the penetration of the centre by the marginalized undermines the dominant position of the centre.

On one hand, in relation to diaspora, hybridity is perceived as a process of cultural mixing wherein the diasporic subjects change different aspects of the host culture and reconfigure them under the ‘shape’ of a new hybrid culture or “hybrid identities” (Chambers, 1996). On the other hand, “hybrid identities” also imply the existence of non-hybridity:

“[…] the idea of hybridity, of intermixture, presupposes two anterior purities… I think there isn't any purity; there isn't any anterior purity... that's why I try not to use the word hybrid ... Cultural production is not like mixing cocktails.” (Gilroy, 1994, p. 54-55)

In other words, the language of contemporary cultural theory shows remarkable similarities with the patterns of thought that characterized Victorian racial theory. It is very important to signal the fact that the ‘cultural clash’ associated with the idea of cultural survival through fusion, mixture, miscegenation or creolization provoked a clash in the colonial rule, attempting to unravel the violent consequences of a paranoid ‘first contact’.

The driving imperative here is to save centred, bounded and coherent identities: placed identities for placeless times. Purified identities are constructed through the purification of space, through the maintenance of the territorial boundaries and frontiers, being also situated at the heart of empire. This can be understood in terms of “a geography of rejection which appears to correspond to the purity of antagonistic communities” (Sibley, 1995, p. 410). Purification aims to secure both protection from and positional superiority over, the external Other. In this case, William Connolly argues:

“When you remain within the established field of identity and difference, you become a bearer of strategies to protect identity through devaluation of the other; but if you transcend the field of
identities through which the other is constituted, you lose the identity and standing needed to communicate with those you sought to inform. Identity and difference are bound together. It is impossible to reconstitute the relation to the second without confounding the experience of the first.” (Connolly, 1991, p. 329)

Jennifer DeVere Brody suggests, “Purity is impossible and, in fact, every mention of the related term hybrid, only confirms a strategic taxonomy that constructs purity as a prior (fictive) ground” (DeVere Brody, 1998, p. 11-12).

Stuart Hall is of the opinion that “unsettling, recombination, hybridisation and ‘cut-and-mix’ carries with a transformed relation to tradition”, one in which “there can be no simple ‘return’ [to] or ‘recovery’ of the ancestral past which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present” (Hall, 1996, p. 30). In constructing identity, Paul Ricoeur suggests that:

“When we discover that there are several cultures instead of just one and consequently at the time when we acknowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly, be it illusory or real, we are threatened with the destruction of our discovery. Suddenly, it becomes possible that there are just others, that we are ourselves an ‘other’ among others.” (Ricoeur, 1965, p. 278)

I want to signify here that the wish to replace ‘purity talk’ with ‘hybridity talk’ also has very different power effects, depending on the context and who defines the situation.

However, as I prepared this book I became more and more interested in what might be described as a Creole diaspora – an ostensibly oxymoronic category given my earlier arguments a way of looking at postcolonial identity as fluid, relational and always in flux. I explain this fluidity of identity by referring to Homi Bhabha’s innovative formulation and application of the concept of liminality in his text, The Location of Culture. Thus, Homi Bhabha analyzes the liminality of hybridity as a paradigm of colonial anxiety. He uses liminality, like hybridity, to refer to the moment or place, where a thing becomes its alterity. It is an “interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” space (Bhabha, 1994, p. 103). Bhabha’s critique of cultural imperialist hybridity means that the rhetoric of hybridity became more concerned with challenging essentialism and its application to sociological theories of identity, multiculturalism, and racism. There is also a nostalgic attempt to revivify pure and indigenous regional cultures in reaction against what are perceived as threatening forms of cultural hybridity. Moreover, Bhabha stresses the interdependence of colonizer and colonized, in terms of hybridity.

The hybrid identity positions itself within this third space, as “lubricant” (Papastergiadis, 1997, p. 56) in the conjunction of cultures. The hybrids’ potential is with their innate knowledge of ‘transculturation’, their ability to transverse both cultures and to translate, negotiate and mediate affinity and difference within a dynamic of exchange and inclusion. They have encoded within them a counter hegemonic agency. At the point at which the colonizer presents a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy opens up a third space of/for rearticulating negotiation and meaning.

My first term in postcolonial studies, ‘hybridity’ commonly refers to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft,
Hybridity versus Cultural Alterity

Hybridization displays many forms including cultural, political and linguistic ones. Moreover, Ashcroft sustains how “hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen as the characteristic feature and contribution of the postcolonial, allowing a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth” (Ashcroft, 1995, p. 183).

