BETWEEN FLAMES AND TIDES:

THE DUALITIES IN WIDE SARGASSO SEA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

This book began as a quiet attempt to understand one woman's struggle to exist between worlds. In Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is never simply a character on the page; she is a Creole woman pulled between colonizer and colonized, between patriarchy and her own fragile sense of self. Her story became a mirror for many unnamed women whose lives have been marked by silence, misrecognition, and the constant demand to be someone other than themselves.

As I followed Antoinette through fire, sea, and madness, her journey blurred into the faces and memories of women I have known—women who carried entire worlds on their shoulders without asking for recognition, who quietly resisted the roles assigned to them. Among them, one figure stands at the centre of this book.

This work is, before anything else, a small offering to the memory of my mother. Her patience, strength, and quiet endurance taught me more about dignity than any theory could. Though she is no longer here, her presence lives between these pages—in every question about injustice, in every attempt to name a hidden wound, and in every gesture of compassion toward women who have been pushed to the margins. If this book manages to give even a little more voice, space, or tenderness to such women, it is because she once did the same for me.

INTRODUCTION

"No nation can ever be worthy of its existence that cannot take its women along with the men. No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men. There are two powers in the world; one is the sword, and the other is the pen. There is a great competition and rivalry between the two. There is a third power stronger than both, that of the women."

Muhammad Ali Jinnah

For women living in colonized countries, the situation created by colonization is even more difficult than it is for women in the West. This is because colonization produces what has been called double colonization. Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford use this term to describe "ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy" (McLeod, 2000). In other words, a woman who lives in a colonized country is exposed to the power of both the colonizer and the patriarchal order in her own society. She must struggle between these forces not only in order to survive, but also to protect what remains of her identity.

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a precursor to Charlotte Brontë's famous novel Jane Eyre and is set in a postcolonial context. It attempts to reinvent the identity of Bertha Mason, Rochester's wife, by giving her a history and a voice. In Rhys's view, Brontë had presented a false image of both Creole and West Indian women, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* was written in part to correct some of these misrepresentations. Rhys wanted to write about the "females lost to England": young Creole girls who married European men, were taken away from their people and their country, and were gradually reduced to selflessness. The novel engages with several important issues—feminism, racism, gender relations, and postcolonialism—but its central concern is a female character whose identity has been fragmented by the circumstances surrounding women's lives. As Marai Olaussen notes, "The fate of a woman belongs to a group which no longer has a place" (Olaussen, 1993, p. 67).

The story is, in essence, about Antoinette's exclusion, alienation, and the cruelty she suffers from those around her. In the hostile environment that surrounds her, she searches constantly for a sense of serenity. As a child, she does her best to find tranquility under her mother's care, but rejection from the person closest to her leaves her silent and lonely. She witnesses formerly disenfranchised slaves burning her home to the ground and watches her mother descend into madness. Throughout her life, Antoinette is unable to find any secure refuge in which to

protect herself. She is treated as a foreigner, pushed into marrying the wrong man, and spends the rest of her life with him. She marries an Englishman, a total stranger, who chooses her primarily for financial reasons. Under the weight of these experiences, her emotional and mental state deteriorates to the point where suicide appears to be the only escape—from the problems that surface during the honeymoon to her final confinement in the attic by her husband.

Wide Sargasso Sea also presents Antoinette as a markedly hybrid woman: she is born in the Caribbean but is of European ancestry. In the world she inhabits, she is regarded as neither Black nor fully white. She remains an outsider, someone who is perceived as having no legitimate place and who is denied full recognition as a white European as well. Indeed, she stands between two worlds and two civilizations, a position that culminates in struggle and leaves her in an "in-between" situation. As Homi Bhabha remarks, "We find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (Bhabha, 1994).

Antoinette is mistreated not only because of her class and gender, but also because of her mixed background: her mother is of Martinican origin and her father is a white English slave-owner. In this respect, Antoinette clearly reflects her creator. Rhys herself was born to a Creole mother and a Welsh father, and her short story "The Day They Burned the Books" draws on her own experiences of discrimination. She recalls, "My relationships with the few real English boys and girls I had met were awkward. I had discovered that if I called myself English, they would snub me haughtily, 'You're not English; you're a horrid colonial'" (Rhys, 1966). What Antoinette must confront and attempt to resolve is the wreckage of discrimination that results in mental illness and a split sense of self. Because she is voiceless and lacks power in society, she is unable to overcome this situation. Women who find themselves in such a position have been named subaltern women by Spivak, who argues that such women, suffering under double colonization, lack both a past that is recognized and a voice that can be heard (Spivak, 1988).

Conflicts between men and women, white and Black communities, and colonizers and colonized subjects are depicted throughout the novel. Two powerful forces fuel these conflicts: logic and emotion. These forces appear in a variety of scenes and images, so that the difficulties created by gender oppression also point to broader, more abstract tensions. Reason and emotion clash within Antoinette's mind, showing how external pressures affect her mental health. She has two

conflicting worlds in her psyche; more precisely, she is trapped between two different worlds and does not fully belong to either of them. Her main struggle is that of someone "who was neither a black Jamaican nor a white Englishman" (Rhys, 1966). This sense of conflict is made explicit in one of Antoinette's most striking speeches:

It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. 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, 1966).

Here Antoinette describes how she is insulted both by Black Jamaicans, who call her a "white cockroach," and by English women, who call her a "white nigger." Caught between these two groups, she is left asking who she is, where her country is, where she belongs, and why she was born at all. Her identity crisis is not simply personal; it is produced by the racial and colonial hierarchies that surround her.

Said's Orientalism helps to clarify these conditions. He argues that the West packages modernity as a universal reality and presents its own cultural values and norms as universal norms that others must adopt (Said, 1978). In this framework, those who do not share Western culture are treated as lacking both a legitimate past and a meaningful voice. The colonized woman is thus imagined as having no real history, because her past is dismissed as primitive or barbaric and therefore of no value in the face of modernity. She is also imagined as voiceless, not because she has nothing to say, but because she is considered ignorant of Western culture and therefore unqualified to speak about what counts as "civilized" values.

Colonialism and postcolonialism have therefore been identified as the producers of metaphors and images used to manipulate race and gender in the interests of the colonizers. Loomba (1998) notes that "lower races represented the female type of the human species, and females the lower race of gender" (p. 161). In other words, so-called inferior races were feminized, and women were racialized as inherently lower. These overlapping images help justify the double oppression of colonized women. Writers such as Spivak have sought to question the isolation, identity crisis, suffering, and madness that women have experienced as a result of double colonization (Spivak, 1988). Feminists more broadly have focused on women's struggle to redefine their relationship with men in

patriarchal societies. As an approach, feminism seeks to eliminate the pressures imposed on women through gender segregation in both public and private life, and to uphold women's rights in the face of male domination.

Feminism thus provides one of the key avenues through which women living under double colonization can resist and attempt to break male domination and, by extension, patriarchy. However, there have also been dissenting voices within feminism itself. Internal conflicts have emerged, leading to the development of postcolonial feminism or Third World feminism. This new wave arose in response to the failure of many Western feminists to recognize "the differences pertaining to class, race, feelings, and settings of women in once colonized territories" (Mishra, 2013). Postcolonial feminists criticize Western feminism for its Eurocentric assumptions and for speaking on behalf of women in colonized regions without fully understanding their contexts. This situation complicates the struggle against both patriarchy and colonialism, because Western feminists have often given limited space to Third World feminists, thereby dimming the voices of women in colonized regions. The lack of attention to the actual conditions in which colonized women live not only hinders their struggle against double colonization but also draws attention to the new forms of resistance and rebellion developed by subaltern women.

Various writers have explored the fate of women who are ill and who live under double colonization, in an effort to depict their unique situation and the ways they struggle against the loss of identity and isolation that accompany it. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys represents her alter ego as a doubly colonized woman, viewed through the combined lenses of patriarchal society and colonialism. The distinctive Caribbean setting, marked by the legacy of slavery and colonial rule, provided inspiration for the novel in the 1960s. As Emery (1986) notes, "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" (p. 3). This experience of displacement and vulnerability finds its fictional counterpart in Antoinette, whose story reflects the broader struggles of women living under double colonization.

Drawing inspiration from the struggles of women in colonized regions, Rhys questions the relationship between women and men and the roles assigned to each within a patriarchal society. As Carr (2007) notes, she "has not regarded herself as a feminist nor particularly concerned with women's affairs only" (p. 123). Nevertheless, her work exposes the marginalized position of women "both in a patriarchal society as well as in colonies, while addressing issues around

colonialism, race, political oppression, and mental illness" (Carr, 2007). Although she pays relatively little direct attention to Black women's specific concerns, there are clear traces in her fiction of "sexual self-determination and economic empowerment and the struggle against the psychic pain of racism and sexism" (Keizer, 2007, p. 155). The desire for self-determination, especially as it appears in the divided character of Antoinette, exemplifies the struggles faced by women from colonized territories who attempt to integrate into societies that refuse to fully accept them. As Haque (2016) observes, Antoinette "attempts to balance between the fight for her identity as a Creole girl while at the same time attempting to perfectly fit as an English girl."

The oppression that accompanies double colonization frequently leads women to seek self-determination, which can manifest in various forms of rebellion and may ultimately be interpreted as insanity. In Antoinette's case, the oppression and repression she experiences under the double domination of patriarchy and colonialism contribute to her mental breakdown. Yet before subaltern women are pushed into madness like Antoinette, it is sometimes possible for the colonized to create a third space that allows for rebellion and other modes of escape from imperial exploitation. Bhabha (1994) describes this Third Space as emerging at points of cultural intersection, "where cultural boundaries are constantly interpreted and where new cultural meanings and identities are derived, and a cultural hybrid is created." For subaltern women, however, this opportunity rarely arises, particularly when they are imagined as lacking a past and as being unable to speak.

The challenge, then, is to trace the connection between race and gender as it is presented in Rhys's novel and to relate it to Ania Loomba's ideas on colonialism and postcolonialism in order to clarify the concept of double colonization. In addition, given the different waves of feminism and the forms of madness that arise from the many kinds of marginalization subaltern women experience, Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject becomes useful for understanding Antoinette's loss of identity and the way madness functions in a situation of double colonization. The following analysis brings these perspectives together to explore how Antoinette's fragmented self, her rebellion, and her final collapse reveal the complex workings of patriarchy and empire in the life of a doubly colonized woman.

Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys is taken as the main point of reference for examining Antoinette and the concept of double colonization as it affects marginalized women in developing countries. The novel makes it possible to

trace how marginalization operates, how women attempt to resist it, and how such attempts can be interpreted as madness. Alongside *Wide Sargasso Sea*, other novels that explore women's marginalization in developing contexts also inform the discussion. The analysis draws on postcolonial feminist theory, which is particularly appropriate because material conditions and social structures play a crucial role in shaping women's lives under colonial rule.

One of the central questions guiding this analysis is how double colonization leads to rebellion among women from developing countries. The argument advanced here is that double colonization frequently provokes rebellion. In patriarchal societies, this situation becomes even more difficult and conflict-ridden. Fuad A. Muttaleb (2020) describes it in the following terms:

Women have suffered from double colonization in different societies and different cultures. Also, women have faced different kinds of oppression: from their masculine society on the one hand, and from colonization on the other hand. They have experienced the oppression of patriarchy because of socially constructed roles which make them an inferior class in the society with no rights, also they have experienced the oppression of colonization (Muttaleb, 2020).

Patriarchy places a heavy burden on women in developing countries. Feminist activists use the term patriarchy to describe the power relationship between men and women and to identify the root causes of women's subordination. Abeda Sultan (2011) explains patriarchy as follows:

The word 'patriarchy' literally means the rule of the father or the 'patriarch', and originally it was used to describe a specific type of 'male-dominated family' – the large household of the patriarch which included women, junior men, children, slaves and domestic servants all under the rule of this dominant male.

