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## THE SENSE OF LOSS IN JEAN RHYS'S VOYAGE IN THE DARK: THE ABSENCE OF MOTHER AND IMAGINED BLACK IDENTITY

Zita Rarastesa

### Abstract

The sense of loss of a mother leads Anna Morgan to her imagined black identity. Being a Creole from Dominica, Morgan is alienated both in her home country and in London. Du Bois's notion of double consciousness substantiates Morgan's sense of alienation. The racial issue here is not only socially constructed, but it is also personally constructed, as Morgan does not consider England as her homeland although she is as white as English people. The character is struggling from identity conflict, as she internalizes the impact of the British colonialization to the black people in Dominica. She feels more black than white because of the image of blackness that she creates from the image of her mother and black women in general, as nurturing, warm and domestic. In addition to that, the geographic location contributes to Morgan's sense of loss.

### Keywords

identity; mother; loss; race; blackness; alienation

### Abstrak

Rasa kehilangan terjadi pada tokoh Anna Morgan karena kematian sang ibu. Perasaan ini menyebabkan munculnya identitas bayangan sebagai seseorang kulit hitam. Sebagai seorang yang terlahir berkulit putih, beretnis Creole (campuran Dominica dengan kulit putih), ia merasa terasing dari tanah airnya, Dominica dan ditempatnya yang baru, di London. Du Bois menampilkan konsep "double consciousness" atau kesadaran ganda yang timbul pada diri Morgan karena keterasingan ini. Isu rasial disini tidak hanya terkonstruksi secara sosial, namun juga terkonstruksi secara personal. Morgan tidak menganggap Inggris sebagai tanah airnya walaupun warna kulitnya sama dengan orang kulit putih di Inggris. Sang tokoh berada dalam konflik identitas karena ia membebani diri sendiri dengan dampak penjajahan bangsa Inggris terhadap orang kulit hitam di Dominica. Ia merasa lebih sebagai orang kulit hitam daripada sebagai orang kulit putih karena ia menciptakan gambaran kulit hitam dari gambaran tentang ibunya, dan sebagaimana perempuan kulit hitam pada umumnya, yang telaten merawat anak, hangat, dan "domestic." Sebagai tambahan, rasa keterasingan disini menjadi tajam karena lokasi geografis.

### Kata Kunci

identitas; ibu; rasa kehilangan; ras; kulit hitam; keterasingan

## INTRODUCTION

Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* depicts how the main character, Anna Morgan, a Dominican born young girl, struggles to construct her self-identity in London conservative society in the 1930s. This paper discusses the sense of loss that Anna Morgan experiences, especially the way this sense of loss leads to her imagined black identity because of the absent mother. Being a Creole from Dominica, Anna is alienated both in her home country and in London. Besides positing racial stereotypes which are very dominant especially the one related to Caribbean women who are considered highly sexual, Rhys also invokes Du Bois's notion of double consciousness, which is problematic in this novel. The problematic aspect of Du Bois's concept of double consciousness in this novel is depicted through Anna's character who does not consider England as her homeland although she is as white as English people.

## DISCUSSION

The racial issue in Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* is complicated because 'the race' in Anna's case is not only socially but also personally constructed. From Hester's statement, it is suspected that not only Anna's mother was a "colored" woman rather than a descendant of English settlers, but also Anna's uncle, Ramsay Colterus fathered several children from Afro-Dominican women:

*Anna grows up on Constance Estate, a Dominican plantation owned for four generations by her mother's family and brought to prosperity through slave labor. Following Anna's mother's sudden and unexplained death, Anna's father marries an Englishwoman named Hester, who struggles to restore the family's long-lost image of undifferentiated Englishness. Insinuating not only that Anna's mother was a "coloured" woman rather than a white descendant of English settlers, Hester also rails against Ramsay Colterus, Anna's uncle who has fathered several children by Dominican women and has "the laugh of a negro". (Seshagiri 493).*