On the contrary, Papastergiadis reminds us of the emancipative potential of negative terms. He poses the following question: “should we use only words with a pure and inoffensive history, or should we challenge essentialist models of identity by taking on and then subverting their own vocabulary?” (Papastergiadis, 1997, p. 258) This question transforms the concept of hybridity into a “celebrated and privileged kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference” (Hoogvelt, 1997, p. 158).

It is thus not at all surprising that the creative production of diasporic hybridity takes the form of a delicate double-matter: denial and appropriation as such in the name of a perennial ‘homelessness’ and at the same time engaging in the polemical politics of representation. Characterized by a symptomatic DuBoisian ‘double consciousness’, the diasporic hybridity has to both ‘enjoy itself as symptom’ and simultaneously transform the political body where it resides as ‘symptom’. The concept of diasporic hybridity reveals a dynamic construction, which creates cultural mixing in the context of colonialism (Brah, 1996; Hall, 1996; Gilroy, 2000).

At another level, the view of diasporic hybridity as layered in history includes the pre-colonial, colonial/imperial and postcolonial post-imperial periods, each with distinct sets of hybridity, as a function of the boundaries that were prominent (Fig. 2.3). Thus, we can distinguish three types of hybridity:

a) Hybridity across modes of production (this gives rise to mixed social formations);
b) Hybridity before and after industrialization;
c) Hybrid modes of regulation (besides nations with overtly hybrid identities, there are hybrid regions or zones that straddle geographic and cultural areas).

My second example is much closer to what Robert Young distinguishes between ‘organic’ and ‘intentional’ (Young, 1995) modes of hybridity (fig. 2.4.). We are thus facing a dualism in hybridity theory between the positive hybridity, which is dynamic, progressive, diasporic, rhizomic, subversive, anti-essentialist, routes-oriented and based on cut-and-mix; and a negative hybridity, which is essentialist, roots-oriented and based on simple ideas of combining two wholes to make a third whole. The dynamic processes of cultural practice, which displays their own tensions between roots and routes, characterize this scheme: being and becoming.

Many critics (such as Hall, Bhabha and Spivak) consider that hybridity could have possible positive effects in different cultural contexts. In this respect, Papastergiadis notes, “At the broadest level of conceptual debate there seems to be a consensus over the utility of hybridity as antidote to essentialist subjectivity” (Papastergiadis, 1997, p. 273). Moving on Bakhtin and Hall, Robert Young introduces a type of hybridization
that is ‘organic’ (Bakhtin’s term) and that it merges different identities into new forms. He goes on to describe a second more radical form of hybridization that is ‘intentional’ and disporic, “intervening as a form of subversion, translation, transformation” (Young, 1995, p. 25). He argues that, “Hybridization as creolization involves fusion, the creation of a new form, which can then be set against the old form, of which it is partly made up. Hybridization as ‘raceless chaos’ by contrast, produces no stable new form but rather something closer to Bhabha’s restless, uneasy, interstitial hybridity: a radical heterogeneity, discontinuity, the permanent revolution of forms” (Young, 1995, p. 25).

![Fig. 1.3: Patterns of Hybridity as layered in History](image)

The two diasporic forms of hybridity (the first one identified by Young with the process of ‘homogenization’) are opposing each other: “hybridity has not slipped out of the mantle of the past” and has not yet been “fully redeployed and reinflected” by cultural theorists (Young, 1995). Young points out that these two forms of hybridity are in an historical relation of chronological change, in which the older, anachronistic, negative form is balancing a newer, more positive form. In this dynamic context, the effect is that these types of hybridity “constantly overlap and interweave,” being framed by the same historical background (Young, 1995).

In his fundamental distinction between ‘organic’ and ‘intentional’ hybridity, Bakhtin refers to ‘organic hybridity’ as, “unintentional, unconscious hybridization (...), as one of the most important modes in the historical life and evolution of languages.
We may even say that language and languages change historically primarily by means of hybridization, by means of mixing of various ‘languages’” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 358). He goes on to declare that “the mixture remains mute and opaque, never making use of conscious contrasts and oppositions... [Yet] such unconscious hybrids have been at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new worldviews, with new ‘internal forms’ for perceiving the world” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 360).

According to Bakhtin, “an intentional hybrid is first of all a conscious hybrid” that is, “an encounter within the area of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousness, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 358) (Fig. 2.4).

Similarly Bhabha drawing on Derrida, also stresses the performative dimensions of cultural enunciation: “the place of utterance is crossed by the difference of writing... [which ensures] that meaning is never simply mimetic and transparent” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 36). Thus, the ceremonial opening of the bridge defines a liminal space. Seen from Bhabha’s perspective, both types of hybridity (he does not distinguish between them) frame the already mentioned ‘third space’ in which the ambivalences of the colonial encounter are enacted.