She goes on to argue that:

Patriarchy is the prime obstacle to women's advancement and development. Despite differences in levels of domination the broad principles remain the same, i.e. men are in control. The nature of this control may differ. So, it is necessary to understand the system which keeps women dominated and subordinate, and to unravel its workings in order to work for women's development in a systematic way. In the modern world where women go ahead by their merit, patriarchy there creates obstacles for women to go forward in society. Because patriarchal institutions and social relations are responsible for the inferior or secondary status of women (Sultan, 2011).

Kamla Bhasin, a well-known Indian author and feminist activist, offers a similar description in What Is Patriarchy? She notes that the term is now used "more generally to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways" (Bhasin, 2006). Alongside patriarchy, colonization and double colonization further undermine women's identities in developing countries. Colonization restricts women's freedom as individuals; double colonization goes further by disregarding their very existence. Female presence is a crucial reality for both colonizers and colonized, yet it is frequently erased or distorted. In her influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) argues that women do not truly "speak" within the colonial framework because they are not granted the right to do so. They are colonized both by patriarchy and by imperial power. As she famously puts it:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling that's the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development (Spivak, 1988).

This "violent shuttling" describes the position of many women whose stories this book seeks to illuminate through the figure of Antoinette: women caught between systems, spoken about but not listened to, and pushed toward rebellion and, at times, madness by the weight of double colonization.

CHAPTER ONE

Colonization, Postcolonial Feminism, and Double Colonization

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework for the discussion. It offers an overview of three key concepts—colonization, postcolonial feminism, and double colonization—that underpin the analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It begins with an exploration of colonization, drawing on Edward Said's Orientalism to highlight the main ideas that illuminate how colonial power operates. It then considers how colonization is carried out and sustained by the colonizers, not only through military and economic dominance but also through culture and knowledge. The chapter goes on to examine postcolonial feminism as a critical approach, presenting different definitions of the term, the main proponents of the theory, and their arguments. It also considers the strengths and weaknesses of postcolonial feminism, the various strands within it, and the tensions between Western and Third World feminists. The discussion of postcolonial feminism concludes with an outline of the main criticisms directed at both feminism in general and postcolonial feminism in particular. Finally, the chapter introduces the concept of double colonization and explains how it is established and sustained through cultural re-creation and adaptation in ways that reinforce both patriarchy and imperialism.

Colonialism is closely associated with oppression and persecution under imperial power and therefore cannot be reduced to questions of skin colour, especially for those living in the developing world. Said (1993) argues that the West presents modernity as a universal reality and attempts to give a universal character to its own culture and values. This presentation is then used to justify colonialism: Western norms are projected as the true values that everyone must adopt as universally valid. Said notes that culture has often been used to legitimize imperialism, as white colonizers have argued that the colonized "were not like us" and therefore "deserved to be ruled" (Said, 1993).

Ania Loomba extends this critique by examining how metaphors and images relating to race and gender have been deployed under colonialism to justify the actions of the colonizers. She observes that so-called "lower races represented the 'female' type of the human species, and females the 'lower race' of gender" (Loomba, 1998, p. 161). In other words, colonized peoples were feminized, and women were racialized as inherently inferior. Loomba (1998) explains that colonial texts often represent women and non-Europeans as passive, childlike, and in need of leadership, or as sexually aberrant, emotional, wild, and outside

society (p. 159). These images have been used to legitimize colonial rule over non-Europeans and to justify the inferior treatment of women both in Europe and in colonized regions.

The disparity in the treatment of colonized peoples—especially non-Europeans and women—led Said to define orientalism in his seminal book Orientalism as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978, p. 3). For Said, Orientalism is a hegemonic discourse that constructs "the East" in ways that serve imperial interests. Knowledge about the Orient, produced and circulated in Europe, has functioned as an ideological justification for colonialism (Said, 1978). Writers, statesmen, political thinkers, philologists, and philosophers all contributed to the creation and recreation of images of the "Orient" and to the development of methods for controlling it. Knowledge, in this sense, is not neutral; it is used to maintain and extend European hegemony over other lands.

Spivak builds on Said's insights and insists that every act of representation is also, to some extent, a misrepresentation. She draws attention to the way Western fantasies about "the Orient" are built on the West's own dreams and desires, making the Orient a fabricated construct rather than a direct reflection of reality (Spivak, 1988). The images produced about the Orient emerge from views, theories, and opinions that are then circulated as factual knowledge. This fabrication gives Orientalism its power, as volumes of literary and scholarly work reinforce the same constructed picture. One consequence is that Orientalism has often studied Islam as an abstract object, while ignoring the people who practise it—turning the religion into a kind of desert with no followers. The declared aim of Orientalist scholarship has been to "bridge" its imaginative assumptions and its material effects, but in practice this bridging often results in the misrepresentation of the Orient (Said, 1978).

Stemming from such skewed misrepresentations are the familiar stereotypes about the East and the Orient in general. Orientalism constructs a highly positive image of the West—associated with scientific progress, rationality, and advancement—while presenting the Orient as "remote, unchanging, primitive or backward" (Said, 1978). The East is depicted as strange, fantastic, and bizarre; the West, by contrast, appears rational, sensible, and familiar. This contrast serves to justify both colonization and the spread of Western culture as a supposedly universal set of values that everyone else must embrace. The fabricated images created by Orientalist discourse have contributed directly to racism, assigning negative characteristics to different non-Western groups. Arabs are portrayed as

violent murderers, Indians as lazy, and the Chinese as inscrutable. Such stereotypes reinforce racist hierarchies and provide further justification for colonial rule.

Gender stereotypes are deeply embedded in Orientalism and, by extension, in colonialism. Women from the East are represented in sweeping, essentializing ways, as "effeminate or the sexually promiscuous, exotic oriental female" (Said, 1978). Their image is one of eroticized nudity and objectification, reducing them to bodies designed to satisfy Western sexual fantasy. At the same time, Orientalist discourse undermines the masculinity of the Eastern man, attributing to him a lack of courage and strength. He is described as lazy, uncivilized, and cowardly, unable to compare with the Western man, whose culture is deemed sound and civilized. In this way, the Orient as a whole is constructed as an appropriate site for colonization: feminized, weak, irrational, and in need of Western control.

The production of knowledge within Orientalism—and Said's critique of it—are strongly influenced by Michel Foucault's work on knowledge and power. Foucault's analyses show how institutions that regulate everyday life also produce forms of knowledge that support particular power relations. Following this line, Orientalism can be understood as a European political project that promotes a binary image of Europe as a familiar, rational centre and the Orient as an unfamiliar, irrational periphery. This binary then serves to justify European colonial measures. Said captures this logic when he writes that "the Orient needed first to be known, then invaded and possessed, then re-created by scholars, soldiers, and judges" (Said, 1978, p. 92). In other words, the Orient is first constructed in discourse and then reshaped in practice to fit Western expectations.

The fabricated images of the Orient have been challenged by Spivak, who insists that even the most detailed picture does not coincide with the reality it claims to represent. One of the questions she raises is whether the colonized world has a precolonial culture to which it can simply return. Spivak acknowledges that no pure, untouched precolonial culture can be recovered, since colonialism has already transformed earlier ways of life. She therefore turns to the notion of "worlding," the process through which European powers persuaded local populations to accept the European worldview as the natural way of understanding their social reality. As long as the subaltern is unable to develop and express a political consciousness, Spivak argues, external representation remains the only available option (Spivak, 1985). At the same time, she criticizes those scholars who, in her view, overlook the complicity between certain forms of theory and the interests of capital and imperial power. In this context, her work

exposes how some intellectual traditions have unintentionally supported colonial domination and the continuing grip of the West on the Orient and the developing world.

1.1 Desire to Free Oneself from Colonialism: Decolonization

The desire to be free from colonialism and imperialism is often difficult to realise. In many cases, the colonized subject can only create a kind of Third Space, a space of rebellion and reimagining, which may be labelled as madness by imperial or patriarchal power. This Third Space expresses a wish to change the reality imposed by the imperial authority and its exploitative structures. To enter it is to attempt to break away from the norms established by the colonizer. Success depends on the extent to which the colonized can retain their own values and practices instead of adopting those imposed by colonial rule. Failure, by contrast, means surrendering to the colonizer's norms and abandoning ancestral culture and heritage (İçen, 2020). The desire to free oneself from colonialism is thus also a quest to rediscover a lost identity.

Said adds that resistance against colonial power carries more than simple refusal; it involves "the national re-establishment of society, affirmation of identity and the appearance of new cultural practices launched as mobilized force" aimed at challenging Western domination throughout the non-European world (Said, 1978). Decolonization is therefore both political and cultural: it demands new forms of collective life and fresh ways of imagining the self.

The Third Space, which can be associated with madness and rebellion against the colonizer, has been described as a site where colonialism, modernity, and postcolonial experience intersect. Bhabha (1994) explains that when cultures open up to each other, a Third Space is formed where boundaries cross:

Where cultures open up to each other, the Third Space is formed where boundaries cross each other. This threshold space between cultures is the intermediate space where cultural boundaries are constantly interpreted and where new cultural meanings and identities are derived, and a cultural hybrid is created (Bhabha, 1994).

The production of knowledge within this space is never innocent; it emerges from power relations that shape interactions between cultures. Foucault's work on power and knowledge allows us to see how such relations operate, and it is on this basis that Said criticizes Western discourse about the East. He shows how the Orient has been represented in literature, sociology, and other disciplines as a

discovery of the West, without an equally recognized counter-version from the East to challenge or correct Western views. The creation of a Third Space, in Bhabha's sense, enables the Orient to evaluate and offer counter-views to those of the West, making it possible to question and revise established representations. The identities that emerge from this interaction are hybrid. As Thomas (2005) notes, "cultural differences are not synthesized into a new third term but continue to exist in a hybrid Third Space." Hybridity, in this sense, arises where cultures intersect and new boundaries are continually created and recreated. The Third Space becomes a middle ground between cultural extremes, a site where neither side fully absorbs the other, but where new, mixed forms of identity can take shape (Bhabha, 1994).

Despite the critical potential of the Third Space, oppression by colonizers, combined with patriarchy, continues to shape the low position of women in many societies. For this reason, engagement with gender issues within the Third Space is essential. Bill Ashcroft (2000) points out that:

There have been vigorous debates in various colonized societies over whether gender or colonial exploitation is the most significant political factor in women's lives. He notes that this colonial control has led to calls for greater attention to the construction of gender and to women's roles in studies of imperialism and colonialism.

In other words, any serious approach to decolonization must account not only for race and nation, but also for the gendered dimensions of power that affect women like Antoinette. In a similar vein, Mohanty has postulated that "without the overdetermined discourse that creates the third world, there would be no (singular privileged) first world" (Mohanty, 1994, p. 82). This contention challenges the presentation and discussion of women's position in the Third Space where the issues of women from the Third World is presented as different from those of the "first world". This indirectly sustains imperialism and colonial tendencies even in the postcolonial era hence undermining the definition of boundaries in Third Space.

1.2 Postcolonial Feminism

Since the 1980s, conversations between feminism and postcolonial cultural theory have opened up a new space for interpretation. Postcolonialism and feminism are connected in complex ways, both practically and theoretically. It soon became clear that these two critical frameworks share important concerns:

both focus on those who are marginalized as the "Other" by dominant systems and both seek to defend the interests of those who have been excluded. Patriarchy and colonialism share a common ground in the way they construct binary oppositions—man/woman, West/East, civilized/primitive—and use these binaries to secure power. For a long time, however, the relationship between postcolonialism and feminism was marked by tension and disagreement rather than easy harmony. Their respective connections to imperialism and to the women's movement led to deep splits over questions such as how to assess women's freedom in the so-called Third World and how to interpret the colonial use of feminism as part of a "civilizing mission."

