

'What happened to Amélie?' - The other 'Other' in Wide Sargasso Sea

Amélie'ye ne oldu? Wide Sargasso Sea'deki öteki Öteki

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Abstract

This paper is about Amélie, one of "the other others" who lived on the colonial island where Bertha Antoinette Mason, "the other" in Jane Eyre, had lived before her marriage, in the past times created for her by Jean Rhys. Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), the prequel of Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847), is one of the most famous rewritings in the history of literature. Wide Sargasso Sea covers the life of Antoinette Cosway that is the non-English side of the story of Bertha Mason, who was imprisoned in the attic by her husband who married her for money. The main element that causes the problem here is the ethnic origin of Antoinette. People from the descendants of white European settlers who live in colonial islands are called Creoles and they are seen as "the other". However, there are non-Creole women in the novel as well, i.e. the black indigenous ones. Although slavery has been officially abolished, the racist-sexist behaviours that have been exposed to hierarchically subordinate and oppressed local women due to their skin colour have been found worthy of examination by the authors of this article. This analysis will be based on the evaluations of the hierarchical structure of the slavery period of American society in Ain't I a Woman Black Women and Feminism (1981) written by African-American feminist writer bell hooks who addresses the stories and problems of ethnically non-Western women who have long been ignored by the feminist discourse.

Keywords: Feminism, Wide Sargasso Sea, bell hooks, black women, gender discrimination

Özet

Bu çalışma, Jane Eyre'deki 'öteki' olan Bertha Antoinette Mason'a, Jean Rhys'in yarattığı geçmişte, onun evlenmeden önce yaşadığı sömürge adasında yaşayan 'öteki Ötekilerden' biri olan Amélie hakkındadır. Charlotte Brontë'nin Jane Eyre (1847) romanındaki olayların öncesine ışık tutan (prequel) Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), edebiyat tarihindeki en ünlü yeniden yazımlardan biridir. Rhys, parası için kendisi ile evlenen kocası tarafından tavan arasına hapsedilen Bertha Mason'ın hikâyesinin İngiliz olmayan tarafını yani Antoinette Cosway'in yaşamını ele almıştır. Burada soruna neden olan temel unsur Antoinette'in etnik kökenidir. Sömürge adalarında yaşayan Batılı beyaz yerleşimcilerin soyundan gelen insanlara kreole denilmekte ve yine Batılılar tarafından öteki olarak görülmektedirler. Öte yandan romanda kreole olmayan, yani siyahi yerli halktan olan kadınlar da vardır. Kölelik resmi olarak kaldırılmış olsa da derilerinin renginden dolayı hiyerarşik olarak daha aşağı seviyede görülen ve ezilen yerli kadınların maruz kaldıkları ırkçı-cinsiyetçi davranışlar bu makalenin yazarları tarafından incelenmeye değer bulunmuştur. Bu incelemede feminist söylemin uzun süre göz ardı ettiği Batı-dışı etnik kökene sahip kadınların hikâyelerine ve sorunlarına eğilen Afrikalı-Amerikalı feminist yazar bell hooks'un Ain't I a Woman Black Women and Feminism (1981) kitabında yer verdiği köleci Amerikan toplumundaki hiyerarşik yapıya ilişki değerlendirmeleri temel alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Feminizm, Wide Sargasso Sea, bell hooks, siyahi kadınlar, cinsiyet ayrımcılığı.

The present study is on Amélie, one of the minor characters in Jean Rhys' most famous book *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1965). The writer introduces her as "the little half-caste servant" (55) of Antoinette, the unfortunate heroine of the book. Although she does not have a big part in the story, she is in the centre of the turning point events. She sleeps with Rochester, Antoinette's husband, and then husband and wife have a serious quarrel. At last, Antoinette's mental state begins to break down. This is the beginning of later events as in Charlotte Brontë's famous 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*.

Antoinette as a Creole woman is subjected to an othering process by white Western manhood in the novel. According to Smith (1997) Rhys believed that Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is "only one side – the English side" of the story (XVI). So, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* she presents the story of a repressed Creole woman by taking the story from a different point of view. However, it is still a limited perspective because, except the Creole or British - white people in the novel, there are other women, too. While Rhys, on the one hand, criticizes the patriarchal and colonialist discourses, on the other hand, she is almost in an attitude that ignores the black and local people on the island. In this context it is a necessity to show the

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differences between the otherness of Antoinette/Bertha and the black servant Amélie. In this study, similarities and differences between the social hierarchy based on race and sex in American society that Bell Hooks presented in her 1981 book *Ain't I a Woman* and for the women of English colony islands just after the end of slavery period. If so, what is Amélie's ranking?