In other settings, in the Western thought, the ‘other’ is seen as a threat, alter-ego or an enigma of the self. The definition offered by *Oxford English Dictionary* describes
alterity as “The state of being other or different; diversity, ‘otherness’” (Oxford English Dictionary, 78). At the other end of the spectrum, one finds such terms as mimesis or copy. Cultural alterity is a pattern of perceiving those outside a group, whatever that group might be, as inferior to another group. Those who do not fit, who are not included, are considered as forming the Other. In other words, all groups have a tendency to develop some expectations, and that some people who do not meet those expectations become the Other. In addition to that, whenever an In-group defines itself, an Out-group automatically creates itself (e.g. those who are not included). W.E.B. Du Bois talks about the pain of such exclusion based on his racial identification and ‘double consciousness’. Thus, the need for ‘belongingness’ can lead to the belief that if we can come to a consensus amongst ourselves, then we have achieved something valuable as a social group. This agreement then becomes normal and commensurate expectations are generated. When these expectations are not met, we consider the others who do not meet them ‘deviant’, or not like us, namely the Other.

Firstly, this phenomenon, in which otherness mediates, related to Lacanian’s idea of seeing others through a screen. The three categories include the other seen through a screen, the other seen as a screen, and the other as a medium for exchange. In the first category, the screen symbolizes a boundary, which represents a space of exclusion or limitation between the self and the other, or individuals and their unconscious. In the case of the second category, the screen identifies with the others. The screen thus becomes like a surface for projection. What one perceives are the stereotypes of the others; projection in this case tends to obscure the other’s identity with a dynamic relationship between fact and fantasy. The third category, the other seen as a medium for exchange, departs from the metaphor of the screen being in this case the place for interaction.

When the self refers to the individual, one must wonder to what extent a person can actually know one’s own mind. Thus, the identity of the individual is constituted by being borrowed from the Other. In this way, the unconscious provides an example of an-other in the tension between the subject and the ego.

In Black Skin, White Masks, Frantz Fanon gives an account of the colonial environment inherently engendering inferiority complexes for the colonized because “the black is a black man; that is as the result of a series of aberrations of affect, he is rooted at the core of a universe from which he must be extricated” (Fanon, 1967, p. 183). Fanon describes his mission in his book to be “the liberation of the man of colour from himself” because of the prejudice and stereotyping arising from the cultural differences, the excluded seeks and desires to prove his humanity, his sameness, to the included and find solidarity with the white man. The Other as a screen emphasizes that the power disparities can change the other into a blank screen. The process of negotiating Caribbean identities involves the question of defining the people. Fanon speaks of what he calls “a passionate research directed to the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some beautiful and splendid area whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and others” (Fanon, 1967, p. 67).
1.4 The Postcolonial Social Contract and Caribbean Modernism

Nevertheless, the social contract is neither ‘natural’ nor permanently fixed. Rather, according to some philosophers such as Locke or Rousseau, the contract itself is the only one, which meets the general interest. Rousseau argues that the subject can be selfish and decide that his personal interest could overcome the collective interest. However, as part of a collective body, the individual subject puts aside his egoism to create a ‘general will’:

“[The social contract] can be reduced to the following terms. Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and in a body we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.” (Kelley and Masters, 1990, p. 139)

Or a total control upon oneself, according to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon:

“What really is the Social Contract? An agreement of the citizen with the government? No, that would mean but the continuation of [Rousseau’s] idea. The social contract is an agreement of man with man; an agreement from which must result what we call society. In this, the notion of commutative justice, first brought forward by the primitive fact of exchange... is substituted for that of distributive justice... Translating these words, contract, commutative justice, which are the language of the law, into the language of business, and you have commerce, that is to say, in its highest significance, the act by which man and man declare themselves essentially producers, and abdicate all pretension to govern each other.” (Proudhon, 1989, p. 34)

Social contract theory can also apply to different territories, taking into account that a society, which has effective governance or influence over a territory, is the sovereign over that territory, and therefore the true, legal owner of all that the said territory encompasses:

“I think that the person who makes this argument is already assuming that the government has some legitimate jurisdiction over this territory. And then they say, well, now, anyone who is in the territory is therefore agreeing to the prevailing rules. But they’re assuming the very thing they’re trying to prove – namely that this jurisdiction over the territory is legitimate. If it’s not, then the government is just one more group of people living in this broad general geographical territory. But I’ve got my property, and exactly what their arrangements are I don’t know, but here I am in my property and they don’t own it – at least they haven’t given me any argument that they do – and so, the fact that I am living in “this country” means I am living in a certain geographical region, that they have certain pretensions over – but the question is whether those pretensions are legitimate. You can’t assume it as a means to proving it.” (Long, 2004, p. 89)