According to Lundin (2008), postcolonialism focuses on marginalization and exploitation in colonial contexts, while McLeod (2000) notes that "feminism and postcolonialism share the mutual goal of challenging forms of oppression." Women who are colonized by foreign powers are thus doubly oppressed: they are exploited and colonized not only by imperial agents but also by patriarchal structures within their own societies. Postcolonial feminist criticism examines how women are depicted in colonial and postcolonial literature and investigates the social and literary issues that shape women's lives. Colonialism and patriarchy have historically been intertwined, and the formal end of empire in former colonies did not automatically lead to the end of women's subjugation. Postcolonial feminist critics point out that even women writers who seek to challenge cultures of oppression can themselves remain stereotyped and, at times, ironically excluded.

Australian scholar Margaret Chilla Bulbeck describes postcolonial feminism as:

It emerged from the gendered history of colonialism. Because colonial powers imposed Western norms on colonized countries, colonial oppression often encouraged colonized peoples to value their precolonial cultures and to fight for them after achieving national independence. Postcolonial feminists argue that forms of oppression related to the colonial experience—particularly racial, class, and ethnic oppression—have continued to marginalize women in postcolonial societies. They stress that gender differences are a major force behind patriarchy, and they reject portrayals of non-Western women as voiceless, passive victims. At the same time, they object to the tendency to represent Western women as automatically modern, educated, and empowered (Bulbeck, 1998).

The social realities described by postcolonial feminism include stark contrasts within the same society. In one sphere stands the "sacred hearth" and the

supposedly inviolable family, where women are, in theory, sheltered and respected—not primarily for themselves, but because they are seen as the centre of the home and the guardians of their husbands' "honour." In another sphere, however, there are women who are equally necessary to the functioning of society but are regarded very differently. Fernando (1977) describes these women as exploited, bullied, ill-treated, confined in the brothels of large towns, condemned to a dreadful life and an early death, yet "tolerated" and kept under the "protection" of the police. Such examples highlight the deep contradictions in societies that idealize some women while treating others as disposable.

In this context, the Third Space discussed earlier becomes closely linked with women's and gender studies and with feminist theory more broadly. It offers a way to deepen our understanding of the position of women in the Third World, where colonial histories and patriarchal structures intersect. The term feminism itself derives from the Latin femina, meaning woman, and was initially associated with campaigns for women's equality and the Women's Rights Movement. Feminism represents women's struggle for fair treatment and equal rights, and it expresses an objection to the legal, economic, and social restrictions that have historically limited women's lives. Over time, different writers and activists have defined feminism in different ways. Chaman Nahal, in his article "Feminism in English Fiction," describes feminism as "a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome." This notion of freedom from dependence resonates strongly with the experiences of women like Antoinette, whose lives are shaped by both colonial power and patriarchal control.

There is, as Chaman Nahal suggests, a "dependence syndrome": whether the source of dependence is the husband, the father, the wider community, a religious group, or an ethnic group (Nahal, 1991). Simone de Beauvoir links feminism directly to the breaking of this pattern. For her, "When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes" (Beauvoir, 1956). In other words, feminism becomes real when women are no longer defined through their dependence on others. Beauvoir's famous statement that:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" underlines the constructed nature of femininity. She writes: No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine (Beauvoir, 1956, p. 301).

Postcolonial feminism, often referred to as Third World feminism, is a branch of feminist thought that examines how colonialism, racism, and the long-lasting effects of empire shape the specific gender realities of non-white and non-Western women in postcolonial contexts. Postcolonial feminists criticize Western feminist traditions for their history of universalizing "woman" and for assuming that their theories can represent women everywhere. In response, postcolonial feminism seeks to challenge male domination while also paying close attention to race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. It aims to alter relationships between men and women towards greater equality, but insists that this cannot be done without recognizing the particular histories and identities of women in formerly colonized societies.

Just as Orientalism has been understood as part of a hegemonic discourse that supports imperialism, postcolonial feminism has sometimes been seen as connected to colonial knowledge systems that construct women from Third World countries as "Other" (Said, 1978, p. 162). Nahal (1991) notes that women's position has historically been "secondary in relation to men," a situation reinforced by male control over education and other cultural values. This control has damaged women's dignity, even when they stand on an equal footing with men in terms of professional or intellectual ability. Feminism, in this context, emerges as both a practical movement and a theoretical challenge to men's domination over women.

Postcolonial feminists share some basic assumptions with other feminists, including the belief that men and women are created as human beings with only minor bodily differences and a mutual attraction that sustains the continuation of life. Yet they also emphasize that the institution of marriage, which grows out of this attraction, has frequently sown the seeds of women's subordination. As Nahal (1991) observes, marriage has often served as a key site where women's freedom is limited and where expectations of obedience and sacrifice are reinforced.

One of the ambitions of postcolonial feminists is to go beyond simply analysing the consequences of patriarchy, gender inequality, and sexual exploitation. They argue that it is not enough to struggle against patriarchy understood solely as men's dominance over women. It is also necessary to confront classism and racism, which privilege white women over women of colour. The fight against patriarchal and socio-economic injustice, they insist, must include a fight against racial, ethnic, and sexual privilege, as well as a recognition that women's groups are not homogeneous and cannot be united under a single, universal experience.

The multiple oppressions faced by women have provoked counter-reactions in the form of various feminist movements, which together serve as umbrella terms for the many ways women have named and resisted injustice.

At the same time, postcolonial feminists recognize that feminists themselves do not always speak with one voice. Disagreements arise from the kinds of injustice being addressed, the regions in which those injustices occur, the specific forms that sexism takes, and the particular groups of women involved. Despite these differences, both feminism and postcolonial feminism share a commitment to social change and to confronting all forms of injustice directed at women because they are women.

The rallying calls of feminist and postcolonial feminist movements grow out of documented and perceived patterns of oppression that women endure simply because of their gender. At the heart of these movements lies a desire to understand gender inequality in everyday life, the social roles assigned to women, and the ways different societies construct sex and gender. This has led to criticism of feminist approaches that focus only on certain categories of women, such as middle-class, educated, or white women. In response, new forms of feminism have emerged that place ethnicity, race, or multiculturalism at the centre of analysis. The underlying concern is well captured by Beauvoir's claim that "the situation of woman is that she is a free and autonomous being like all human creatures nevertheless finds her living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other" (Beauvoir, 1956, p. 155). The recurring themes in feminist thought are discrimination, oppression, stereotyping, objectification, and patriarchy in the treatment of women across different societies.

Postcolonial theory adds another layer to this picture by suggesting that the category "woman" is often used in a universal way that ignores social class and ethnic identity. Mainstream Western feminists have been accused of neglecting the voices of non-Western women for many years, thereby creating tension and even hostility among women in emerging nations. Postcolonial feminism responds to this oversight by insisting that the experiences of women in the Third World cannot be folded into a single, universal story, and that their particular histories of colonialism and racialization must be taken seriously if genuine solidarity is to be achieved.

Postcolonial feminists have consistently pointed to the links between capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. While feminist and postcolonial studies have often remained in a state of tension, postcolonial feminism—aligned with broader

postcolonial perspectives—also takes a critical stance toward mainstream Western feminism. One of its central concerns is the protection of women from all forms of violence, especially domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other kinds of sexual abuse, particularly in Third World countries. Feminists more generally have focused on securing fair treatment for women in many areas: improving working conditions, guaranteeing rights such as maternity leave, and eliminating formal and informal discrimination. In this sense, feminism is often more concerned with identifying and challenging injustices than with defining which groups should benefit. Many of the reforms won by feminist struggles have, in fact, benefited men as well as women. Nevertheless, Alice Jardine emphasizes that "feminism is generally understood as a movement from the point of view of, by and for women" (Jardine, 1986, p. 15). She underlines that feminism is primarily focused on issues specific to women, in both form and context.

Postcolonial feminist writer Chandra Talpade Mohanty has strongly criticized Western analytical techniques and forms of feminism that she considers overly simplistic. She argues that they often seek to gather "evidence" of weak, oppressed women in order to confirm a preconceived image of Third World women as helpless victims. Mohanty also challenges the white feminist ideal of "sisterhood," which assumes a misleading similarity of experience and goals among all women, as if they were all subjected to the same monolithic patriarchal system. For Mohanty, such a concept is not productive; it risks paralysing women by ignoring differences of history, culture, and location. She not only exposes the limitations of Western feminism but also proposes ways to correct the gaps in its portrayal of "Third World women." Careful, context-sensitive research, she argues, is needed to empower women in the many different "third worlds" they inhabit, considering historical and socio-political conditions. Mohanty's work is crucial for developing a politics of place or "situatedness," and she seeks to move beyond oversimplified models of power based on a straightforward "oppressors versus oppressed" dichotomy. In challenging both the binary "First World women versus Third World women" and the binary "men as oppressors and women as victims," she helps to reframe feminist scholarship (Mohanty, 1991).

The feminist movement itself can be traced back to the 1630s and 1650s, when radical English religious sects began to advocate equality for women. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, feminism concentrated on the struggle for basic civil and political rights, such as the right to vote and to own property. The period from roughly 1920 to 1960 has sometimes been described as an era

of relative self-satisfaction, as many legal injustices were formally removed. Today, feminists are preoccupied with the deeper, institutionalized biases against women that remain embedded in cultural values, social expectations, and everyday practices.

Across these historical phases, feminist activists have been troubled by the ways women are perceived and treated. As Beauvoir famously wrote, woman is "defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (Beauvoir, 1956, p. 16). Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, similarly remarked that "you can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women" (Nehru, 2007, p. 1). The treatment of women thus becomes a measure of a society's level of civilization. Sharma (2007) notes that the rights enjoyed by women in any given society are often taken as an index of its maturity and development. Beauvoir also argues that "civilization" itself is responsible for creating stereotypes and determining the social, political, and economic fate of women in society (Beauvoir, 1956).

In patriarchal societies, identity markers and social roles are defined in ways that often exclude or diminish women. This led Frantz Fanon to observe that a woman learns that "she is a woman… that… she is not welcomed in this society" (Fanon, 1967). The use of identity and symbols, combined with the mimicry of dominant culture, helps to sustain the domination and subordination of women.

Bhabha (1994) explores:

The ambivalence of mimicry, describing it as "almost but not quite": colonial subjects imitate the colonizer's culture, but never fully become it. He argues that the "fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter appeal." The "identity-effects" of mimicry are crucially split. Under the cover of camouflage, mimicry—like the fetish—functions as a part-object that both revalues and reauthorizes existing forms of authority. It "mimes the forms of authority at the point at which it reauthorizes them." In this way, mimicry rearticulates presence in terms of its "otherness," that which it officially disavows (Bhabha, 1994).

For women in colonial and postcolonial settings, this dynamic helps explain how adopting the dominant culture's patterns can both reinforce and subtly undermine the systems that keep them subordinate. The use of mimicry has also been central

to feminist critiques of women's repression. At the same time, feminism—especially Western liberal feminist scholarship—has itself been criticized for reproducing colonial patterns. Spivak argues that "the emergent perspective of feminist criticism reproduces the axioms of imperialism" (Spivak, 1985, p. 243). Mohanty similarly points out that the repeated construction of the "Third World woman" as continuously and universally oppressed helps sustain the illusion of "First World" women's complete independence, giving the impression that women in the West are "secular, liberated, and have control over their own lives" (Mohanty, 1994, p. 353). Yet Mohanty (1994) also emphasizes that Western feminist discourse and political practice are "neither singular nor homogeneous in [their] goals, interests, or analyses" (p. 334). Feminism as a movement against women's oppression is thus far from uniform. Contexts, regions, and histories differ significantly, making it impossible to speak of one feminism that enhances women's rights globally in the same way everywhere.