Hester's statements do not come out of the blue, considering Ramsay's colored children are all around and the sexual encounter between white men and colored or black women in West Indies is common knowledge. Supporting the statement, Evelyn O'Callaghan states in her book *Women Writing The West Indies, 1804-1939: "A Hot Place, Belonging to Us"*: "There is plentiful evidence, then, that white men in the West Indies, whether married or single, were openly involved with black or brown mistresses" (O'Callaghan 49). Based on these phenomenon, Creoles like Anna can never be certain whether her mother was colored or white. These phenomenon also makes Hester determined to make Anna "a lady", considering the sexual history of her family. Hester tries to make Anna more English than colored, but Anna cannot change her black accent when she speaks English. Hester says to Anna,

*I tried to teach you to talk like a lady and behave like a lady and not like a nigger and of course I couldn't do it. Impossible to get you away from the servants. That awful sing-song voice you had! Exactly like a nigger you talked – and still do. Exactly like that dreadful girl Francine. When you were jabbering away together in the pantry I never could tell which of you was speaking. (Voyage in the Dark 65)*

The closeness between Anna and Francine is the result of the way motherhood works in Creole households. O'Callaghan supports this fact by interpreting Carmichael's statement about black women's motherhood:

*"Negro children are brought up altogether differently from European infants" in that the black mother, "unless in cases where sickness prevents, always suckles her own child", clearly implies white mothers do not generally nurse their infants! (O'Callaghan 53)*

Related to Francine's attitude towards Anna, which shows obvious dislike towards her whiteness, O'Callaghan explains further that the nursing activity is not a voluntary activity for the black woman because it is part of her duty to be obedient towards her white mistress:

*Here is a paradigmatic vignette of the relationship of black and white women, once more sharing roles: in this case, the duties of motherhood. The black woman is without rights to her own body, and the white woman is circumscribed by social expectations in the employment of hers, and (once more) has to depend on her supposed "inferior" in this most intimate and "natural" of maternal duties. (O'Callaghan 53)*

This kind of role of mothering contributes to Anna's longing for blackness, since from the very beginning of her life all she can recognize is the warmth of the blackness of Francine, not to mention the absence of her biological mother, which adds to Anna's feeling of loss.

The complex racial issue in this novel makes Anna struggle with her identity and internalize the burden of what the colonialists do to the black people in Dominica. The compassion does not only appear because she feels the pain of the black people but also because she associates the blackness with the land and the nature of Dominica. The love of her motherland strengthens Anna's admiration for blackness. The uncertainty of her mother's racial identity puts her in the in-between space between white and black. She always relates herself with the brownness, which is neither white nor black, or the combination between white and black:

*I sat there. I didn't know what to say. There wasn't anything to say. I kept on wondering whether she would ask me what I was living on. 'What is Purity?' For Thirty-five Years the Answer has been Bourne's Cocoa.' Thirty-five years...Fancy being thirty-five years old. What is Purity? For Thirty-five Thousand Years the Answer has been...(Voyage in the Dark 59)*

The stereotype of white and black people in Dominica which leads to Anna's self-hatred toward her skin color contributes to Anna's longing for blackness. Due to the political and economic power, the Creole people as the representative of the colonialist with their 'whiteness' feel superior although they are surrounded by black Dominican people who are native to the island. The black character in this novel does not have any voice. Anna's voice is the only voice that the readers hear in this novel. Although the black voice is silenced in this novel, but it is not necessarily absent because the voice is transferred into Anna's voice, which is longing for blackness. The readers never hear any voice coming from Francine or the other black characters, instead, the black voice dominates Anna's mind:

Francine was there, washing up. Her eyes were red with the smoke and watering. Her face was quite wet. She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and looked sideways at me. Then she said something in patois<sup>1</sup> and went on washing up. But I knew that of course she disliked me too because I was white; and that I would never be able to explain to her that I hated being white. Being white and getting like Hester, and all the things you get – old and sad and everything. (*Voyage in the Dark* 72)

Francine's dislike of Anna's whiteness implies Francine's hatred of being colonized and degraded as human being. As the representative of the colonialist, Anna feels the distance between Francine and herself. Anna also feels Francine's withdrawal from Anna as refusal to negotiate and share the experience. However, Anna keeps trying to get close to Francine because she despises the image of the white as colonialist.