Within this context, colonialism, once the imperial hegemony of the West, has changed the cultural differences for its own historical purposes. The histories of why one country (Britain, in this case) was able to obtain mastery over another have used cultural disparities as a justification; the discontinuities between the interests of colonizer and colonized make a coherent history of their exchanges.
Starting from the “emphasis on the epistemological break between colonizer and colonized, postcolonialism renews the post-modern questioning of historicism”\(^4\) (Hamilton, 1996, p. 178). According to this, if justice is abandoned and the colonizer is defined as inferior or irredeemably ‘other’, the effects on the colonizers can still be disconcerting: “The immobility to which the native is condemned can only be called in question if the native decides to put an end to the history of colonization – the history of pillage – and to bring into existence the history of the nation – the history of decolonization” (Fanon, 1967, p. 327).

Also vital for postcolonial thinking is the consequence that the more unjust is the domination upon the slave, the more his or her existence will remain unknowable. The other may conform to the expectations, but only in the so-called self-ignorance. In the social contract, the ‘other’ is the outline of the familiar, viewed as the boundary of its outside, sharing its own self within. Thus, when that circumference is disturbed, the inside is also disturbed, as well as the outside. Homi Bhabha writes that “The White man’s eyes break up the Black man’s body and in that act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 60). From Fanon’s perspective ‘colonialism’:

“…is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content by a kind of perverted logic it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it... The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives’ heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality.” (Fanon, 1967, p. 169)

Therefore, in the social contract framework, the resistance to colonialism means that the past is given back its value. It is not just history as a narrative that is coercive here, but the dialectical assimilation of native traditions to the colonial ideology of progress:

“After the conflict there is not only the disappearance of colonialism of the colonized man. This new humanity cannot do otherwise than define a new humanism both for itself and for others.” (Fanon, 1967, p. 198)

In this episteme of the new humanism, there is a re-examination of the idea that the postcolonial social contract deals with the methods through which a culture gathers others to its own point of view. In a typical way, this appropriation determines the colonial subjects not to obey, this fact adding a subversive ‘disobedience’ to their ‘civility’, keeping also a suitable distance between them and their masters, between the colonizers and the colonized. However, dismissed or repressed, the native culture floats free of regulation.

\(^4\) The concept of historicism used here in terms of ‘Hegelian historicism’ disproves rationalism and universalism.
For Fanon the ‘colonial world’ is seen as a ‘Manichaean world’ (Fanon, 1967). The oppressed would still mirror their oppressors, although this time, from the position of power. However, their identity would still be prescribed as before. To escape this Hegelian master/slave cycle, the postcolonial social contract produces ‘another knowledge’ of both positions, through a parodic distance and not scientific mastery.

Because of their Western episteme or way of knowing, “Europeans were ontologically incapable of producing true knowledge about non-Europe” (Ahmad, 1992, p. 178). In connection with these, Paul Gilroy thinks that, race is “a distinct order of social phenomena sui generis” (Gilroy, 1987, p. 27) and not just an epistemological aid to a knowledge of global power-struggles. In any case, the Caribbean culture not consolidated by the national ‘other’ but adopting its position, seems to have little difficulty in staking out a critical position by fitting antagonistically to authoritarian norms. With Jean Rhys’ Wide Sargasso Sea, postcolonial writing is able to invade the classic story and myth through unconventional entrances because it has the key to the b(l)ack door. The encroaching British culture implodes along with the epistemological distinction between same and other on which it is founded. The Caribbean are already acculturated, otherwise, they would not be human. To try, then, to cultivate them, ostensibly with a view to their humanity, must actually be to do something else – to dehumanize them by violating the shape of their already existing humanity. The classic excuses of colonialism become nonsense.

Finally, the social contract deals not with freedom, but with political subordination. This fact constitutes an important reading of the social contract theory because it allows us to understand the social contract as an ideological underpinning of so-called social systems of servitude. To this end, there is a historical abstractness of the contract itself because of its fictitious nature. In this respect, for example, Caribbean modernism is seen as a refashioning reterritorialization with respect to European, and Western presence and models that can’t, and couldn’t, be ignored.

1.5 The Caribbean (Is)Landscape as Homeland

In the process of locating the cultural identities to place, Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin argue that the concept of place in post-colonial societies is a “complex interaction of language, history and environment” (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 389). The Caribbean landscape is impenetrable, wild and lush and it is corrupt and untamable. It discloses great mystery and beauty but this merely tempts the greedy of heart to cry: “I want what it hides” (Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea, 189).