Although postcolonial feminism is difficult to generalize, it is still possible to think of Third World women as a broad community whose histories and struggles against colonialism, racism, sexism, and economic exploitation invite comparative analysis. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) proposes the idea of an "imagined community" of postcolonial opposition. She stresses the abstract value of this notion, which suggests potential alliances and collaborations that cross borders and open the possibility of a deeper, more critical engagement with the idea of sisterhood. Postcolonial feminist writers do not only challenge the beliefs that have undermined women's positions; they also challenge the dominant notion that Western womanhood represents the norm. They work to dismantle stereotypes that portray them as naturally submissive, while insisting that, despite the formal end of empire, many women remain vulnerable to the pressures of neo-colonialism.

Postcolonial feminism does not function as something entirely separate from postcolonialism; rather, it has directly influenced postcolonial politics and its critical agendas. Its focus on women includes a range of non-Western feminisms that confront everyday patriarchal practices and institutional discrimination while also engaging with the political concerns of socialist feminism, nationalism, liberalism, and ecofeminism. Postcolonial feminism often begins with the situation of an ordinary woman in a particular place and then connects her predicament to larger structures and debates, giving her experience a stronger basis in community and history. As Young (2003) notes, it highlights the extent

to which women continue to struggle against an institutional, economic, political, and ideological colonial legacy that was itself profoundly patriarchal.

1.3 Entrapped Between Two Poles: Double Colonization

The lack of unity in feminist struggles—especially when many First World feminist movements focus primarily on their own contexts—exposes women in formerly colonized territories to additional challenges. In response to this problem, Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford coined the term double colonization to describe "how women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy" (McLeod, 2000). Women who live under both imperial rule and patriarchal authority have been described as subalterns: figures constructed as inferior, without a recognized past and without a voice (Spivak, 1988). In this framework, women in colonized countries are portrayed as lacking culture and therefore as being unable to articulate their own desires. Since they are imagined as having no precolonial culture to which they can return, they are denied historical depth. This portrayal is part of what Said calls "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978, p. 3). Spelman draws attention to the fact that women are never oppressed only as women. She notes:

In a world in which a woman might be subject to racism, classism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, if she is not so subject it is because of her race, class, religion, sexual orientation. So, it can never be the case that the treatment of a woman has only to do with her gender and nothing to do with her class or race (Spelman, 1988).

At the heart of these overlapping oppressions lie images and metaphors created and circulated within colonial contexts. Loomba (1998) observes that "lower races represented the 'female' type of the human species, and females the 'lower race' of gender" (p. 161). Colonial discourse thus feminizes colonized peoples and simultaneously treats women as a kind of racialized "lower" category. Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks vividly captures the link between territory, sexuality, and fantasies of power when he writes: "I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine" (Fanon, 1967, p. 63). In colonized countries, such fantasies echo the way white men sexually exploit colonized women as a means of punishing colonized men. Women in these contexts endure double colonization: they are subjected both to imperial domination and to patriarchal control.

Violence is not only exercised by colonizers. The use of rape by nationalists, who target the wives and daughters of colonizers in the name of liberation, also reveals the dangers women face in these territories. Fanon notes that the "work" of colonization is ultimately crowned when the colonized come to accept "that the white man's values are both intelligent and supreme" (Fanon, 1967). Postcolonial literature has challenged Western feminist writing for what Gandhi (1998) calls its "ethnocentric myopia," which ignores the enormous material and historical differences between "real" Third World women and the fused, stereotypical "Other" that appears in some Western accounts (pp. 85–86). These kinds of "othering" contribute to double colonization by fixing Third World women in rigid, inferior roles.

Mohanty summarizes the prevailing Western images of Third World women as depicting them as "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented and victimized," while Western women are portrayed as "educated, modern, as having control over their bodies and 'sexualities', and the 'freedom' to make their own decisions" (p. 200). Such literary and theoretical depictions not only misrepresent women in the Third World but also reinforce the structures that silence them, subjecting them to double colonization. The persistence of this dichotomy has therefore been repeatedly questioned. Mohanty argues that "without the overdetermined discourse that creates the third world, there would be no (singular privileged) first world" (Mohanty, 1994, p. 82). The dichotomy between "First World women" and "Third World women" is produced by discourse, and it is precisely this distinction that grants privileges to the former while intensifying the marginalization of the latter. In this way, the language used to describe women across the globe does not simply reflect imperialism and Western supremacy; it actively helps to sustain them.

Mohanty identifies three analytical assumptions that often shape the representation of Third World women in Western feminist texts. The first is the assumption that "Third World women" form a coherent group with identical interests, experiences, and goals prior to their entry into any socio-political or historical field (Mohanty, 1994, p. 121). This presupposition is flawed, because it treats Third World women as outsiders to the social relations in which they actually live and erases the differences among them. The second assumption concerns the model of power that informs many Western feminist writings: a humanist, classical view in which men are oppressors and women are victims. As Mohanty notes, this model is inadequate because it implies a universal notion of patriarchy and focuses only on the binary opposition between men and women

(Mohanty, 1994). Thirdly, she criticizes Western methodological practices that, in their search for "proof" of women's powerlessness, end up reinforcing the idea of Third World women as passive victims rather than exploring the complexity of their lives (Mohanty, 1994).

From this perspective, the Western feminist ideal of sisterhood is problematic if it continues to rely on a fixed categorization of Third World women as "Others," whose experiences are assumed to be fundamentally different and uniformly inferior. Mohanty works to deconstruct the dichotomies often found in feminist literature—"First World women versus Third World women" and "men as oppressors versus women as victims" (Mohanty, 1994). In many Western texts, women in the West are portrayed as sexually liberated, self-determining, and autonomous, facing challenges that are implicitly treated as more advanced or more "modern" than those confronting women in the Third World. Such representations obscure the diversity of women's experiences in both contexts.

Said challenges these broader binary classifications by insisting that "such… geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made" (Said, 1978, p. 5). Like the category of "Third World women," they are not neutral divisions but ideas with histories, traditions of thought, and vocabularies that give them a powerful presence in and for the West. This underscores the power and authority that underpin such classifications. Said describes Orientalism as a "created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment" in maintaining the division between East and West (Said, 1978, p. 6).

In male-dominated societies, this logic affects women in particular ways. As Said notes, women are doubly marginalized: men are regarded as superior, while women are seen as inferior. Women thus become doubly colonized: they appear as the "Other" for imperial power and, at the same time, as the "Other" for their husbands, fathers, and communities. The double image of women reflects the intersection of colonial power and patriarchal power. Colonization, however, does not only involve the physical presence of a colonizer in a specific place. It also functions as a force that penetrates various aspects of life, culture, and society, "restructuring" them and maintaining authority through new, redefined norms (Said, 1978, p. 3). These norms keep the colonized under control. Said points to the enduring tendency of Western cultures "to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these other cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be" (Said, 1993, p. 67). The recipient culture is thus reshaped in the interests of the dominant one.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, this dynamic is made visible in the figure of Antoinette. The novel shows how adopting, resisting, or being trapped between imposed cultural norms can lead to a condition of double colonization. Antoinette is caught between the expectations of imperial power and the constraints of patriarchy, and it is within this tension that her identity begins to fracture. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a postcolonial feminist novel by the twentieth-century writer Jean Rhys, can be regarded as one of the most striking reworkings of a classic in modern British literature. It rewrites Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre by entering a familiar story and transforming it from within. The force of Rhys's work lies in its challenge to both the historical and authorial boundaries of the original text. In revisiting and expanding the story of Bertha Mason, Rhys subverts nineteenth-century European discourse and, at the same time, questions some of the central assumptions of English literary tradition.

In her pioneering work, Jean Rhys returns to Charlotte Brontë's "madwoman in the attic," the figure of Mrs. Rochester in Jane Eyre. Drawing on her own white Caribbean background, Rhys reimagines this Creole woman as Antoinette and, as she explains in her preface, sets out to "provide a life" for her and place her at the centre of the narrative. In other words, Rhys offers what Brontë's novel leaves out: she gives Antoinette a voice and a history, and by doing so opens up an entirely different perspective on the story that Jane Eyre tells. Because of its critique of colonial and patriarchal structures, as well as its status as a loose adaptation, Rhys's work is strikingly original. Since its first publication in 1966, *Wide Sargasso Sea* has often been read as a feminist manifesto against the patriarchal—and imperial—power that forms the background to Jane Eyre's struggle in Brontë's novel.

Wide Sargasso Sea is also a valuable historical text. Written in the 1960s but set in the early nineteenth century, it explores Victorian paternalism, sexualization, racism, and the complex social and political history of West Indian society. Rhys vividly imagines Rochester's time in the Caribbean, when he encounters Bertha/Antoinette, a Creole woman—"a naturalized West Indian of European ancestry." The novel unfolds against the backdrop of the Emancipation Act, which has abolished slavery but compensates former slave owners for their loss of "property." England and France appear as dominant and rival colonial powers, while earlier Spanish colonization has left its own traces. Many once-profitable estates are now in decline due to the end of slave labour and the slowdown of the sugar economy, creating a tense and unsettled world in which Antoinette's story takes place.

CHAPTER TWO

Antoinette and the Web of Double Colonization

This chapter offers a critical analysis of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as she is portrayed by Jean Rhys. It begins by tracing the burden of patriarchy on women, focusing on the challenges Antoinette faces in a society where values and practices are controlled by men. It then examines how colonization contributes to her loss of identity, showing how the forces of empire in the novel push her into a profound identity crisis. The discussion follows the process of colonization and the desire to remake the colonized in the image of the colonizer, and shows how this process destabilizes Antoinette, a Creole woman living in Jamaica. The chapter also considers the concept of double colonization and explores how it drives Antoinette toward madness. In this context, the characterization of "otherness" is analysed, along with the role of hybridity in bridging—or failing to bridge—the gap between self and other, and the way madness can operate as a means of escaping the weight of double colonization. Finally, the chapter brings these strands together in a discussion that draws on the theoretical perspectives outlined earlier to illuminate the position of women living in colonized societies.

Rhys's decision to rewrite the story of Bertha Mason from Jane Eyre as Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an attempt to give this "madwoman" a voice and to allow her to speak from the other side of the story, in light of her English colonial and Jamaican identities. As Gilman observes, "the anxiety present in the self concerning its control over the world engenders a need for a clear and a hard line of difference between the self and the other" (Gilman, 1985). She explains that this hard line is often drawn along the surface of the body: "the hard line is skin colour," yet stereotypes "carry entire realms of associations that form a subtext within the world of fiction" (Gilman, 1985). Rhys's novel exposes precisely these subtexts, revealing how race, gender, and colonial power intersect in the figure of Antoinette.

Double colonization examines how women are colonized and dominated by men within colonial frameworks. In colonized nations, women are subject to the control of both imperial authority and patriarchy. The term patriarchy comes from the Greek patria (father) and archē (rule), and it refers to a system in which men—especially fathers or male heads of households—hold power. Patriarchy typically implies male control over political, religious, and social institutions. Against this backdrop, women like Antoinette are doubly controlled: by the colonial power

that structures their world and by the patriarchal structures that shape their daily lives. Antoinette becomes a doubly colonized character, trapped in a web of domination. Heidarzadegan (2019) describes the situation of such characters as follows:

This feeling or perception of abandonment by both cultures causes the colonial subject to become a psychological refugee. The colonized writer must create a new discourse by rejecting all the established transcendental significances created by the colonizers. Such a writer must also embrace pluralism, believing that no single truth or meta-theory of history exists (Heidarzadegan, 2019).