Instead of feeling privileged to be white and superior, Anna feels alienated from her own society of white people in Dominica, "a 'white cockroach' to the black and a 'white nigger' to the English" (O'Callaghan 107), especially because the one person she has to interact with all the time is her English step-mother, Hester, who does not want Anna to get too close to the black servant, Francine. Hester's effort to make Anna "a white lady" instead of "a black white girl" demonstrates the white segregation as minority yet superior economically and politically. In fact, what happens to Anna is that she feels more black than white because of the image of blackness that she creates. Hommi Bhabha, in his article "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences", interprets Fanon's theory that "cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in relation in Self to Other" (Bhabha 207). Bhabha theorizes that for the colonized nation, the natives have to be in the "third space" to be able to freely negotiate between the self and the other by being both of them (Bhabha 208). In this novel, although Anna does not belong to the group of colonized people, she identifies herself with black Dominican natives so she can put herself in the position as the other and thinks that she can understand the other. For her, the whiteness of her skin remains simply biological or physical without

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<sup>1</sup> A dialect, especially one that is provincial and non-standard

superior feeling, which should be attached as the socially constructed race of the Creole in Dominica. I argue that Bhabha's concept of mimicry fits better than the concept of third space in this novel, although what happens in this novel is the reverse kind of Bhabha's mimicry:

*...mimicry represents an ironic compromise. If I may adapt Samuel Weber's formulation of the marginalizing vision of castration, then colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence, in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. ...Mimicry is, thus, a sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power. (Bhabha 126)*

In Bhabha's concept of mimicry, usually it is the colonized people who try to be like the colonizer, but in this novel, it is Anna, representing the colonizer, who tries to be black, the colonized people. Anna mimicked the way black people speak, the way they behave and the way they feel not as a camouflage but to be able to get accepted in the black community, denying her whiteness. O'Callaghan observes that "language is direct indicator of the extent of this daily and intimate cultural contact" (O'Callaghan 54). She explains further that "the thorough acculturation of white children as manifested in their fluent Creole speech" (O'Callaghan 54). This language is home for the Creole children who are born in Dominica instead of pure English that is considered more elite and especially for women; the pure English language is considered more "lady-like". The Creole elite norm is the same as the English norm.

In relation to England, Anna cannot be in the third space since she rejects English whiteness but she stays Creole because she was born with the skin color and yet she wants to be black because she associates the blackness with Dominica, her motherland. The absence of suspected-colored mother becomes the significant factor in Anna's longing for blackness since if her mother was still alive, Anna would have developed her sense of identity as colored instead of white Creole. However, she could have developed both black and white identities because she was born on the island and interacted with black Dominicans so she could be in the third space between white and black. She would be able to accept herself as colored although she might adapt black Dominican culture as well. The mother for Anna functions as the root of her identity. Having suspected-colored mother is Anna's only connection to the blackness she always desires. In England, not only Anna's language which can make English people see her as different, but it is the geography of Dominica and the physical appearance of Anna which is different from English women. O'Callaghan quotes the anonymous author of *The Koromantyn Slaves* describes how the Creole women different from the English women:

The eye sockets of creoles were apparently deeper than those of Europeans, "thus shading the eye from the ill effects of an ardent and glaring solar light." Physically, whites

in the West Indies seemed to evolve downwards toward the bestial; and this applied to character also. So creoles in the region are represented as *less* well-bred, intelligent, active, sensitive, moral – generally less in *every* way – than the British and American writers who pronounce on them. (O'Callaghan 107)

Du Bois's double consciousness can clearly be seen in Anna's experience in England. She has always be conscious of being seen as different and "the other" by English people and racialized by labeling her with the stereotype of Creole people who are inferior.