Rhys, like many other women writers in the 60s, questions women's roles and relationships between men and women. In her works she examines the lifestyles, beliefs and traditions of the male-dominated society. But she does not categorize herself as a feminist and she is not concerned only with the problems of women. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she exposes the marginalized condition of women within the patriarchal society of the colonies and she also explores issues such as colonialism, race, political oppression and mental illness (Carr, 2007: 123). Although black female issues are not in the centre of the novel, we can see and sometimes feel "the need for sexual self-determination and economic empowerment and the struggle against the psychic pain of racism and sexism" (Keizer, 2007: 155), in other words the major issues of black feminist criticism in 70s, within the character of Amélie.

Jean Rhys was born in Dominica, one of the Windward Islands in the Caribbean, on 24 August 1890. Her childhood coincides with the last period of the British colonial administration. This was also a period in which the influence of the British/Creole culture began to weaken with the disappearance of oppression. At the age of 16 she moved to England and went to school there. As Emery states, "like other West Indian writers...Jean Rhys left the Caribbean island of her birth for the metropolitan centres of England and Europe... Rhys experienced a specifically female alienation and sexual vulnerability" (Emery, 1986: 3). Upon her arrival in England *Jane Eyre* was one of the first novels she read. She was fascinated by Bertha, the 'mad' wife of Mr Rochester, the principal male character of *Jane Eyre*. Jane Eyre described her as "some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing" (Bronte, 1960: 295). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have seen her as "Jane's dark double" (Gilbert, Gubar, 1984: 360). The portrayal of 'mad' Bertha has always disappointed Rhys and she decided to give her a life; "*Wide Sargasso Sea*, the slim novel published in 1965, at the end of Rhys' long career, is that 'life'" (Spivak, 1997: 803). Difficulties in her personal life led her to empathize with all kinds of human suffering regardless of the cause. Since Rhys always felt cold and removed in England she might have imagined that the character Bertha Mason must have felt the same.

"Writing as a white Creole woman, Jean Rhys represents black women as necessarily 'free', liberated, and even occasionally tyrannical in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Legally, black Caribbean people were freed from colonial rule with the introduction of the Emancipation Act of 1833, with full liberty being granted in August 1838" (Smith, 1997: 134). In the story that reflects Rhys' point of view, it is concluded that black women have more personal freedom than white women. After emancipation, black women were technically free of ownership and by this way they had a freedom that many white women did not have. "Not suffering under any of the typical constraints placed on women of the time, black women were not usually forced into marriage against their will, and were allowed a degree of sexual freedom that white British women could only dream of" (Thomas, 1995: 152). In her autobiography, Rhys recollects that "marriage didn't seem a duty for them [Dominican women] as it was with us," and that black women have "more freedom, particularly sexual, than the white islanders who must conform to the constraints of the colonist" (Bruner, 1984: 247).

The Left Bank (1927), *Quartet* (1928), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Good Morning Midnight* (1939) bear traces of Rhys' own life. These novels contain alienated female protagonists. Following these, she gave a long break before publishing her most successful work *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1965. She wrote this novel in order to reveal the aspects of *Jane Eyre*'s severe male-dominated structure of the Victorian era. As Capello (2009) argues

Jean Rhys practices the postcolonial tendency to write back to founding imperialist novels. The choice to rewrite canonical narratives of Western discourse is a common colonial practice where the telling of a story from another point of view is considered an extension of the deconstructive project to explore the gaps and the silences in a text. In this case, the novel Jean Rhys is writing back to is *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. In fact, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys confronts the possibility of another side to *Jane Eyre* and she gives voice to Edward Rochester's mad wife, Bertha. (48)

But while doing this, Rhys left the black women silenced; they didn't have their own voice in the novel. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) Spivak argues that "there is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak" (307). Therefore, it is seen that colonized women are subjugated to the double oppression because of their race and gender.