Antoinette's condition, as a doubly colonized subject, is in some ways worse than that of the colonized community in general. Her status as a white Creole woman in Jamaica becomes a personal tragedy: she is not only the "Other" in relation to Black Jamaicans, but also in relation to white English people. In Colonialism/Postcolonialism, Ania Loomba explains the link between race and gender in the colonial field: "In short, lower races represented the 'female' type of the human species, and females the 'lower race' of gender" (Loomba, 1998). Loomba shows how both non-Europeans and women are represented as docile and childlike, in need of leadership, or as sexually deviant, emotional, wild, and outside society in colonial literature—and thus in popular colonial imagination as well. Against this background, the chapter explores why and how Antoinette loses her sense of personal identity, and how madness functions within a colonial and patriarchal culture. Her final breakdown is not an isolated event, but part of a larger pattern in which double colonization destroys the space available for selfhood.

2.1 Burden of Patriarchy on Creole Women

Like many other women writers of the 1960s, Rhys is deeply concerned with the roles of women and the nature of their relationships. In her work she examines how male-dominated societies organize everyday life and how they preserve certain beliefs and habits that keep women in subordinate positions. Although Rhys did not identify herself as a feminist or write exclusively about "women's issues," *Wide Sargasso Sea* clearly exposes "the marginalized condition of women within the patriarchal society of the colonies" and explores "issues such as colonialism, race, political oppression, and mental illness" (Carr, 2007, p. 123). Her understanding of feminism is closely tied to the idea of a "dependence syndrome": the need for women to free themselves from dependence on men,

communities, religious groups, and ethnic loyalties in order to live as autonomous individuals.

From the very beginning of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the text signals that its women characters are unable to subvert patriarchy. Their lives are oriented not toward their own desires but toward the needs and authority of men. Antoinette herself, her mother Annette, her aunt Cora, and the servants Christophine and Tia all inhabit a world structured by male power. The only male figure presented as weak and vulnerable is Antoinette's brother Pierre, whose helplessness stands in contrast to Mr. Mason, a dominant male figure who marries Annette and attempts to impose his own judgments and decisions, even when he seems to act out of love.

The second part of the novel begins with a shift in narrative voice between Antoinette and her husband and reveals a strongly patriarchal attitude. Rochester's narration centres on his perception of Antoinette's homeland, where he feels completely isolated. He is not only estranged from his wife's island; he also resents its position as a wild, unfamiliar environment. Because the island is so different from his own country and he cannot—or will not—adapt, he remains an outsider. At the same time, he is fascinated by the island's hidden presence and is determined to uncover its secrets. His desire to conquer and demystify the landscape recalls Orientalist discourse, which insists that the East can only be properly understood from a Western perspective (Said, 1993). Rochester's vision is colonial: he finds the island beautiful yet disturbing, "wild, untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness," and he insists that "it keeps its secret." Like many colonizers, he confirms his own superiority by exploring and naming his "Other," at one point referring to the Caribbean as a "god-forsaken land" (Rhys, 1999).

Rochester's limited understanding of the island—as his "Other"—extends to his perception of Antoinette and the other women who live there. In his narration, binary oppositions emerge almost automatically: nature versus culture, matriarch versus patriarch, colonized versus colonizer. Antoinette and the landscape of the Caribbean begin to merge in his imagination, and he gradually distances himself from his wife. He observes her with a cold, critical eye: She held up the skirt of her riding habit and ran across the street. I watched her critically. She wore a tricorne hat which became her. At least it shadowed her eyes which are too large and can be disconcerting. She never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark, alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either… (Rhys, 1966, p. 39) This passage expresses Rochester's

sense of superiority and his refusal to recognize Antoinette as fully "English" or "European," despite her "pure English descent." Her body, and especially her eyes, mark her as alien in his view. He measures her appearance against an invisible standard defined by English and European women and finds her wanting. In this way, he embodies both patriarchal and imperial authority: he judges, classifies, and distances.

Rochester's relationships with other women in the Caribbean also reveal his colonial and patriarchal attitudes. He regards Christophine and Amelia as part of the island's mysterious atmosphere, often commodifying them and projecting fear and suspicion onto them. He stereotypes Amelia's physical attractiveness in racialized terms, describing her as having "dark skin, thick lips" (Rhys, 1966, p. 61), and treats her primarily as a potential sexual object. Antoinette, by contrast, suffers more severely from his gendered discourse. Rochester never truly praises her; throughout the novel, he views her from a patriarchal and "civilized" standpoint, judging and alienating her rather than recognizing her as an equal partner. His gaze does not simply describe her—it helps to produce the inferiority she is forced to inhabit, reinforcing the burden of patriarchy borne by Creole women like Antoinette.

Antoinette is effectively voiceless and unable to shape the course of her own life. Even though she is an heiress, Rochester seeks to bring her entirely under his control, including control over her finances. Christophine, the Black woman who in some respects enjoys more independence than Antoinette as a long-established Creole in the Caribbean, openly challenges Rochester and tries to protect Antoinette's money from him:

…You want her money, but you don't want her. It is in your mind to pretend she is mad. I know it. The doctors say what you tell them to say. That man Richard he says what you want him to say – glad and willing too, I know. She will be like her mother. You do that for money? But you wicked like Satan self! (Rhys, 1966)

Rhys is deeply concerned with the way women are treated, and she uses Antoinette's plight in *Wide Sargasso Sea* to expose the consequences of patriarchal domination. Beauvoir's famous statement captures the underlying problem: One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine (Beauvoir, 1956).

The issue, then, is how society—especially in a patriarchal system—constructs and reproduces female identity. Women appear in writing as secondary to men, and the blame lies with traditions and ideals preserved and transmitted by men, who extend their control across all aspects of life in patriarchal cultures. Emery notes that, "like other West Indian writers… Jean Rhys left the Caribbean island of her birth for the metropolitan centres of England and Europe… Rhys experienced specifically female alienation and sexual vulnerability" (Rhys, 1999, p. 3). This estrangement and sense of sexual vulnerability in England profoundly shaped her understanding of women's situations and left a strong mark on her fiction.

Rhys's reading of Jane Eyre and the depiction of Bertha as Mr. Rochester's "mad" wife—"some strange wild animal" which was clothed (Brontë, 1960, p. 295)—troubled her deeply. Spivak suggests that this disappointment helped inspire *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Rhys wanted to give the "madwoman" a life, a history, and a voice (Spivak, 1985, p. 803). Her own personal struggles made her sympathetic to all kinds of marginalised people, and she may have imagined that Bertha Mason felt as cold and distant in England as she herself did. As a result, Rhys opposed various forms of injustice embedded in repressive patriarchal structures, using fiction to question and undermine them. From a postcolonial perspective, her work identifies women trapped within patriarchal systems and seeks to challenge, fragment, and ultimately unsettle established Western frameworks.

The novel also hints at the broader lives of Black women living on the colonial Caribbean islands. These women often negotiate a kind of sexual independence because they are not always bound by formal, contractual marriages, yet this apparent freedom also exposes them—along with white Creole women—to sexual exploitation. Reading *Wide Sargasso Sea* through a feminist lens reveals how Antoinette herself is exploited under male dominion. Rumours about the illegitimate child of a Creole woman, for example, are enough to make her husband distance himself from her. He does not judge her carefully as an individual; instead, his reaction reflects exoticized Western ideas about Creole people more generally.

Rochester thus appears as a clear representative of the mentality that "others" Antoinette and the Caribbean Creoles. As a colonized woman, Antoinette becomes one of the figures addressed by Spivak's question in *Can the Subaltern Speak*? (Spivak, 1988). She attempts to raise her voice against the forces that silence her, but Rochester's coldness and lack of compassion drive him toward

Amelia, another woman, while leaving Antoinette increasingly isolated. Filled with conflicting emotions, she suppresses both her tears and her smiles. The moments of happiness she experiences are rare and wild, dependent on brief flashes of warmth from her husband. Ultimately, Rochester regards her as a "Devil, a madwoman and insane" (Rhys, 1965, p. 149). The collapse of their relationship also suggests the limits of European "hospitality": while Rochester can return to England with his status intact, Antoinette is left confined and voiceless.

The difficulties Antoinette faces can be understood within the framework of colonial mimicry as described by Bhabha (1994). In much colonial writing, the white Western man appears as conqueror and witness, speaking on behalf of colonized lands and women who supposedly lack their own voice under imperial rule. *Wide Sargasso Sea* reverses this pattern by giving voice to the "other woman" through Antoinette. Rochester, for his part, is shown in Jamaica as frequently lost, watched, and even hated, seemingly unaware of much that happens around him. He acknowledges his lack of connection to the "brightly coloured, very strange country which, just like Antoinette, never had anything to do with me at all" (Rhys, 1966, p. 45).

These feelings highlight the mutual strangeness that shapes both characters' lives. In their local context, Antoinette and Rochester become increasingly remote and detached, and both begin to experience a profound sense of not belonging—of being present in a place that never truly accepts them, and that they, in different ways, cannot fully claim as their own.

Loomba notes how colonial narratives often cast the "other woman" as an object within the Western man's fantasy, someone he both "cares for" and controls (Loomba, 1998, p. 157). Rochester never fully understands this pattern, but Antoinette initially hopes he will rescue her from her suffering. His own account reveals the distance between them:

"You're safe, I'd say. She liked that – to be told 'you are safe' […] I felt very little tenderness for her. She was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did" (Rhys, 1966, p. 55). Once he recognises his isolation and his inability to understand or "possess" Antoinette, Rochester responds not with empathy but with domination. He begins to suppress her identity, erasing the secrecy and mystery that surround her and redefining her in his own terms.

His failure to understand this Creole woman drives him back to patriarchal norms as the framework for their relationship. In a patriarchal culture, a woman's worth is measured through male definitions. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, this logic is made brutally clear when Rochester renames Antoinette as "Bertha," imposing a new identity on her. Spivak, in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," reads this renaming as a violent act and asks why "such a significant, peculiar and intrinsic human identity can be subjected to the political machinations of imperialism" (Spivak, 1985). Her critique, alongside Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1994), exposes the ways in which Western feminist and literary traditions can unintentionally reproduce colonial structures even as they claim to challenge oppression.

Spivak argues that "the emergent perspective of feminist criticism reproduces the axioms of imperialism" (Spivak, 1985, p. 243). Mohanty similarly observes that the recurring image of the "Third World woman" as "always and everywhere oppressed" serves to reinforce the illusion of First World women's independence and total control over their own lives (Mohanty, 1994, p. 353). Such essays call for a more nuanced feminism that recognizes differences in history, context, and power. Judith Butler adds that "the very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms" (Butler, 1999, p. 1), underscoring the instability of any single, universal category of "woman."

Spivak's reading of Jane Eyre highlights the silencing of Bertha Mason, the Creole wife who remains in the background while Jane occupies the centre of the narrative. For Spivak, this marginalization signals a failure of nineteenth-century feminism to engage meaningfully with the issues facing colonized women. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Bertha/Antoinette represents a white colonial subject caught in the web of empire (Spivak, 1985). Within her own community, she is a Creole and thus participates in colonial privilege, yet she is also exposed to exploitation and exclusion. She is doubly linked, at once a member of the colonizing culture and a native of the Caribbean world, connected to both the metropolis and the colony.

Unlike Jane, who occupies an ambiguous class position as a governess, Antoinette becomes a social stranger in both societies. As Baldellou notes, she "ends up being a social stranger in both societies," while Jane also finds herself suspended between social classes (Baldellou, 2008, p. 13). Antoinette's life is a long struggle to claim a place and an identity in communities that never fully accept her. Spivak sums this up by stating that Antoinette "is caught between the English imperialists and the black natives" (Spivak, 1985, p. 243). Her childhood

story reveals this tension: she grows up anxious, solitary, and afraid of rejection, aware that she belongs completely to neither side. “Pain is evident in Antoinette’s voice” as a child, Spivak observes, “when she was a nervous, solitary girl, afraid of rejection” (Spivak, 1985, p. 246).