The displacement and resettlement of Rhys’s protagonists is condemned to inbetween-ity. Antoinette’s belonging to the Caribbean landscape can be observed in Wide Sargasso Sea through the colonial distance from what it must forever be her dream space: “we changed course and lost our way to England” (Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea,
Thus, the Caribbean islandscape becomes an illusory psychic space made out of the flashbacks of second-hand memories. In dealing with the loss of the Caribbean landscape as homeland, Rhys’s fiction foreshadows the issues of homecomings and alienating experiences of the white Creoles who oscillates between the lost ancestral cultures, harsh poverty-striken island societies and the hostile landscape of the metropolitan host cultures. Homecoming then can only be a contradictory return to Caribbean imaginary or the Caribbean topoi.

In Wide Sargasso Sea the opaque mirror which separates Tia and Antoinette becomes a penetrable pool only in illusory space. Not quite English and not quite ‘native’, Rhys’s Creole woman straddles the embattled scission between human and savage, core and periphery, self and other. For example, in Wide Sargasso Sea, after a disagreement, Antoinette accuses her friend of being a “cheating nigger” (Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea, 10) and Tia calls her a “white cockroach” (Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea, 9). Both girls are moved by the touching atmosphere of the moment because they feel that something has been lost. They see each other as in a mirror image. Moreover, if immediately after her mother’s second marriage Antoinette is glad “to be like an English girl” (Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea, 17), later she will come to wonder who she is: “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, Wide Sargasso Sea, 64).

Jean Rhys’s novels, especially Wide Sargasso Sea, may be seen as an entry point to the analysis of the Other as ‘latent’ to the Western metropolitan centre and its discourses. As the metropolitan space is unmapped, the Other therefore destabilizes the terrain on which Western appropriating strategies are conducted. To re-map the centre’s geographies and identities can be an act of resistance especially when metropolitan space is re-described from within the perspective of the Other. The oxymoronic conceptualization of the Other as absent/present defines the Other as never present, never now. Rhys’s postcolonial narrative strategies institute accordingly new stances about identity. Rhys’s postcolonial strategies of resistance seek to embrace a perspective whereby identity, space and temporality may be rendered contingent, shifting and uncertain.

In Voyage in the Dark, Rhys’s first autodiegetic novel, the illusory nightmarish return is to the fearsome though potentially liberating Caribbean space. In dealing with the absent Other of the metropolitan centre, Rhys’s novel does not only undermine the universal consensus of human rights and social equality as an impossible political and social utopia, but it also touches upon the limits of the finite thought of the Same, upon the inadmissible and the uncanny. They point to the uncertainty and ambivalence at the heart of the self and other, centre and periphery to make up that which exceeds the ‘historical’, the ‘social’, the ‘rational’, and above all the ‘Manichean’.

Moreover, the relationship between identity and belonging focuses on two directions of thought: one that claims that the reinvented self expresses the simultaneity of home-exile; and the other one that argues that the existential anxiety is related to
the feeling of estrangement from the natural environment. First, a colonial who is
trapped within the logic of a place that enforces her Caribbean status while insisting
that she can never really be English, exposes his/her national identity itself that is
always subject to confusion. Secondly, as long as Englishness is so unreliable, the Car-
ibbean ‘colonial identity’ too must remain in doubt. There are reasons to believe that
both these views offer a broad picture of the relationship between the two approaches
of belongingness.

Taking into consideration the ‘multi-relation’ that ‘shadows’ the region, a new cre-
ative and cultural context for Caribbean identity can be effectively forged. Essentially
an artistic framework that draws on linguistic, cultural, and historical patterns of plu-
ralism within the region to express the totality of the Caribbean experience, ‘Creolité’,
as Michael Dash continues, “is essentially a strategic defence of the ideal of diversity
in a world threatened by the disappearance of cultural difference” (Dash, 1998, p.
239). Barbados, Jamaica and Martinique are among the remnants of a British-colonial
empire which now only encompasses a few overseas departments, overseas territo-
ries and ‘collective territories’. While their historical past and colonial present relate
them to a distant metropole, their history, socio-demographic profile, their cultural
traditions and geographical location place them within a Caribbean continuum. They
serve to anchor the fundamental role played by the struggle between the written and
the oral word in the search for identity in the British Caribbean. This linguistic/liter-
ary struggle has also led to the creolizing the literary trace left by European authors in
an attempt to open new perspectives on Creoleness.

1.6 Caribbean Cultural Creolization

Cultures become creolized because of the fusion of disparate elements, which are
both heterogeneous and local. The concept of creolization lies at the very center of
discussions of transculturalism, transnationalism, multiculturalism, diversity and
hybridization.