Spivak in another essay, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" criticizes Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. She argues that Bertha Mason was pushed into the background and silenced as a Creole woman, with the character Jane Eyre coming to the fore in the story. According to Spivak, this is an indication of the inadequacy of feminism's participation in the Third World's issues. Bertha/Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* represents the white colonial subject (Spivak, 1997: 80).

In this context Spivak argued that Bertha remains a Creole in her own community, thus representing the exploiters, not the exploited, so that she is caught in a double bind as she is neither accepted in her own colonial community nor in the imperialistic English metropolis. In this respect, not entirely unlike Jane in Bronte's novel, Antoinette becomes a social alien in both communities as, Jane as a governess is also caught between different social classes" (Baldellou, 2008: 13).

The crossbreed servant Amélie has a very minor part in the story. She appears in the first scene of the second part when the just married couple Rochester and Antoinette was on the way to their sweet honeymoon house. They "were

sheltering from the heavy rain under a large mango tree" (Rhys, 2000: 55) and they were far from awareness of how closely their destinies were to be linked. The narrator of this part, Rochester mentioned her as "a little half-caste servant who was called Amélie" (ibid, 55). Half-caste is an archaic term for category of people of mixed race or ethnicity. It is derived from the term Caste, which comes from the Latin *castus*, meaning pure, and the derivative Portuguese and Spanish *casta*, meaning race. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Half_caste) So, she is characterized as a half pure ex-slave woman. The exact date in the novel is not told, but it should be after 1833 because the Emancipation Act has been enacted that year. It is normal to think that Rochester used that term as an oppressive and sexist adjective since it was the common attitude towards black women by Western white man. Bell Hooks explains this situation by saying "when we look at the history of black women, sexism seems as important as racism as an oppressive force" (Hooks, 1982: 15)

Amélie says, "I hope you will be very happy, sir, in your sweet honeymoon house" (Rhys, 2000: 55). After that Rochester's inner voice; "She was laughing at me I could see. A lovely little creature but sly, spiteful, malignant perhaps, like much else in this place." (ibid, 55) Although Rochester saw Amélie as a 'creature' rather than a human being, it is clear that he found her attractive from the first moment he saw her.

Even if white European men regarded all black people as nonhuman, inferior creatures, they also had a tendency to see "the sexuality of the beautiful dark-skinned women as the symbol of an African heritage" (Couti, 2012: 130). On the other hand this tendency was more common against crossbreed women. Colonization process in the Caribbean islands generated a classification of skin tones. In the 18th century a white Creole from Martinique, Moreau de Saint-Méry declared the existence of one hundred twenty-eight gradations of blood resulting in dozens of skin colours organized in a restrictive social hierarchy in which the whiter the skins, the better (130). So, Rochester might have known all about this before coming to the island. Amélie or any other crossbreed women might eventually be the object of his white patriarchal glance.

But why not the white Creole women, who were regarded neither European nor African, caused the same impression on white men? It would be Christianity that led this situation. Bell Hooks explains this situation in her *Ain't I a Woman Black Women Feminism* (1982). Before the 19th century the fundamentalist Christian teaching regarded women as an evil sexual temptress, the bringer of sin into the world. Severe punishments were meted out to those women who passed the boundaries white men defined as women's place. The Salem Witchcraft trials were an extreme expression of patriarchal society's oppression of women. They were a message to all women that unless they remained within passive, subordinate roles they would be punished, even put to death. Colonial white men expressed their fear and hatred of womanhood by institutionalizing sexist discrimination and sexist oppression. (Hooks, 1982: 29-30).

According to Hooks, after the 19th century these severe religious teachings left aside. "White women were no longer portrayed as sexual temptresses" (ibid, 31) and most white women eagerly engaged sexist ideology that claimed virtuous women has no sexual impulses. The shift away from the image of white women as sinful and sexual to that of white women as virtuous lady (mother and helpmate) occurred at the same time as mass sexual exploitation of black women. As colonizer white men idealized white womanhood, they sexually assaulted and brutalized black women. Because they were naturally seen as the embodiment of female evil and sexual lust (ibid, 31-32). In this way the sexual possessions of black female bodies come to symbolize both a colonization and re-colonization of space in the colonized lands.