Patriarchal culture and rigid systems of identity assignation produce a “wedged” identity crisis for women like Antoinette. They do not know how to represent themselves in societies that define them in advance—as Creole, as colonial subject, as madwoman, as Other. Antoinette’s fragmented sense of self is therefore not simply a private psychological issue; it is the product of a world in which colonial and patriarchal forces work together to deny her a stable, livable identity.

2.2 Colonization and Identity Crisis Among Creole Women

Jean Rhys’s social critique in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is grounded not only in the history of women’s oppression but also in the longer history of colonialism. The novel is set in the late 1830s, when the Caribbean was still a British colony and one of the regions most deeply affected by British rule during the Victorian age. Slavery had shaped the islands for generations, and although the British Parliament outlawed it in 1833, the end of slavery did not bring stability. As Rhys (1982) notes, the Slavery Abolition Act in many ways made life worse for Creoles—especially those who were already vulnerable, such as women dependent on male relatives—because newly emancipated Black populations, resentful and impoverished, often turned their anger against former slave-owning families.

Wide Sargasso Sea can be read as a response to this Creole predicament. Through Antoinette, a “double-minded” character, Rhys opens a window onto postcolonial experience. “In one sense, she has been portrayed as a very unruly soul hostile against the English, while on the other hand, she has equally been portrayed as attempting to perfectly fit as an English girl” (Haque, 2016). This divided position captures the difficulty of belonging in a world split between colonizer and colonized.

Ashis Nandy, in The Intimate Enemy:

Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism, argues that colonialism works hand in hand with Western sexual stereotypes and a particular philosophy of life. The result, he notes, is “the production of a cultural consensus in which political

and socio-economic dominance symbolized the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity" (Nandy, 1983, p. 4).

Colonial rule therefore intensifies existing gender hierarchies, and women become doubly vulnerable—to imperial power and to local patriarchy.

Within this framework, Antoinette's position is especially precarious. Her situation is more complicated than that of many historically colonized women, because she is perceived as the "Other" by both Black Jamaicans and white English people. As Nandy observes, she occupies an ambiguous place in Jamaica as a white Creole, a position that "plunges her into personal tragedy" (Nandy, 1983, p. 18). She belongs fully to neither group, nor this in-between status feeds her identity crisis.

Ania Loomba, writing about colonialism and postcolonialism, draws attention to the images and metaphors used in colonial discourse. These figures of speech, she argues, are used "to designate inferior races equated to the 'female' kind of human species and women the 'lower race' of gender" (Loomba, 1998, p. 161). In colonial texts and everyday language, "both non-Europeans and women were regarded as being either passive, juvenile-like and requiring guidance or as sexually peculiar, emotive, wild and external to society" (Loomba, 1998, p. 159). Such representations strip colonized subjects of agency and maturity, reinforcing their dependence.

Spivak (1985) emphasizes that there is no simple way back to a pure pre-colonial society; colonialism has permanently altered the cultural landscape. Edward Said captures this process when he writes that "the Orient needed first to be known, then invaded and possessed, then re-created by scholars, soldiers, and judges" (Said, 1967, p. 92). According to Said (1967), the power to "re-create" the culture of the conquered is one of the core privileges of colonial discourse.

This cultural reproduction of the colonized subject appears not only in Orientalist writing but also in some feminist attempts to describe the Third World through a shared ideology. In these accounts, the colonized person is often represented as incapable of self-representation and therefore in need of being "reproduced" by the colonizer's language and categories. The "third world woman" becomes the imagined opposite of Western knowledge: the figure against which Western identity defines itself.

At the same time, Said (1967) points to the role of the colonized in "national re-establishment": the desire to affirm identity and develop new cultural practices

that can form the basis of resistance to Western supremacy in non-European lands. “Orientalism,” in this sense, refers not only to a region but to a way of being “discovered, observed and labelled” by Europe—to a world that is, in many respects, “invented” by the West (Said, 1978). Knowledge about the Orient is therefore never innocent; it is shaped by particular authors, institutions, and political aims and reveals the complex relationship between power and knowledge that lies at the heart of Orientalism.

Against this backdrop, Antoinette’s identity crisis can be seen as a symptom of broader colonial forces. She is caught within a network of images and expectations that define her before she can define herself. As a Creole woman, she becomes both the object of colonial fantasy and the bearer of a fractured, unstable self, struggling to hold together the conflicting demands of Englishness, Caribbeanness, whiteness, and womanhood.

Identity in this context is shaped by imperialism: the West positions other societies as objects to be defined from its own point of view. As a white Creole woman in England, Rhys herself felt tense and alienated from British culture; her female protagonists likewise experience exclusion from political institutions, power, and authority. *Wide Sargasso Sea* often reads like a memoir in the sense that Rhys “voices her own sense of displacement as a white Creole, dispossessed at home and living as an exile in England” (Howells, 1991). For postcolonial scholarship, the novel is crucial because “it reverberates the voice of the oppressed others and subsequently sets up an attestation to the social peculiarities of the prior colonized Creole individuals” (Gramaglia, 2008). When women refuse to conform to customary gender roles, they are often pushed into complex identity crises, especially in colonial contexts. Beauvoir describes this division of roles as follows:

Since the husband is the productive worker, he is the one who goes beyond the family interest to that of society, opening up a future for himself through co-operation in the building of the collective future: he incarnates transcendence. Woman is doomed to the continuation of the species and the care of the home—that is to say, to immanence (Beauvoir, 1956).

Women who step outside these prescribed roles are quickply labelled “wicked” or deviant in patriarchal societies and literatures, regardless of their education, upbringing, or profession. If a woman does not fit the social, patriarchal, or imperial frameworks designed to maintain male domination, she is treated as Other. Phyllis Chesler describes this in Women and Madness: “female madness

can be considered a gender-specific reaction towards oppressive and inadequate environments" (Chesler, 2005). The pattern is similar for women in the so-called Third World, who are repeatedly represented as "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized," in contrast to Western women, who are depicted as "educated, modern, independent, free and empowered" (Mohanty, 1994, p. 200).

Antoinette's status as a Creole intensifies her identity crisis. Her sense of self becomes uncertain and unstable. In this situation, the notion of hybridity becomes crucial: it refers to a zone of contact where cultural, linguistic, and psychological differences intersect. At this "in-between" point, identities do not simply mix into a stable whole; they become unsettled. Bhabha calls this the "Third Space of enunciation" (Bhabha, 1994). As Susie Thomas explains, Bhabha understands all identities as already hybrid and argues that "cultural differences are not synthesized into a new third term but continue to exist in a hybrid Third Space" (Thomas, 2005). This is the starting point of the concept of hybridity. Hybridity describes a kind of otherness that removes the colonized subject from any secure attachment to an original culture and produces a person who is neither fully "himself" nor fully aligned with the colonizer. People in this position, like Antoinette, find themselves "in between" without a practical, stable identity. She is neither Jamaican nor English: because of her heritage, she belongs completely to neither side. The Black community calls her and her family "white cockroaches" because they are no longer as rich and powerful as they once were (Rhys, 1999, p. 1). As alienation deepens, Antoinette begins to question even the reality of places and people:

"But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?"

"And how can millions of people, their houses and their streets be unreal?"

"More easily," she said, "much more easily. Yes a big city must be like a dream."

"No, this is unreal and like a dream," I thought (Rhys, 1966).

The Third Space, then, is a paradoxical and unstable setting. Because cultural specificities cannot be neatly separated or ranked, Bhabha insists that it is not a hierarchical field based on pure cultures. Understanding this ambiguous space of cultural identity, he argues, can help move beyond exotic images of cultural diversity by recognizing that difference itself can operate through hybridity. As Bhabha writes: It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that

alien territory may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity (Bhabha, 1994).

For Antoinette, this "alien territory" is not a theoretical idea but the reality of her everyday life. Her identity crisis is not merely psychological; it is the lived consequence of existing in a hybrid, colonized world that never fully allows her to belong. Bhabha describes hybrid identities as "in-between identities," positions in which subjects are "not this or that but are both this or that and neither this and that" (Bhabha, 1994). Hybridity, for him, is "a constant state of contestation and flux caused by differential systems […] the unstable element of linkage" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 227). The demand placed on hybrid subjects is contradictory: in some situations, they are expected to behave like "whites," in others like "Blacks." This double expectation can easily lead to psychological strain.

For Third World women, Spivak famously notes that "between patriarchy and imperialism […] the figure of the woman disappears […] into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the third-world woman caught between tradition and modernization" (Spivak, 1988). She shows how the imperial and the patriarchal projects intersect, and how, between the two, the woman herself vanishes as a subject. Postcolonial women are thus subjected to overlapping forms of domination, and their capacity for self-determination is steadily eroded.

Imperial discourse makes it possible for the colonizer to construct the identity of the colonized. It speaks from a distance and from a position of assumed superiority, establishing the conditions under which the colonized live and shaping the conceptual framework through which they understand the world. In this discourse, the perspective of the colonized is constantly measured against the overwhelming presence of the imperial "Other." This dynamic helps explain Antoinette's behaviour when, in the second part of the novel, she introduces Rochester into her world and tries to perform the role of an Englishwoman for him. She dresses like an English lady, eats and speaks as he expects, and imitates him as the representative of a culture she has been taught to admire.

In Bhabha's terms, "Antoinette is a mimic man" (or, more accurately, a mimic subject), "who imitates the imperial culture" and thus embodies colonial mimicry (Bhabha, 1994). Colonial mimicry, Bhabha argues, is "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other" (Bhabha, 1984): the colonizer wants the colonized subject to resemble him, but never completely. The purpose of mimicry is to produce a double gesture. On the one hand, the colonized is regulated and made legible

within the colonizer's system; on the other, mimicry opens a space for slippage, excess, and potential subversion, creating an ambiguous subject who is "almost the same, but not quite."

Because of this ambiguity, mimicry always contains an element of uncertainty. It must constantly reveal its "slips, surpluses and distortions" in order to function (Bhabha, 1994). The imperial power wants the colonized to imitate its ways, yet this imitation is never perfect and never fully controlled. Antoinette's efforts to look and act like an Englishwoman—hoping this will win back Rochester's affection—exemplify this tension. When she dresses in English style, Rochester is momentarily pleased, as the performance seems to confirm his cultural expectations. Yet his gaze quickly returns to suspicion and contempt. The novel captures this doubleness in his reaction to Amélie as well. Amélie says, "I hope you will be very happy, sir, in your sweet honeymoon house" (Rhys, 1966, p. 55), but Rochester's inner voice immediately turns against her: "She was laughing at me I could see. A lovely little creature, but sly, spiteful, malignant perhaps, like much else in this place" (Rhys, 1966, p. 55). He is clearly attracted to her, yet he also reduces her to a "creature," dehumanizing her even as he desires her.

This dehumanisation reflects a broader colonial pattern. As Couti notes, European men often described Black people as simple organisms and eroticized "the sexuality of the beautiful dark-skinned women as the symbol of an African heritage" (Couti, 2012, p. 130). In the Caribbean islands, colonisation also produced a strict colour hierarchy. In the eighteenth century, the Martinican white Creole Moreau de Saint-Méry famously identified "one hundred twenty-eight gradations of blood resulting in dozens of skin colours organised in a restrictive social hierarchy in which the whiter the skins, the better" (Couti, 2000, p. 130). Rochester may well have been aware of such hierarchical thinking before arriving on the island, and his gaze on Amélie or other mixed-race women is shaped by these racialised norms.