In this novel, the Creole segregates themselves to maintain their caste of whiteness as well as their economic and political power. Although the novel does not clearly describe the time period, but when we see that Francine is a black servant, not slave, it implies that it is the time when the slavery has been abolished.<sup>2</sup> Although there are no slaves anymore, Dominica is still under British colonialization. Both Hester and Anna are aware of the silent resistance coming from the black Dominicans, although Anna considers black warmer and more nurturing instead of white that she considers cold and sad. Anna's step mother sees Anna's tendency to get closer to her black servant, Francine, than to her as her mother. Anna naturally picks up Francine's language and behavior instead of picking up the behavior of a white lady. The absence of mother in Anna's life creates a hollow space in her heart which drives her unconsciously to get closer to Francine. Anna tries to recreate the image of her mother, the kind of mother she wants to have: nurturing, warm and domestic—the image she also creates for the black women. The domestic stereotype appears from Francine's domestic activities which are mostly in the kitchen. Anna's longing for mother gets even worse when she moves to England because she does not have any opportunity to feel the warmth of mother which she can feel by spending time around Francine and Dominica. Ironically, when she is pregnant, she has an abortion instead of keeping the baby and becoming a mother, the figure she has been longing for. This action shows not only Anna's lack of confidence to be a mother but also Anna's lack of the financial support.

Rhys complicates this race by including geographic location as one of the factors that contributes to Anna's sense of loss. Anna develops this resistance towards white even when she is sent to England. For Anna, black feels like home while white feels like the other and foreign. Her refusal of England represents her refusal to accept her step mother and any norm and values that her step mother believes in. In England, she always identifies herself with black instead of white which goes along with the way the English society see her. The concept of Du Bois's double consciousness in this novel

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<sup>2</sup> In 23 August 1833, slavery was abolished in British Law. This Law was effective from 1 August 1834 in West Indian territories. Previously, legal discrimination on the grounds of skin colour was abolished in Dominica in 1831.

is problematic because Rhys's concept of race is problematic. In Du Bois's concept of double consciousness, black people see themselves from two perspectives: the way they see themselves and the way the white people see them: "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois 694). Anna's whiteness is seen as the authoritative figure and colonialist, although according to Robin Visel quoted by O'Callaghan the term colonizer and colonized in this context is problematic: "the white settler woman can best be described as half-colonized" (O'Callaghan 13). Further, O'Callaghan explains that:

*The white woman, powerless under patriarchy, had power over black women and men; the black woman, powerless in a racially stratified society, had power over white men; the white woman, empowered as domestic manager, yet was powerless to fulfill her role without dependence on the black woman. (O'Callaghan 57)*

The whiteness in *Dominica*, especially the women, is seen as cold and distant—the quality that a woman should not possess according to Anna. For Anna, a woman should be black and warm. The negative stereotype of the black women, highly sexual, in this novel is celebrated as positive stereotype because it comes from Anna's perspective which considers her sexuality is private and she can do anything with it:

*Sander Gilman (1986) graphically illustrates the point that female sexuality under slavery was very differently conceived for white and black/brown women: the white wife and mother was chaste, moral, modest, demure even to the point of asexuality; the black mistress was wanton, seductive and promiscuous. (O'Callaghan 47)*

Anna's third space here does not work well since she refuses to negotiate with the culture she lives in. Both Anna and the English society see her as the other because she does not act based on the English norm although she is as white as English women. The attitude of English society towards foreigners makes Anna feels more alienated and humiliated, although they do not laugh at her directly:

*"Well," she said, "that girl who did Three-Fingered Kate was a foreigner. My friend who was working in the crowd told me about it. Couldn't they have got an English girl to do it?" ...It was just because she had this soft, dirty way that foreign girls have. ...Well, an English girl wouldn't have done that. An English girl would have respected herself more than to let people laugh at her like that behind her back." (Voyage in the Dark 109)*

Anna always identifies herself as the inferior and the victim who can be seen from her relationship with Walter. When they make love for the first time, she imagines herself as a young slave woman "*Maillotte Boyd, aged 18. Maillotte Boyd, aged 18... But I like it like this. I don't want it any other way but this*" (*Voyage in the Dark* 56). The way she identifies herself as victim demonstrates not only the longing for blackness but also