Here it is understood from Rochester's commend on Amélie's "expression" that she was aware of Rochester's intentions; she "was so full of delighted malice, so intelligent, above all so intimate" that Rochester "felt ashamed and looked away" (Rhys, 2000: 57). Possibly it was not the first time that she was subjected to a desirous glance of a white European man. Since crossbreed Caribbean women have come to function as a prominent object of desire for both black and white men, they might be accustomed to such attitudes. Her 'intimate expression' might be related to her knowledge about the colonizer Europeans. Even soon after that event Rochester continues casting amorous glances at her. Rochester is the narrator of this event so the intimate expression of Amélie can be related to Rochester's attraction to her, an attraction that he can not admit to himself at this point. What Amélie thinks here is unknown.

When they arrive at Granbois, the property inherited from Antoinette, it can be seen that Rochester undergoes some changes. He becomes increasingly uncomfortable because of the servants, his strange young wife and overly colourful environment. He says, "Everything is too much". While these two young people, who hardly know each other, seem happy for a while, the man is almost certain that he does not love the woman: "I was thirsty for her, but that is not love" (ibid, 78). Hostility grows between him and Christophine, Antoinette's servant since her childhood. She has great power in the house. Rochester's relationship with Antoinette is unstable and it becomes worse after Amélie gives him a letter from Daniel Cosway, one of the illegitimate children of Antoinette's father stating that Antoinette and her family are insane. In the letter he claims that Antoinette's father is bewitched both by his wife and daughter. Nevertheless, she leaves a significant portion of her wealth to her daughter. He is supposedly on the side of Rochester and warns him against his wife's family. He adds that he has much to say about this weird family so Rochester should come to visit him.

Rochester is disturbed a lot about this incident and goes outside for a walk on his own. When he comes back he sees Antoinette and Amélie are having a discussion;

Antoinette jumped out of bed and slapped her face.

'I hit you back white cockroach, I hit you back,' said Amélie. And she did.

Antoinette gripped her hair. Amélie, whose teeth were bared, seemed to be trying to bite.

'Antoinette, for God's sake,' I said from the doorway.

She swung round, very pale. Amélie buried her face in her hands and pretended to sob, but I could see her watching me through her fingers.

'Go away, child,' I said.

'You call her child,' said Antoinette. 'She is older than the devil himself, and the devil is not more cruel.'

'Send Christophine up,' I said to Amélie.

'Yes master, yes master,' she answered softly, dropping her eyes. But as soon as she was out of the room she began to sing:

'The white cockroach she marry

The white cockroach she marry

The white cockroach she buy young man

The white cockroach she marry' (ibid, 83)

By calling Antoinette "the white cockroach" and dare to hit her back, Amélie shows that she has no respect to Antoinette and is usually rude to her. Probably she knows that because of the marriage the economic superiority of Antoinette has passed to Rochester and she does not have any power at all without her husband, who is obviously interested in Amélie. "White cockroach" can be thought as a term of abuse for poor white people in the book. Cockroaches are large brown insects, often living in homes. Comparisons are made for humiliation against black people because of the insect's appearance and its relation to dirty environments. Amélie wants to insult Antoinette by singing the song about the white cockroach. As a local islander she knows all the stories about the Cosways and their unpleasant reputation. And also she might see herself superior than Antoinette because she does not need to "buy a young man" and she is not a "white cockroach". Antoinette is aware that Amélie can be very cruel when she has the chance and opportunity. So she says, "She is older than the devil himself, and the devil is not more cruel." If Amélie hadn't done anything to hurt Antoinette, it was because she was afraid of Christophine. Meanwhile, Antoine goes to Christophine for advice because she knew that Rochester no longer loves her. Christophine advises her to leave her husband as soon as possible. Antoinette, on the other hand, says she can not use the inheritance from her father in case of a divorce. This situation surprises Christophine very much.