Creolization is a form of cultural meaning, with different paths. The concept focuses
on the cultural syncretism, as the source for cross-fertilization between different cul-
tures. When creolization takes place, the individuals select particular elements from
incoming or inherited cultures, investing these with meanings, different from those
they owned in the original culture and then merge these to create totally new varie-
ties that replace the first forms. The creolized subject is thus a cultural element that
stresses new common identity in the place of identification. A diasporic consciousness,
by contrast, generally reflects a degree of anxiety with cultural identities in the current
location. ‘Homeland’ is recovered through historical memory and social organization,
the past providing a continuing pole of attraction and identification.

Creolization means more than just mixture; it involves the creation of new cul-
tures. However, the cultural processes of creolization are not simply a matter of
constant pressure from the center toward the periphery, but a much more creative interplay of creole elements. Magical mimesis on the colonial frontier points to a basic empowering effect in terms of the imitation function, either by way of the production of similes by mimicry or by contiguity and contact (a ‘creole continuum’), wherein a copy partakes the power of the original. This was made possible by means of a “rupture and revenge of signification” (Taussig, 1987, p. 5). If cultural contact and transmission occurs in not-so-related contexts, then I can characterize creolization as a symbolic substitute, instead of the more neutral – and in my view, inaccurate – concepts of “borrowing” or “conversation” ((Hannerz, 1992, p. 90) between cultures, depicted as forms of “Creole contagion” (Abrahams, 2002, p. 89). Imitating the symbols and gestures of powerful others ‘with an attitude’ is probably the most proper characterization to these metaforces of creolization. As Hannerz maintains:

“Creolization also increasingly allows the periphery to talk back. As it creates a greater affinity between the cultures of the center and the periphery, and as the latter increasingly uses the same organizational forms and the same technology as the center [...] some of its new cultural commodities become increasingly attractive on a global market. Third World music of a creolized kind becomes world music [...] Creolization thought is open-ended; the tendencies towards maturation and saturation are understood as quite possibly going on side by side, or interleaving.”

(Hannerz, 1992, p. 265-266)

According to Hannerz and other writers cited above, the process of creolization has offered a space to create a new sense of home, a place to express its within cultural imperialism.

Quoting Edouard Glissant, “[...] in the Caribbean there are a multitude of relationships” (Glissant, 1981, p. 84) mostly produced, shaped, either encouraged or prevented by the European colonizing powers. Although it has come to refer to different people in different islands at different times, generally the ‘creole’ has always been the most indicative product of Caribbean interculturization and by far the figure that has most haunted its narrative imagery.

According to Maryse Condé, the Caribbean creolization could be also associated with a “mangrove swamp” (Condé, 1995, p. 23), stretching between sea and earth.5 Mangrove roots, in fact, do not necessarily precede the tree as the latter may shoot down new roots from its branches. This lack of correspondence between roots and trees refers to the impossibility of cultural genealogy or authenticity in the Caribbean. Nonetheless, despite its lack of recognizable roots/origins, Maryse Condé repeats the fishermen’s definition of the mangrove as being “the roots of the sea”, without which the sea “would have no meaning” (Condé, 1995, p. 23). This interesting definition of the mangrove reminds us of the peculiar significance of Caribbean hybridity, which

5 The idea of the mangrove from the Caribbean Sea has at its core the metaphor of the Creole identities in Jean Rhys’ novels.
is not to be intended as an easy amalgamation irrespective of its different origins, but as the proud affirmation of a complexity, a Creoleness (a term coined by Edouard Glissant) without which the Caribbean would not exist (and without which, as a consequence, what I refer to as the West will not be the same).

1.7 Imagining the “Black Atlantic”: Trans-Racial Identity

The image of the ‘Black Atlantic’ is at once a metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence and by that same token a metonym, a sign of its absence and loss. It is precisely from this edge of meaning and being, from this shifting boundary of otherness within identity that we can ask: ‘What does a black man want?’ The black man wants the objectifying confrontation with otherness; in the colonial psyche there is an unconscious disavowal of the negating, splitting moment of desire.

In this section, I aim to explore the ambivalent, uncertain questions of colonial desire with a study case of Jean Rhys’ Caribbean writing. We can think of a correspondence between the mise-en-scène of unconscious fantasy and the phantoms of racist fear (the language of colonial racism) and hate that stalk the colonial scene.

In writing The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness, Paul Gilroy wanted to devise a theoretical approach to understanding race that encompassed three crucial elements: the idea of race as fluid rather than static; as a transnational and intercultural, rather than strictly national, phenomenon; the focus here will be on analyzing resistance to racism as a phenomenon that emerged transnationally and diasporically.