her repressed memory of the slave raped by the master as the legacy of Anna's father's generation (Seshagiri 493). Anna also remembers what Hester told her about the mulatto servant named Maillotte Boyd: "...Maillotte Boyd, aged 18, mulatto, house servant. The sins of the fathers Hester said are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation - don't talk such nonsense to the child Father said - a myth don't get tangled up in myths he said to me..." (*Voyage in the Dark* 53). Anna's father denies the story Hester has told Anna, but Anna feels that her father does not want her to know because it is too horrible to handle. With her father's denial Anna feels uncertain whether she has to interpret her father's denial as confession or she has to keep thinking that she is purely white English who is just born in Dominica. This thought is attached in Anna's brain, contaminating her mind and opening the hole in her empty feeling. She has to imagine herself as black slave to be able to experience her blackness and it is almost like she likes to be conquered. Anna's body symbolizes the virgin land which has to be conquered by Walter, the Englishman. The idea of a virgin body associated with virgin land is supported by Peter Hume and Columbus as quoted by O'Callaghan:

*As Hume observes (1), the sexual nature of the encounter - the male gazes down at the semi-reclining female body - and the manner in which the allegorical woman figures both "native" and "land," are apparent. Similarly, Columbus's journal configures the Gulf of Paria as the entrance to "the terrestrial paradise" (another inscription of El Dorado), and fittingly "from his reading of geographers and theologians, he had come to the conclusion that the earth here was shaped like a woman's breast, with the terrestrial paradise at the top of the nipple". The tropics as woman's body, a bountiful source of sustenance and pleasure, and the construction of the encounter between Old World and New in terms of male conquest of seductive "virgin territory" ... (O'Callaghan 92)*

This scene in particular not only strengthens the stereotype that the women like to be victims and that the men are the sexual agents, but also the women's bodies as sexual objects or property which have exchange values. Anna's first sexual encounter also suggests redemption of the sin of her father's generation. She gives herself up to Walter, an Englishman, and lets her white body be colonized so she can feel whole as a black woman. Imagining to be raped as a slave woman becomes not only her desire to experience the blackness but also her sexual fantasy - a little bit masochistic.

In his article "Whiteness and the Return of the Black Body", George Yancy theorizes that:

*...the body is a battlefield, one that is fought over again and again across particular historical moments and within particular social spaces. In other words, the concept of the body provides only the illusion of self-evidence, facticity, thereness for something fundamentally ephemeral, imaginary, something made in the image of particular social groups. (Yancy 216-217)*

Yancy discusses how the black body is invaded by the white gaze and then is returned but distorted by the inscription that the white creates for the black body. According to him, this act is a violation of the body. What he is saying about the dark or

black body being a battlefield is because someone like Anna in this novel, has to constantly be conscious of her skin and body which is seen as Dominican, at the same time she has to struggle to define her self-identity. If the body only exists as an illusion because its image is made by a particular social groups, then Anna in this novel is trying to inscribe her own body with the image she creates herself to have black body. Rhys turns any negative inscription about black body into something desirable through Anna, while the one which is now inscribed negatively is white which is seen from the mixed blood Creole girl, Anna. From this perspective, Anna's agency is dominant as well as her sense of individuality because she is determined to have her own image of a black body and refuses to submit to the society's image of a black body. The loss of her mother empowers her to construct the new race in herself which is not the same as the racial image which is constructed by her society or the English society. However, at the same time, she has to confront the English society who inscribes her body as Dominican. Interestingly, Anna goes along with some of the created images of a Dominican woman. For example, she does not even try to assimilate with the English culture, instead, she fits the stereotype that a "foreigner" especially that Dominican woman is sexual. Furthermore, she does not try to speak perfect English to get accepted in the society. She is determined to be a Dominican, no matter how people perceive her. As a result, her refusal to assimilate strengthens the stereotype of the colored people, instead of creating counter type. For example, Anna does even try to behave like an English lady, to learn to speak perfect English language and lessen her accent. She also does not try to dress the way English women dress to fit her in the stereotype of English women who are submissive and fragile, instead, she wears black dresses which she likes. Anna strengthens everything related to the stereotype of black or colored women. It is difficult to find sentences that can support this kind of attitude because so many things are unsaid and even if they are said, they are not clear, so the readers have to interpret Anna's incomplete narration. Perhaps the clearest idea about how England is not good for Anna which implies Anna's incapability to adapt to English culture and expectation is through Anna's uncle, Uncle Bo's letter: "Now you write this extraordinary letter telling me that you don't think life in England is agreeing with her very well and that you are willing to pay half her passage out here" (*Voyage in the Dark* 60). If it is intentional for Rhys to create such a situation then the novel exemplifies the very complex and problematic racial issues which open our eyes that it is not simply the struggle to get accepted in a certain group of people but also what people want to be.