After a while, Daniel Cosway sends another letter to Rochester to threaten him if he does not visit his house. Again Amélie is the one who brings him the letter. Amélie is apparently used by Cosway to hurt Antoinette and later Rochester is going to use her to do the same thing but that time in a different way. While he is waiting Amélie to talk to her about the letter and Daniel Cosway, he is sitting on the veranda and thinking about the mountains, the sky and Amélie;

I knew the shape of the mountains as well as I knew the shape of the two brown jugs filled with white sweet-scented flowers on the wooden table. I knew that the girl would be wearing a white dress. Brown and white she would be, her curls, her white girl's hair she called it, half covered with a red handkerchief, her feet bare. There would be the sky and the mountains, the flowers and the girl and the feeling that all this was a nightmare, the faint consoling hope that I might wake up (ibid, 98-99).

Here again we can see the effect of Amélie's attractiveness on Rochester. Besides, as a European white man he sees himself from a very different world. Everything is so natural, wild and beautiful, but also inferior, because he is civilized and the others are uncivilized, even nonhuman for him. He knows everything about that wild place, because he is the symbol of the colonial power, but he still does not belong to there. He wishes to be in a dream. Such details in the text give it a post-colonialist texture. Rochester as the representative of colonial power indeed identifies himself by his differences from that place and people.

Defining the Other, as Rochester does here, is a complex process. When we remember Derrida's famous sentence, "every other is every other other, is altogether other" (Derrida, 1995: 50). We are all other in sum; on the one hand every One is also an Other to somebody else and on the other hand every One is also an Other "in oneself", which Derrida explains through an otherness in the unconsciousness (ibid, 50). In that case everybody is the Other, and therefore the making of the Other also will be the making of the One. In other words, everybody, as an individual or as a group, has to define Others to define themselves.

The concept of "Other" is something invented or socially produced. It is defined with its distinctive features. These features are the signs of being otherness and they are very important for the process of identification of the self. We can say that one has to define the Other in order to produce an identity. Then, if Rochester sees himself as the One, he must have someone Other to differ from. This has some important consequences, in such a way that, if the Other is his opposite, it will always be his opposite in any aspect; if he believes that he has great values, the values of the Others must be poor; if he sees himself as good, the Others must be evil and so on.

There's another interesting point here; according to Rochester's thoughts Amélie has curly hair and she calls it "white girl's hair" (Rhys, 2000: 98-99). Perhaps she does not know much about white women since curly hair is more common among black people. She probably thinks that having beautiful curly hair would be the qualification of a white girl. Even long after the emancipation of slavery in colonized Caribbean islands, the social status of black people had not raised much. What Amélie wants is perhaps to feel like a 'human', not to be a white girl. So, it might be a matter of 'black skin, white mask', but it is still not certain since they are not Amélie's own sentences; Rochester narrates this part.

When Amélie comes, they talk about the second letter. Rochester asks her questions about Daniel Cosway. She seems to know something that Rochester does not know. She says, "I am sorry for you" (ibid, 100). Here it is not exactly clear what Amélie is "sorry" for. In the first instance, the sentence seems to have the idea that only Rochester has a bad marriage. However, in the later stages of the novel it is understood that according to Amélie this marriage will bring unhappiness to both Rochester and other women in his life.

Following their short conversation, Rochester decides to visit Cosway. He feels uncomfortable because of Cosway's hateful and sanctimoniously depressive attitudes. When Cosway wants to blackmail him, he decides to leave. Before leaving, he informs Rochester that his wife has another relationship before. After this he comes home and Antoinette promises to explain her husband all the facts about his past. Meanwhile Rochester thinks that "For a moment she looked very much like Amélie. Perhaps they are related, I thought. It's possible, it's even probable in this damned place." (ibid, 105) He seems to be physically attracted from both women and their 'white dresses'. He likes Amélie's body but he does not like black people as human beings and tries to keep them, like Christophine and Daniel Cosway, at a distance. He once asks Antoinette that, "Why do you hug and kiss Christophine?" (ibid, 76). Then he says, "I wouldn't hug and kiss them, I'd say, 'I couldn't.'" (ibid, 76) We know that he wants to hug and kiss Amélie and in a near future he would do it but that is not a presentation of human love that is lust for an unexplored territory. Women bodies were seen as a land that could be conquered and exploited by imperial Western men. He continues to address Antoinette with the name Bertha. He knows that she never likes that name, yet he remains unconcerned about her desires. "Rhys suggests that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism. Antoinette is caught between the English imperialists and the black native" (Spivak, 1997: 804). Here Rochester begins to see what he thinks are the signs of Antoinette's madness. As the novel progress, she begins to break down into madness.