Derrida's reflections on alterity help illuminate this aspect of Rochester's perspective. He writes that "every other is every bit other, is altogether other" (Derrida, 1995, p. 50). On the one hand, each person is "Other" to someone else; on the other, each subject is other even to itself, divided by unconscious processes and internal difference. Rochester, however, fails to acknowledge this shared otherness. He constructs a rigid boundary between himself and the Caribbean women he encounters, refusing to see them as complex subjects. In this refusal, the colonial and patriarchal orders converge both depend on fixing the Other in

place so that the self may remain unchallenged. Antoinette's hybrid, unstable identity is a direct result of living under such a gaze.

Otherness, in this sense, is not just an abstract concept but part of the way every subject defines itself. "The Other" is produced by cultural processes that assign it particular traits, and these traits of alterity are crucial in the formation of identity. To construct a sense of self, one must also construct an Other. If Rochester imagines himself as the "One," he needs someone against whom he can measure and distinguish himself. This logic is absolute: if he sees himself as possessing great values, the Other must be imagined as lacking them; if he considers himself good, the Other becomes bad, and so on. *Wide Sargasso Sea* repeatedly stages this dynamic of othering and the sense of incompleteness it produces.

The novel also raises the question of whether England itself can be experienced as a kind of Third Space. Antoinette recalls a friend who married an Englishman and wrote to her about life in London: "England is like a dream? Because one of my friends, who married an English man, wrote and told me so. She said this place in London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up" (Rhys, 1966, p. 58). Here, England appears as another unreal, dream-like space that destabilizes identity. The process of othering within imperialism causes the colonized to lose their sense of self, even as patriarchal and imperial powers are themselves haunted by their own unresolved forms of otherness.

One of the most striking symbols of this condition in the novel is "the doll." Through Antoinette, Rhys uses the doll to bring into view the lives of women in colonized, "Third World," or developing countries. At one point, the narrator observes, "I scarcely recognized her voice. No warmth, no sweetness. The doll had a doll's voice, a breathless but curiously indifferent voice" (Rhys, 1966).

A woman in a colonized society is often voiceless; her speech is difficult to recognize as her own. The doll, with its lifeless, indifferent voice, becomes a symbol of subaltern women. Spivak defines the "subaltern" as "the inferior [who], like women in the sense of colonial production, has no past and cannot speak" (Spivak, 1988). Rhys echoes this idea when a character explains: "That word mean doll, eh? Because she don't speak. You want to force her to cry and to speak" (Rhys, 1966).

In contrast to Spivak's more specific formulation, Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean offer a broader definition, describing subaltern groups as "simply

groups that feel subordinated in any way" (Landry & MacLean, 1993). Whether understood narrowly or broadly, the figure of the doll in *Wide Sargasso Sea* embodies this condition of enforced silence and subordination, revealing how colonial and patriarchal structures combine to deny women a full, audible presence in the world.

2.3 Double Colonization and Antoinette's Madness

Wide Sargasso Sea stages double colonization through the intertwined experiences of Antoinette and her mother, Annette. Their suffering, fear, and instability are closely tied to their position as white Creole women. Antoinette is the daughter of former plantation owners; her father has children with several Black women, yet she herself is not fully accepted either by the Black community or by the colonial authorities. As a white Creole she becomes "nothing": she does not entirely belong to any group and remains permanently exposed and unprotected.

Colonialism and patriarchy, in this context, rest on unequal relations of power and systematic oppression. Postcolonial critics and writers have traditionally focused on colonial domination, while feminists have centred their analyses on patriarchy. As Lundin notes, "feminists focus on the power balance between men and women, while Postcolonialism focuses on the marginalisation and oppression of women in colonial contexts" (Lundin, 2008). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, these two lines of oppression converge. Rhys offers not only a critique of women's subordination but also a sustained reflection on the history and afterlives of colonial rule.

In patriarchal cultures, women are often treated as colonial images: decorative figures rather than full subjects. They are reduced to men's dependants and excluded from the most significant social and political arenas. The absence of women from public events, decision-making, and institutional life becomes a visible sign of their limited role. Where patriarchal dominance is strong, this exclusion deepens. In Rhys's Caribbean, white male colonizers shaped by Victorian ideals and Black male-dominated local structures both exert power over Creole women, and the combined effect is particularly destructive. Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford capture this overlapping oppression with the term "double colonization," used to describe situations in which women are subjected to both colonial and patriarchal control (McLeod, 2000). Women who are located within colonial hierarchies and patriarchal systems at the same time are, in this sense, doubly colonized.

Wide Sargasso Sea has often been read as one of the most powerful feminist postcolonial novels because it exposes the harsh consequences of double colonization for Creole women, especially Antoinette and Annette, whose stories end in tragedy. The European conquerors who come to the Caribbean bring with them not only new laws and economic structures but also deeply rooted patriarchal assumptions from their own societies. In this multi-layered system, women can be subjected to several forms of oppression at once: as women, as colonized subjects, as Creoles, and as members of families in decline. Lundin observes that "the relationship between Antoinette and her husband, Mr. Rochester, is traditionally patriarchal and colonial; not only a sexual mixture, but it is also a synthesis of various cultures and traditions" (Lundin, 2008). Their marriage becomes the central site where gendered and imperial power intersect.

Political readings of *Wide Sargasso Sea* tend to emphasize this background of female subjugation and colonial domination. The novel challenges traditional portrayals of patriarchal authority and interrogates imperial abuses, especially the way mixed-race bodies are sexualized, pathologized, and associated with madness. Antoinette's mental breakdown is not an isolated personal failure but is rooted in her position between cultures and in the dynamics of her marriage. As a Creole, she belongs fully neither to Jamaican society nor to white European culture. Her status is repeatedly questioned and refused. This structural insecurity is intensified by her lack of autonomy within marriage: she has little control over money, movement, or even her own name.

Marriage in the novel reflects a wider socio-cultural logic in which the husband embodies the role of colonizer and the wife becomes an object of exchange. Rochester treats Antoinette as a kind of transaction, something he has acquired rather than an equal partner. This perspective erodes her sense of self and exacerbates the instability of her environment, pushing her further towards psychological collapse. Madness, in this context, emerges as both a symptom of double colonization and a distorted form of resistance to it.

Double colonization also highlights the specific ways women are controlled by masculine power. In colonial spaces, women face imperial rule from outside and patriarchal rule from within their own communities. Although the novel does not centre Black women's experiences, it offers glimpses of their struggles "for sexual self-determination and economic empowerment and the struggle against the psychic pain of racism and sexism" (Keizer, 2007, p. 155). Figures such as Christophine hint at a parallel, though differently structured, story of resistance and vulnerability.

Whereas Brontë's Jane Eyre presents Rochester as a mysterious, compelling figure, Rhys rewrites him from a Creole perspective and lays bare his role in driving his wife into madness. As Haque suggests, *Wide Sargasso Sea* "has become the Creole answer to Brontë's English text," offering "a subtle understanding of postcolonialism through the double-minded character Antoinette" (Haque, 2016). In England, Antoinette's alienation only deepens: she is taken far from her home and confined to an attic, and her estrangement from her own country turns into a series of fantasies and dreams about a place she is no longer allowed to inhabit. Her madness, then, is not simply a private tragedy but the visible mark of a life lived under overlapping regimes of colonial and patriarchal power.

Rochester functions as a symbolic figure of colonisation: he is an Englishman who is neither Creole nor Black and does not share the historical legacy of the island's Creole community. His dominant position on the island is mirrored in his domination over Antoinette—over her personal history, her family ties, her cultural identity and, eventually, even her name, which is erased by the end of the novel. In this sense, the marriage contract between Rochester and Antoinette itself becomes a form of colonial occupation. Antoinette's fate is ultimately decided by both the coloniser, Rochester, and by the male relatives who embody patriarchy. They use her ethnic origin and her gender to fix her in a specific position of dispersal and vulnerability in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rochester's remark—"Vain, silly creature. Made for loving? Yes, but she'll have no lover, for I don't want her and she'll see no other" (Rhys, 1966)—condenses the brutality of both patriarchal and colonial power.

At first, Antoinette clings to a hopeful fantasy about England: "I will be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me" (Rhys, 1966, p. 66). By the third part of the novel, this curiosity has turned into bitterness and dread. In Thornfield Hall she confronts her terrifying vision of England. Confined in the attic and treated as a senseless madwoman, she dreams in vivid Caribbean colours while the English landscape remains cold, dark, and hostile. Thornfield becomes for her what Coulibri once was for the Black community: a site of resentment and violence. When she finally jumps from the window, she escapes a world that has refused to recognise her. "Now she is free to call it home: this place is not either the Caribbean or England" (Rhys, 1966). Because she never feels truly free in either location, she seeks another space altogether—what Bhabha would call a "Third Space."

Some postcolonial critics argue that the category of the "third world woman" in Western feminist writings often continues the work of colonial discourse rather than opposing it. The fascination with "exotic" indigenous women can become a way of satisfying Western desires rather than actually listening to the experiences of those women. Western feminists, therefore, need to use their awareness of cultural hierarchies to support, rather than overwrite, the struggles of women in formerly colonised societies. Female bodies were repeatedly used as symbols of conquered territory (Loomba, 1998, p. 152), and this metaphor is visible in Rochester's perception of Antoinette. Yet for Rochester the conquest never fully succeeds: neither Antoinette nor the land—which he describes as dream-like and unreal—ever truly becomes his (Rhys, 1999, p. 47).

For colonised communities, land itself carries immense value: it is tied to food, dignity, and survival. As Fanon notes, occupying the land is also an attack on "the country as a whole, its history and everyday mood," turning existence into "a breathing occupied…a breath of battle" (Fanon, 1965). When women's bodies are symbolically equated with land, the insult is doubled: their subjugation marks both colonial domination and gendered oppression. This is another way in which women become doubly colonised.

Under such conditions, Fanon argues, violence often appears as the only route out of a suffocating colonial system. Antoinette's final act reflects this logic. By setting fire to the mansion—the emblem of colonial authority—she attempts to free herself from the prison of the attic. Her body and mind both demand release. Her "double liberation" unfolds in two stages: madness breaks the mental hold of colonial and patriarchal categories, and the fire breaks the physical cage that contains her. Her willingness to pay the ultimate price for freedom contrasts with the coloniser's refusal to relinquish power, highlighting the desperation of the subaltern position.

Spivak describes the subaltern as "unable to speak" because she is silenced both by patriarchal and by imperial authority (Spivak, 1985). Rochester, who claims the right to decide Antoinette's fate, ultimately withholds the freedom she asks for and remains passive in the face of her suffering. Antoinette's plea is simple: "I will not trouble you again if you will let me go. But

he never came" (Rhys, 1966, p. 142). Her words are not heard, and her only remaining way to "speak" is through the destructive act that ends both the house and her life. In this sense, her madness and her final leap become a devastating

commentary on double colonisation: when no space is left for the voice of the colonised woman, the only possible reply is fire.

Women in many parts of the so-called Third World are subjected to overlapping forms of oppression: they are constrained by both patriarchy and colonisation. Their lives unfold under the pressure of this "double pole," which makes resistance particularly difficult. This situation has often been discussed through the concept of the subaltern, a term that has its roots in Antonio Gramsci's work on hegemony and was later re-theorised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Historically, Gramsci used "subaltern" to describe those groups who live under dominant power structures and whose ability to shape political life is severely limited. In contemporary usage, the term has been extended to designate people who are "oppressed" or cast as "the other," whose voices are rarely heard in public discourse (Kiraz & Kestel, 2017).

Gramsci's notion of the subaltern does more than name the oppressed; it also points to fragile spaces in which resistance can emerge. Within the networks of power that define a hegemonic order, subaltern groups may still develop a critical consciousness and attempt to organise against domination. Gramsci calls this counter-hegemony: an effort to reinterpret ideology and politics in those cultural spaces neglected or controlled by the ruling classes (Gramsci, 1971). From this perspective, women's resistance within gender regimes becomes an important example of subaltern struggle against hegemony.