Quoting Sartre, Yancy posits:

*...as Black, by definition, I am an obstacle. As Black, I am the very obstacle to my own meta-stability and trans-phenomenal being. As Black, I am not a project at all. Hence, within the framework of the white imaginary, to be Black and to be human are contradictory terms. (Yancy 237)*

In this novel, this depiction of black cannot be found through Anna's narration

because Anna sees the black not through the white gaze but through her individual gaze. The gaze which is shaped by her daily experience, breathing the Dominican nature, walking on the Dominican land, being born from a suspected-colored mother, staring at the Dominican sky, and living among black Dominican people. Black and vivid colors are associated with vitality, being alive, and free, while white and pale colors are not attractive for Anna. The geography of the island has so much influence on how Anna sees black as something more desirable than white, especially when she is cut off from the land she is so used to. Dominica becomes a dream as well as black. However, as Yancy says that our body is only illusion then in Anna's case, she can have white skin but she can feel black because both white and black skin is imaginary.

Although her body becomes sexual commodity, Anna does not realize that being a prostitute is something that she can do to earn her own money. The sense of loss dominates her narration which does not only have the sense of time, but also the sense of agency that can motivate her to think about how she is going to take care of herself. This sense of agency, I argue, is very weak since instead of determining that prostitution is the profession that she has to take to get money, she lets herself mourn over Walter by getting drunk. The nostalgic feeling for Dominica makes her even weaker due to the feeling of getting lost in England, foreign country where everything is so cold and grey: "Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream, but I could never fit them together" (*Voyage in the Dark* 8). The way Anna narrates the story using repetition demonstrates the dream like reality of her life. By repeating what she says, she tries to convince herself that her life is going to change someday without knowing how: "Soon he'll come in again and kiss me, but differently. He'll be differently and so I'll be different. I thought, 'It'll be different, different. It must be different'" (*Voyage in the Dark* 24). Anna tries to sound hopeful but still she sounds like she is unsure that she believes what she says to herself. However, when her relationship with Walter is over, Anna's agency can be seen through her self control not to beg Walter for his love. Instead, she says what she wants to say to Walter to herself: "The thing is that you don't understand. You think I want more than I do. I only want to see you sometimes, but if I never see you again I'll die. I'm dying now really, and I'm too young to die" (*Voyage in the Dark* 97). I call it the agency because Anna can have the ability to decide what is good for her without degrading her dignity. Ironically, what the relationship means to her is different from what it means to Walter. For Walter, their relationship is only a sexual transaction, although Walter feels obligated to give Anna pension because Anna is a virgin when they first make love. For Anna, the relationship is her first romance and she is deeply in love with Walter who will not marry her because of his social status. In the relationship, Walter becomes the representation of English whiteness and who sees Anna as Dominican instead of white. Anna's cultural hybridity enables her to experience

the imagined black body because although she is white, the English society still considers her an outsider “white nigger” and being aware of the white gaze, until the end of the novel, Rhys does not suggest that Anna will submit to the Social norm to get accepted in the society. Even with the revised version of the ending which is intended to be more hopeful Anna does not seem to submit to any social norm. She can go through the same cycle again or give the society the silent resistance to survive.

The sense of longing for the homeland is depicted in a dream-like scene:

*“A goodly island and something highland, but all overgrown with woods,” that book said. And all crumpled into hills and mountains as you would crumpled a piece of paper in your hand – rounded green hills and sharply-cut mountains.  
A curtain fell and then I was here.  
...This is England Hester said... (Voyage in the Dark 17)*

The transition between the scene depicting Dominica and England has a sense of dream and reality. It seems that Anna is dreaming of Dominica and then suddenly she wakes up and she is in England. The use of curtain creates the sense of performance where the beauty of Dominica scene happens on stage and unreal, while on the other side is Anna as audience. The falling curtain signals the end of the performance and Anna has to get back to reality that is England. It mirrors Anna’s being a chorus girl who is on stage and who has to perform for her audience but then after the performance is over, she has to get back to her life.