Antoinette begins to think that her husband hates her and wants him to love her again, so asks Christophine for a magic love medicine. Christophine unwillingly agrees to practice obeah to prepare it. Obeah is "a religious belief of African origin involving witchcraft and sorcery; practiced in parts of the West Indies and tropical Americas." (Concise English Dictionary). That night, Antoinette tries to explain her side of the story behind Daniel Cosway's letter. When he confronts Antoinette about her past, they argue passionately, and he begins calling her Bertha because it is a name he likes more. Even though Antoinette dislikes that name, he insists on using it. He learns that it is one of Antoinette's "mother's names". (Rhys, 2000: 94). Changing her name can be seen as one of the factors that led Bertha to madness in *Jane Eyre*. Finally, they go to Antoinette's room. There he drinks drugged wine. They have a rough love-making that night.

When he wakes up the next morning, he understands that he was poisoned by tasting the wine in the glass. He spends all day outside. When he comes back in the evening, he is sick but we do not know exactly what made him feel sick; was it because of Christophine's poison or because of the forest? He expects to see Amélie; "I knew that Amélie would come, and I knew what she would say: 'I am sorry for you'" (ibid, 115). Eventually she comes and feeds him as a child of her. They start an intimate conversation; they laugh together, look each other's faces and touches. Although he knows that Antoinette would hear voices, he has sex with Amélie in the next room. He thinks, "She was so gay, so natural and something of this gaiety she must have given to me, for I had not one moment of remorse. Nor was I anxious to know what was happening behind the thin partition which divided us from my wife's bedroom" (ibid, 115). Here it may be taught that Rochester takes revenge of his poisoning by using Amélie as a sex partner. Although he knows that Antoinette would notice what they are doing in the next room, he does not show any reservations. He says, "Yes, that didn't just happen. I meant it" (ibid, 127). What Amélie felt was not important for Rochester since white men (and even women) consider black women as sexual savages who were the initiators of sexual relationships with white men. (Hooks, 1982: 52). And making love to Amélie was not his only aim. He could already do it before that time or he could do it somewhere else so Antoinette could never learn. But, he deliberately uses Amélie to hurt Antoinette.

In the morning of course he feels differently: "her skin was darker, her lips thicker than I had thought" (Rhys, 2000: 115). He "had no wish to touch her and she knew it" (ibid, 116). She is no longer an unexplored territory for him. He tells her that he would be leaving the island soon and he wants to give her a large present. Here Rochester treats Amélie like a prostitute, however, she takes the present "with no thanks and no expression on her face" (ibid, 116). She has also used him for her plans to go to Rio. Amélie has an enormous self-confidence. When Rochester asks her how to get to Rio, she responds, "I don't want no horse or no mule... My legs strong enough to carry me" (ibid, 116). Amélie considers herself morally superior to Rochester. She has had sex with a man for her benefit yet, for her it does not affect her soul; she does what she has to do. She realizes that although she is white, Antoinette is not as free as she is.

Antoinette leaves the house the next morning and goes to Christophine. When she returns to Granbois after three days, she goes to her room and gets drunk; she seems to be totally mad. There is a fight between the husband and wife. She wants her husband to stop calling her 'Bertha'. There is a fierce quarrel between them that made Antoinette to get into bed. Christophine then gives Antoinette's feelings a voice as she blames the husband for causing Antoinette to break down. She tells him to leave Antoinette with her and goes back to England. But he decides to leave for England with Antoinette.

The third part of the novel is narrated by Antoinette. After her mental breakdown her husband locks her up in the attic. Rochester appoints a servant to care and watch her. Since she lives there as a hidden captive, she is unaware of many things; she even does not know where she is. Naturally, she wonders what has been happening in other rooms of the house. In fact, she constantly dreams about it. In her dreams she walks out of the room holding a candle in her hand. One night she wakes up and begins doing what she dreamed of. The novel ends when Antoinette goes down the stairs with the candle in her hand. The general judgment about this scene is that Antoinette set the house on fire. The point to be noted here is that actually the novel ends up with Antoinette waking up from the dream and leaving the room. At this stage, she is accused of causing the fire, but actually these are merely comments and predictions. So it can be said that the readers are never really informed about what actually happens there.