Gilroy seeks to provide a theoretical framework of race that bridges the hemispheres. In order to do this, he takes the Atlantic as his preferred unit of analysis and uses it to ground his transnational perspective on race, with extent to transracial identity. In Gilroy’s view the ‘Black Atlantic’ represents the history of the migratory movements of people of African descent from Africa to Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas. Through these transnational lenses it can be viewed how ideas about nationality and identity were formed. In cultural criticism, the concept of the Black Atlantic focuses on traveling identities as well as on the process creolization (seen as a cultural artifact); thus, the Caribbean is a hybridized form of the cultural identity.

The author maps the Atlantic Ocean as a way to categorize a whole series of transoceanic exchanges in the past and in the present and in so doing seeks to move beyond racially essentialist ways of thinking which posit a pure and singular black (or African) culture. In supporting the hybrid nature of black culture and the deep connections between the formation of modernity and the formation of black culture, Gilroy points to the fact that modernity is itself a hybrid phenomenon.

The idea of movement (traveling) is central to Gilroy’s argument. Hence, the image of a ship forms a central metaphor in the text. Gilroy describes ships as microsocial systems that focus one’s attention on the circulation of ideas as well as identifying
them as cultural and political artifacts. Slave ships are particularly central to Gilroy’s argument as he considers slavery as a fundamental moment for the emergence of modernity, modern ideas of race, and the Black Atlantic as, in his words, “a counter-culture of modernity” (Gilroy, 1994, p. 34). It was the racism and modernity that led people of African descent to search for ways to construct oppositional identities and retain a sense of cultural integrity and forge common cultural memories.

As referred to above, Gilroy denies ethnicity as a basis of identity, yet still alludes to a ‘Black Atlantic’ which needs some common inheritance. As a result, Gilroy evokes a ‘travelling culture’ in the African diaspora which is seen as liberating. According to Eceheruo, Gilroy ‘acts’ to restrain the essence of diaspora – the notion of exile. One thing we can learn from Eceheruo in order to problematise the question of identity is that no matter how complex and mixed a diaspora is “you cannot belong” (Eceheruo, 1999, p. 9).

Whereas black people may have, as Gilroy sets forth, some space to manipulate this space is not limitless: “[...] the predicament for those who have a problem choosing where to belong is that they cannot quite get themselves to realize that their options in the matter are very limited indeed” (Gilroy, 1994, p. 11). Paul Gilroy does not have a choice of identities in this context of the “instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being remade” (Eceheruo, 1999, p. 9).

So, the dynamics of identity within diaspora are highly complex and, to an extent, contingent on other factors. This process of ‘articulation’ “is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time” (Grossberg, qtd. in Patterson and Kelley, 2000, p. 19). The main point here is to see that this enunciation is reinforced by racial and gender forces, so that individuals within diaspora are not free to determine their own identities. This fact points to the final element in the diasporic consciousness: the question of return. The individuals or groups have different relations to ‘home’ and return: some see Africa in idealistic terms, while others perceive home as a dynamic entity, so that it is without meaning to think of a genuine home to return to. The images we have here are multiple imaginings of home dependant upon the cultural circumstances and the level of consciousness. For example, in talking about the relationship between Caribbean identity and the African home, Stuart Hall comments “The original ‘Africa’ is no longer there. It too has been transformed. History is, in that sense, irreversible” (Hall, 1996, p. 233). Such a personal interpretation of the diasporic issue led Kwame Appiah to argue that “whatever Africans share, we do not have a common traditional culture, common language, common religious or conceptual vocabulary” (Appiah, 1993, p. 26). Brahm also gathers in his idea of ‘homing’ the power of return and home, in which there is a lingering desire that may or may not be realised in reality. Eceheruo approves this idea by saying that: “The power of the idea lies in the principle of it; that a return is possible forever, whenever, if ever” (Eceheruo, 1999, p. 4). This ‘gathering of exile’ or ‘prophetic vision’ of the return from exile makes the diasporic identity different from other group identities.
Furthermore, in his article *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, Paul Gilroy focuses upon the linkage between a deterritorialised, diasporic black consciousness and the local and territorialized identity politics of whiteness, which produces a variety of ‘hybrid’ cultural practices and collective identities. He asserts that “Black Britain defines itself crucially as part of a diaspora. Taking into account the condition of the colonial world, we can see the colonizer caught in the ambivalence of paranoic identification, a Manichean allegory of his colonial consciousness. In this case, the white man is projecting his fears and desires on ‘them’. From this Manichean perspective, the native’s violence is a force intended to bridge the gap between the white as subject and the non-white, the Black man as object. Moreover, this fact reflects his view of the psychic structure of the colonial relation: the opposition between the native and the settler zones, like the overlaying of black and white bodies. In a Hege-lian sense, this flash of ‘recognition’ fails to acknowledge the colonial relation: “And yet the Negro knows there is a difference. He wants it […] The former slave needs a challenge to his humanity” (Fanon, 1967, p. 21). In the absence of such a challenge, Fanon argues that the colonized can only imitate, never identify.