In relation to the color black, Anna likes to wear black, although black dress universally symbolizes grief which suits Anna’s personality that is always gloomy. However, for Anna, black is sexy. In her article “Writing Colour, Writing Caribbean: *Voyage in the Dark* and the Politics of Colour” Elaine Savory says that black in combination with red signifies sexual willingness: “When Walter summons her for a final meeting, Anna again dresses in black, though she wears more rouge than usual, combining the black and the red which signify a dangerously willing yet conflicted sexuality in a Rhys protagonist” (Savory 97). Black can also be interpreted as masculine and associated to the strong black women slaves:

*Many of the negro women...are so very masculine in their voice, manners and appearance, that it is at times a matter of doubt to say to which sex they belong. This may be attributed to the general system of treatment during slavery...[which] in time rendered them callous, and in the end, divested them of all those principles of modesty which are so great an ornament to the feminine character, whether in high or low condition of life. (O’Callaghan 27)*

Since the way women dress is significant in the white and male gaze, especially in English culture, the way Anna dresses represents her refusal to be part of English society. When she has to change her dress and borrows Laurie’s dress, Laurie gives her a pink dress. The colors, black and pink are very contrast. Pink symbolizes the

stereotypical characteristic that a woman should have according to English culture: "In fact, dress serves as an appropriately "feminine" trope for a subtle critique of colonial mimicry, for English fashions are frequently represented as a torment for creole women" (O'Callaghan 112), while black symbolizes everything she desires in life, although it does not fit the English norm. Savory makes a connection between Anna's attitudes towards color to that of Rhys's, since this novel is considered autobiographical. Anna's attitude toward the pink dress represents Rhys's attitude towards pale colors because the color resembles the color of her skin—pale:

*At root, Rhys dislike of pale colours and paleness itself seems to be directly connected to her dislike of her own paleness, i.e. white racial identity, which is most explicitly laid out in Smile Please, and which comes directly from her Caribbean experience. The Caribbean is generally associated in Rhys's texts with bright colours and vitality. This opposition, and an important conjunction of black and white, is marked in Voyage in the Dark. (Savory 89)*

Laurie's gesture, lending Anna the pink dress, imposes the idea that Anna should look a certain way to be able to survive in the society. The gesture also suggests that Anna should submit to the new culture where the women should appear more feminine and cold which she does not feel comfortable with: "The ideal (white) female stereotype was timorous, refined and fragile" (O'Callaghan 26). The color of the dress that women wear can represent their characteristics. Moreover, the color of the dress as well as the color of the skin is socially constructed. In relation to black and white, many cultures consider black gloomy, mournful, and evil, while white is pure, virginal, and joy. Ironically, for Anna, it works the other way around. White, for her, represents grief and death as well as repression of vitality, since she was wearing white gown and gloves at funeral:

*White clothing is associated for Anna with grief and with the repression of vitality which white Creoles imposed on their children (especially the girls), in order to preserve caste, Anna remembers a funeral, probably her father's, which she attended in a white dress with wreaths on her head and in her hands which made her white gloves wet." People were saying "so young to die." (Savory 97-98)*

Rhys constantly counters the socially constructed color both in general and skin color through Anna who personally constructs the colors. This attitude can also be seen as agency because Anna claims her right to set her own values which do not fit in the English social values.