After a short conversation with Rochester, we do not hear anything about Amélie again nor do we know what happens to her after that morning. And we also do not know anything about her childhood. Where are her parents? Has she ever known them? It is clear that her mother was a slave. And probably Amélie was born after someone, perhaps a white man raped her mother. From Bell Hooks' quotation from Lydia Marie Child, a 19th century white female humanist, we learn that, "the negro woman... is the property of her master, and her daughters are his property" (Hooks, 1982: 26). So the owner of Amélie's mother or one of his sons may have been raped her, too. Or, at least, she was brought up in an environment that she witnessed "the black female slave who willingly submitted to a master's sexual advance and who received presents of payments was rewarded for her acceptance of the existing social order." (ibid, 27) She would also witness the punishments for the black women slaves who resisted sexual exploitation. These facts could explain her sexual behaviour and her readiness to have sex with Rochester.

It should also be noted that Amélie is more independent than Antoinette in many respects. She determines her targets and takes firm steps to reach them. She knows that she needs money so she uses Rochester in order to acquire what she needs. In another words she knows what she wants to do and she knows she won't get it on that island. She wants a better life; first she plans to see her sister who lives in Demerara (a former Dutch colony in South America) and then goes to Rio because rich people live in this city. According to Rochester she is "beautiful enough to get anything" (Rhys, 2000: 116) she wants. From her relatively little part in the novel we can say that Amélie is a self-determined and self-confident woman.

Actually black and white women have very distinctive characteristics in their relations with men. In her novel, Rhys, based on her own experience, shows that black women in colonial islands have more personal freedom than the white women. In the post-colonial period, the indigenous people were technically no longer slaves, but because of the male-dominated social structure that was the legacy of the whites, black women never had complete freedom. However the black women who have independent characters and never trust men, have more independence than the white female characters that are legally and financially dependent on the men around them.

There is also a negative side of the relative freedom of the black women living in the colonial islands of the Caribbean. They have sexual freedom and it is a fact that they do not have to do contracted marriages like white Creole women. However, because of these facts, they are exposed to sexual abuse by both white and black men. They are seen as easy woman.

Amélie proves her courage and skill in taking the first and the most important step to realize her dreams. This also reveals the sharp difference between Antoinette and Amélie. Antoinette as a Creole woman was considered as a second class British citizen, and definitely different from England born white people. As for the situation of white islanders; they are the minority group in a society that is mostly made up of freed black slaves, and this, with no doubt, makes the social hierarchy of colonized Caribbean islands more complex than the United States where the white Western oriented people have almost always been the majority in the society. In such a hierarchical order it is not easy to determine the ranking of white Creole women. Do they have a better or a worse place? We are in the opinion that this is a meaningless question since all women in one way or another are exploited by men. And Amélie's story under such circumstances would not have been a happy one. The worst of all no one would ever been interested in her unsuccessful survival adventure and so no one would ever write a sequel to her story.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışma, Jane Eyre'deki "öteki" olan Bertha Antoinette Mason'a Jean Rhys'in yarattığı geçmişte, onun evlenmeden önce yaşadığı sömürge adasında yaşayan "öteki Ötekilerden" biri olan Amélie hakkındadır. Charlotte Brontë'nin Jane Eyre (1847) romanındaki olayların öncesine ışık tutan (prequel) Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), edebiyat tarihindeki en ünlü yeniden yazımlardan biridir. Victoria dönemi ahlakı ve toplum düzenine göre 'tavan arasındaki deli kadın' olarak lanse edilerek ötekileştirilen Antoinette/Bertha'nın hikâyesine odaklanan bu roman, ataerkil düzenin ve onun temsilcisi olan bir kocanın kurbanlaştırdığı bir kadının ruhsal ve bedensel çöküşünü çok yönlü olarak yansıtmaktadır. Rhys, parası için kendisi ile evlenen kocası tarafından tavan arasına hapsedilen Bertha Mason'ın hikâyesinin İngiliz olmayan tarafını yani Antoinette Cosway'in yaşamını ele almıştır. Burada soruna neden olan temel unsur Antoinette'in etnik kökenidir. Sömürge adalarında yaşayan Batılı beyaz yerleşimcilerin soyundan gelen insanlara kreole denilmekte ve yine Batılılar tarafından öteki olarak görülmektedirler. Öte yandan romanda kreole olmayan, yani siyahi yerli halktan olan kadınlar da vardır. Kölelik resmi olarak kaldırılmış olsa da derilerinin renginden dolayı hiyerarşik olarak daha aşağı seviyede görülen ve ezilen yerli kadınların maruz kaldıkları ırkçı-cinsiyetçi davranışlar bu makalenin yazarları tarafından incelenmeye değer bulunmuştur. Bu incelemede feminist söylemin uzun süre göz ardı ettiği Batı-dışı etnik kökene sahip kadınların hikâyelerine ve sorunlarına eğilen Afrikalı-Amerikalı feminist yazar bell hooks'un Ain't I a Woman Black Women and Feminism (1981) kitabında yer verdiği köleci Amerikan toplumundaki hiyerarşik yapıya ilişki değerlendirmeleri temel alınacaktır.