Beyond the permeable boundaries of the colonial desire, the white masked black man lurks. Thus, it becomes possible to cross, even to shift those boundaries, for the strategy of the colonial desire is to stage the drama of identity at the point at which the black mask is trying to reveal the white skin. At the margins, the transformative forces in-between the black body and the white body changes the psychic of the racialized subjects. Thus, in the Caribbean colonial discourse the stereotype of the *mulata* evokes contradictory feelings: fear and desire.

At another level in the stratification of the social structure, the population of black ex-slaves who maintain their own kind of independence is placed. For instance, Sandi and Daniel Cosway, Alexander Cosway’s illegitimate children, both occupy this in-between position between black and white people. Moreover, Antoinette and her mother recognize their dependence on the black servants (Christophine), showing a respect that combines fear and resentment.

In Rhys’ fiction every text includes fragmented elements of Afrocentric identity that acknowledge the culture of the Black Atlantic. Thus, in her fiction Rhys transgresses these Black ‘cultural aesthetical references’ under the form of ancestral Black legacy such as: Caribbean voodoo, obeah folk magic, religious practices from the West African culture that ‘crossed’ the Atlantic, towards her Dominican homeland. The rhetorical and stylistic strategies of the Afrocentric orality, strategies of parody, satire, and masquerade anf folklore interrogate the colonial and metropolitan power structures in *Wide Sargasso Sea* through “forms of verbal artistry such as calypso that require economy and highly developed verbal play [and] permit a depth of signification without many words” (Savory, 1998). Albert Gilson writes that in the metropolis “she was subject to disparagement reserved by the English for West Indian colonials whose racial identity was suspect and whose social position was questionable at best” (Gilson, 2004, p. 636). ‘The Atlantic world’ is a useful concept here, long a staple of slave-trade studies, recently given a cul-
tural twist in Paul Gilroy’s notion of a ‘Black Atlantic’, and already present in the deeply mediated title of Jean Rhys’ novel, which names that which slows down the channels of communication which criss-cross the Atlantic: “I thought of ‘Sargasso sea’ or ‘Wide Sargasso Sea’ but nobody knew what I meant” (Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea, 154).

In Voyage in the Dark, the English aunt, watching the Black dancers with masks, repeats angrily, “It ought to be stopped... it’s not a decent and respectable way to go on” (Rhys, Voyage in the Dark, 113).

Moreover, Aunt Clarice, the ‘real’ Hester claimed that her brother was “continually brooding over his exile in a small Caribbean island... ‘Poor Willy,’ ‘poor, poor Willy’”, she would say meaningfully (Rhys, Smile Please, 55). For the white Heather in Tigers are Better Looking, her Caribbean origins are encapsulated in the spelling of her name as “Hedda” (Rhys, Tigers are Better-Looking, 181). Marya Zelli in Quartet has a “strange little Kalmuk face: broad-cheekboned, with wide nostrils and thick lips” (Rhys, Quartet, 199). In After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie, Julia’s mother of Brazilian origins is, like Rhys’ own mother, dark with high cheekbones and long black hair. In this sense, Rhys’ Afrocentric beliefs may be foregrounded in her own ambiguous West Indian ethnicity. Calling upon her cultural heritage, Rhys makes the Black women in her texts act as white, but encodes them as nonwhite, and transfers them her own experiences.

Knowing everything about zombification (the process of animating corpse), Rhys also employs here the Black Caribbean symbols of the trickster and the zombie, two of the Afrocentric tropes. Rhys also highlights the category-defying properties of liminal spaces, when Rochester is reading about the practice of Obeah, a dark form of magic said to exist in the Caribbean. “A zombi”, he reads, “is a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead” (Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea, 88). Rochester’s book about Obeah concludes its section on zombies with the remark, “they rage in the sea that is their anger” (Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea, 89) a foreshadowing of Antoinette’s decision that she is not in fact in England, because she has been lost in the Sargasso. The reason zombies are a source of such terror is that they embody characteristics of both life and death; because categorizations are comforting, a forced and unnatural blending of such all-important categories is highly discomforting. Just as Antoinette cannot perceive herself exclusively inhabiting Coulibri or England, she is caught in a transition between states, a passage between life and death. Especially intriguing, considering Antoinette’s attachment to her home, it is the book’s claim that a zombie “can also be the spirit of a place” (Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea, 88). On the other hand, like Anansy, the trickster spider of Jamaican folklore, Rhys’ women must turn weakness to advantage in a predatory world.