No matter how hard Anna rejects the English culture, the oppressive attitude of English society towards women who dress differently slowly tortures her and she begins to think about buying more expensive clothes. When she was in Dominica, she did not have to think about the financial problem because her father had the financial resource she needed. At that time she did not realize that she had financial support as a privilege because she belongs to the Creole people who have land and plantation and slaves. In England, she has to struggle to earn her own living just like her servant, Francine. The

struggle for financial support becomes part of Anna's experience as a result of being seen as different and foreign. The demand to buy more expensive clothes to create her selling image signifies the consumerism culture as the result of capitalism. Anna finds no way out from the capitalistic system because she is absorbed in the system which creates a never-ending labor for her, while she does not have any choice to get the money besides being a prostitute. Walter willingly supports Anna after abandoning her, but Anna seems to be reluctant every time she receives money from him. She seems to get trapped between accepting Walter's charity and feeling humiliated because she still thinks that her relationship with him means more than a sexual transaction. Anna considers her feeling for Walter is true and real, while Walter sees the relationship as regular sexual transaction with a young prostitute who happens to be a virgin. He thinks it is a noble gesture to continue taking care of her financially although he does not want to continue seeing her.

Anna's narration mostly depicts her sense of loss as being empty of emotion, hollow, incomplete, and the impossible will. What I mean by the impossible will here is the will to die and the will to be black. Sometimes Anna's will seem contradictory. One the one hand, she is afraid of dying because she thinks she is too young to die, especially when Walter abandons her. As a teenager who is in love for the first time, her relationship with Walter means so much to her that when it is over, she cannot deal with it. Interestingly, when she is still with Walter, she always expects that she will be abandoned one day. So when Walter really leaves her, she has this empty feeling which she expected to feel. However, after Walter abandons her, Anna realizes that she has to perform for other people, especially for Englishmen because she needs money to live. The thought of buying more expensive clothes is closely related to this realization to perform. She feels like she is on stage. She is aware of the men looking at her and creating her image according to the image they want. If they like the image, they will ask for her. Anna takes advantage of her "raced" body to fit the stereotype as sexual Dominican to get men to sleep with her. She knows that being racially different is sexually desirable for Englishmen.

## CONCLUSION

The idea of performing is associated with unreal and illusion. At the beginning of the novel, when Anna has just arrived in England, she depicts the experience as if there is a curtain which falls in front of her and everything ends. The curtain metaphor is significant in relation to Anna's dream-like experience throughout the novel. Besides that, Du Bois also uses "the veil" as a metaphor to explain his concept of double consciousness: "And, finally, need I add that I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil?" (Du Bois 693) The curtain and the

veil work together in Anna's life in London as a prostitute in the sense that she has to dress well to attract men and she also makes herself available for the white gaze which is beneficial for her. However, she still maintains her desire to be black and to crave for black experience. Anna consciously fits herself in the image which the Englishmen create to be able to survive. The curtain is not only associated with illusion but also Anna's feeling of entrapment, for example when Walter leaves her and she is alone in her room:

*I kept the curtains drawn all the time. The window was like a trap. If you wanted to open or shut it you had to call in somebody to help you. The mantelshelf was crowded with china ornaments – several dogs of various breeds, a pig, a swan, a geisha with a kimono and sash in colours and a little naked woman lying on her stomach with a feather in her hair. (Voyage in the Dark 104)*

Anna's description in the novel is not based on the real thing but it is based on the way she feels, her mood which most of the time gloomy. Anna's mood can also be seen when she catches flu: "He went out. The room looked different, as if it had grown bigger" (*Voyage in the Dark* 34). With Walter, Anna feels that the room grows bigger, implying that without Walter in her life, her room will be much narrower.

This image of unreal and illusion or dream-like description in Anna's narration clearly reflects her state of mind which shows her sense of loss. Her despair can be sensed at the end of the novel when she says:

*When their voices stopped the ray of light came in again under the door like the last thrust of remembering is blotted out. I lay and watched it and thought about starting all over again. And about being new and fresh. And about mornings, and misty days, when anything might happen. And about starting all over again, all over again... (Voyage in the Dark 1887-88)*

We cannot be sure that "starting all over again" means returning to the same cycle as before, but there is no assurance that Anna is going to submit to the English culture and norm which always put her in the position of the other. To my mind, Anna can only imagine death and blackness. Those are the only things she wants considering the tone throughout the novel. She is not going to kill herself but she wishes she were dead because it seems that life is too hard for her to bear, without Walter who can make her feel loved and needed and blackness that can make her feel alive.

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