Hooks'a göre 19. yüzyıl öncesinde kadınlara yönelik, dini kökenli olan, cinsel kışkırtıcılığın kaynağı oldukları yönündeki anlayış, Victoria dönemi ahlakının egemen olmaya başlaması ile bir tarafa bırakılmıştır. Bu yüzyılda ev hizmetçiliği ve çocuk bakımı gibi işlerle görevlendirilen siyahi kadın sayısında bir artış olmuştur. Bu duruma bağlı olarak erkek egemen toplum anlayışı siyah ve beyaz kadınlar arasında bir ayrıma gitmeye başlamıştır. Beyaz kadınlar artık cinsel kışkırtıcı olarak görülüyordu ve erdemli kadınların cinsel istekleri olmaz şeklindeki cinsiyetçi anlayış çoğu beyaz kadın tarafından gönüllü bir şekilde kabul gördü. Beyaz kadınların, günahkâr kadın imajından, erdemlin temsilcisi olan kadın imajına (anne ve hizmetçi rolüne) bürünmesi, siyah kadınların kitlesel cinsel sömürsüyle aynı zamanda gerçekleşmiştir. Sömürgeci beyaz erkekler beyaz kadınlığı idealize ederken, cinsel olarak siyah kadınlara saldırdılar ve onlara merhametsizce davrandılar. Siyah kadınlar doğal olarak feminen kötülüğün ve cinsel şehvetin cisimleşmiş hali olarak görülmeye başlandı.

Hikâyede nispeten küçük bir yeri olan Amélie'ye, erkek egemen İngiliz kültürünün temsilcisi Bay Mason tarafından, hooks'un belirttiği cinsel kışkırtıcılık nitelikleri atfedilmiştir. İçinde bulunduğu ekonomik ve sosyal koşullardan kurtulmak ve yaşam kalitesini artırmak isteyen Amélie ise bir an önce adadan ayrılmak ve önce kız kardeşinin yaşadığı Güney Amerika kolonisine ardından da zengin insanların yaşadığı Rio'ya gitmeyi hayal etmektedir. Bu hayalini gerçekleştirmek için ihtiyaç duyduğu paraya Bay Mason'un cinsel ilişki teklifini kabul ederek ulaşır. Eşine saygı duymayan ve açıkça tüm kadınları aşağı varlıklar olarak gören Bay Mason bunu gizleme gereği bile duymaz. Antoinette'in kalımsal bir hastalık olması çok muhtemel hastalığı bu olay sonrası ilerleme göstermiş ve ruhsal ve fiziksel çöküşünün başlangıcı olmuştur. Onun hikâyesinin sonraki bölümünü Jane Eyre'den biliyoruz ancak Amélie'nin hikâyesinin nasıl devam ettiği asla öğrenemedik. Karayip adalarının o yıllardaki karmaşık sınıfsal yapısı göz önüne alındığında, Antoinette ve Amélie'nin kurbanlaştırılmaları arasında bir kıyaslama yapmak kolay olmasa da kendilerine yakın gördükleri beyaz kadınlara tanımadıkları cinsel özgürlüğü, beyaz olmayan kadınlara tanıyan erkek egemen kültür içinde her zaman kolay av olarak görülecek melez bir kadının başarı ve mutluluğa ulaşma şansının çok fazla olmadığı öngörülebilir.