Spivak gave the concept of the subaltern a new theoretical depth in the mid-1980s and laid the foundations of subaltern studies. Her central question—"Can the Subaltern Speak?" (Spivak, 1988)—goes beyond the literal ability to utter words. She asks whether those at the very bottom of social hierarchies can truly speak in their own name and in their own voice, and what happens to their words once they do. If the subaltern gains a recognisable platform, does she still remain "subaltern," or does that status, by definition, disappear?

Spivak is a key figure in postcolonial theory. A student and translator of Derrida, she wrote the influential translator's preface to Of Grammatology and has consistently been more interested in how "truths" are constructed than in simply exposing error. Central to her work is the figure of the subaltern. Borrowing Gramsci's military term ("of lower rank"), she uses it to refer to women, tribal communities, colonised peoples and other groups pushed to the margins of history (Stephen, 2003). In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" she argues that earlier

political and historical narratives systematically displaced the voices of these groups, leaving them spoken about but rarely speaking for themselves.

For Spivak, subalternity is also marked by fragmentation. Those at the margins are divided by gender, class, caste, religion, and ethnicity; this fragmentation makes collective self-representation even more difficult. The question, "Can the subaltern speak?" thus also means: can those whose lives are shaped by multiple layers of exclusion express their concerns in a way that is actually heard and taken seriously by those who hold power? Spivak notes that subaltern groups do in fact speak, resist, and form collectives, but their "speech acts" often remain incomplete because there is no institutional or discursive infrastructure ready to receive them (Spivak, 1988). The state and other powerful actors lack both the will and the frameworks to listen. In a famous formulation, Spivak writes:

"Between patriarchy and imperialism (…) the figure of the woman disappears (…) into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the third-world woman caught between tradition and modernization" (Spivak, 1988). Here she describes women as objects crushed between male-dominated local structures and imperial power. The Third World woman is not simply oppressed once; she is pulled back and forth between competing projects—tradition versus modernity, nationalism versus colonialism—and disappears within their conflicting demands. Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* gives this theoretical figure a literary body in the character of Antoinette. Rhys focuses on subaltern women through Antoinette's fragmented voice, "Very soon she'll join all the others who know the secret and will not tell it. Or cannot. Or try and fail because they do not know enough. They can be recognized. White faces, dazed eyes, aimless gestures, high-pitched laughter" (Rhys, 1966).

Antoinette's "dazed eyes" and "aimless gestures" mark her as one of those who "know the secret" but cannot fully articulate it. She belongs to that group of women whose experiences of colonialism and patriarchy cannot easily be translated into the dominant language of power. In this sense, *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be read as a sustained attempt to let a subaltern woman speak, while simultaneously showing how fragile and precarious that act of speaking remains.

In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak exposes a central irony of subaltern politics: those at the margins do in fact act, resist, and make "practical utterances" against domination, yet their speech rarely registers within the dominant order. She denounces the harm done to women, especially women in the Third World and non-European contexts, whose experiences are either erased or reinterpreted by

others (Spivak, 1988). Her essay seeks to give conceptual space to those who cannot speak "in their own name" or whose words are systematically distorted. Focusing on debates around widow sacrifice (sati), Spivak shows how even extreme acts are narrated by colonial and nationalist discourses rather than by the women themselves. She also calls attention to women writers submerged by their male contemporaries and highlights the specific burden of women's double colonisation.

There is ample evidence in *Wide Sargasso Sea* to read Antoinette as a subaltern figure. Alongside the Black women whose voices remain largely silenced, Antoinette, as a white Creole woman, is doubly oppressed by colonial structures and patriarchal authority. Neither group is granted stable narrative space or full agency in the novel. Spivak's claim that "there is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak" (Spivak, 1988) resonates strongly with Antoinette's situation.

Rochester tries to confine Antoinette to silence, stripping her of physical freedom and social credibility. Yet she still attempts to speak, to tell her own story, even if this speech ultimately fails to change her fate. Her account of childhood rejection and shame reveals both her emotional depth and the limits of her agency:

"No, I said I was always happy in the morning, not always in the afternoon and never after sunset, for after sunset, the house was haunted, some places are. Then there was that day when she saw I was growing up like a white nigger and she was ashamed of me, it was after that day that everything changed. Yes, it was my fault that she started to plan and work in frenzy, in a fever to change our lives. Then people came to see us again and though I still hated them and was afraid of their cool, teasing eyes, I learned to hide it." (Rhys, 1966)

As a representative of the coloniser, Rochester also polices language, treating Standard English as the only legitimate norm. He repeatedly mocks Christophine's non-standard English and links her speech and presence to stereotypes about Black women as "unclean, sexualised and lazy" (Rhys, 1966). Here, Englishness becomes the standard against which all other identities are measured and found wanting. Christophine's phrase "taste my bull's blood, master" during the honeymoon at Granbois is not simply an odd expression for Rochester; it becomes proof of linguistic and cultural inferiority.

Bhabha's notion of the Third Space helps to frame this dynamic. He argues that the "intervention of the Third Space of enunciation," where meaning is negotiated and never fully fixed, disrupts the mirror-like illusion of a single, unified cultural

code (Bhabha, 1994). This space reveals culture as ambivalent and hybrid rather than homogeneous and stable. Antoinette and Christophine occupy such an in-between zone: they do not fit neatly into either the coloniser's or the colonised community's self-image, and their voices expose the fractures within both.

If Rochester refuses to grant freedom, Antoinette's struggle for autonomy becomes inevitable. Rhys carefully contrasts the positions of Black and white women within colonial society. She suggests that African women on the islands sometimes have more personal independence than white women: they may not depend on husbands in quite the same contractual ways and can express a guarded mistrust of men. Yet this relative independence carries its own risks, exposing both Black and white women to sexual exploitation by men across racial lines. What appears as "freedom" is deeply ambivalent.

In this tangled field of power, the idea of a Third Space also points toward possible, if fragile, forms of resistance. Bhabha's concept suggests that new identities and meanings can emerge in the gaps between fixed categories (Bhabha, 1994). For Antoinette, however, this space is never fully secure; her attempts to speak and to inhabit a hybrid position are continually undermined by colonial and patriarchal forces. Subaltern speech exists, but as Spivak warns, it often remains unheard, misread, or finally consumed by the structures it tries to resist.

For Antoinette, the asylum in England becomes a final, distorted "third place." It is both prison and threshold: a space where a ritual of death and rebirth unfolds across the narrative. By the time she is confined in the attic of Thornfield Hall, she has already been pushed out of every other social location available to her. In that sense, her flight into a symbolic Third Space is also a refusal of the identities imposed on her. Here Bhabha's famous notion of a Third Space becomes especially relevant. He argues that cultural identity does not arise from any "pure," hierarchical origin, but from conflicted, ambiguous encounters in which difference is constantly negotiated (Bhabha, 1993, 1994). In this view, hybridity is not a colourful add-on to an already stable culture; it is what unsettles the exoticism of "cultural diversity" and shows that all cultures are already mixed and in motion.

Bhabha insists that the productive force of this Third Space has a specifically colonial and postcolonial provenance: it emerges in situations where people must live between incompatible systems of meaning. An "international culture" grounded in hybridity rather than in neat models of multiculturalism would have

to begin from this in-between zone (Bhabha, 1993). In colonial societies, however, those who are marked as mentally ill are often abandoned, left to ruin at the edges of community. Against this background, Antoinette's madness can be read as both a symptom of violent exclusion and an attempt—however fragile—to inhabit a different coordinate of being.

For Bhabha, cultural identity is never a set of pre-givens "roots," nor can coloniser and colonised be seen as neatly separate entities (Bhabha, 1993). Instead, identity is always negotiated in an ongoing exchange of practices, images, and narratives. Cultural difference is not simply reflected but produced in a "complex, on-going negotiation" that sometimes allows new hybrid forms to appear (Bhabha, 1993). The Third Space, in this sense, mobilises two apparently opposed positions and stages their encounter in a performative, institutional context that neither side fully controls. The meaning of an utterance in this space is, as Bhabha puts it, "neither the one nor the other" (Bhabha, 1994). It emerges in the interstices—where domains of difference overlap, shift, and are translated.

For Antoinette, this in-between zone is both necessary and dangerous. Hybridity offers a way to think beyond fixed identities, but her lived reality shows how costly that position can be. As a Creole, she is "of pure English descent," yet never fully English or European in the eyes of those around her (Rhys, 1999). In Jamaica, she and her mother are called "white niggers," marked as neither truly white nor truly Black, "And I've heard English women call us white niggers. 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, 1966).

Antoinette's question—"where do I belong?"—summarises the psychic cost of being suspended between two cultures that both reject her. The need for a Third Space and for hybridity is clear: without some way of inhabiting this in-between position, exclusion hardens into personal tragedy and madness. When no viable hybrid position is recognised, Antoinette's oppression is intensified. She suffers as a colonised subject and as a woman under patriarchal rule. Her final "solution"—a madness that culminates in burning down Thornfield Hall—can be read as a desperate attempt to reclaim agency. With no one left to defend her, and married to a man determined to own and silence her, she turns her body and her imagination into the last site of resistance. Love appears, to her, as the only possible answer, but Rochester's coldness and control close even that path. Locked behind the iron gate in England, she cannot speak to him except through the destructive gesture of fire.

From Antoinette/Bertha's perspective, suicide becomes a paradoxical act of liberation. As Burns suggests, her death may be perceived as a kind of freedom, even though she has been living "under another name" and in the hands of a man who was meant to protect her (Burns, 2010). Her plunge into madness exposes the novel's uneven power structures: it lays bare the cultural inequalities of colonial society and questions the hierarchies that have defined her as other from the start. In this sense, Antoinette's final act is both a tragedy and a critique—a burning refusal of the identities that double colonisation has tried to force upon her.

Between 1816 and 1830, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel delivered a series of lectures on madness at several universities. Although his remarks on insanity occupy no more than two pages in the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences, he is still one of the major thinkers who tried to explain why people lose their reason (Berthold-Bond, 1991, p. 193). Drawing on these fragmentary notes, Daniel Berthold-Bond later reconstructed what can be called a Hegelian theory of madness. In this framework, madness marks a rupture between inner life and outer reality, a failed attempt to hold together a fractured self.

Antoinette's trajectory in *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be read through this lens. Throughout the first two parts of the novel, she longs for safety and freedom but never fully attains either. In the final section she constructs her own psychic territory—what Homi Bhabha would call a Third Space. Bhabha defines this space as a zone "between the colonizers and the colonized," a cutting edge of translation and negotiation where identities are formed in relation to conflicting systems of meaning (Bhabha, 1994). For Antoinette, madness becomes the form this Third Space takes: a place that is at once terrifying and protective, where she can resist the identities imposed by colonial power and patriarchy.

Although Antoinette clearly suffers from "a psychological disorder, whose roots are to be found in some childhood trauma" (Rovera, 2009), her behaviour is driven by a persistent desire to reconcile her inner world with the external one. Like her mother before her, she marries an Englishman in the hope of securing happiness and stability—Annette with Mr. Mason, Antoinette with Rochester (Rhys, 1966; O'Connor, 1986). Both hopes are disappointed. Rather than healing earlier wounds, marriage intensifies Antoinette's already fragile sense of self and deepens her confusion.

In the last part of the novel, Antoinette narrates again, but her voice now comes from a space of radical estrangement. She is alien to herself and to the country

that is supposed to be her new "home." The loss of mirrors and windows in her room at Thornfield Hall symbolises the erasure of self-recognition: "The windows were in my room, but they were taken away. In this place is not much more... no glass looks inside, and now I don't understand how I am" (Rhys, 1966, p. 149). Rochester has stolen her name, her body, her heart, and her dignity, leaving "nothing recognizable" behind: "I remember watching my head brushing up and my eyes looking back at me" (Rhys, 1966, p. 180). When she wakes and tries to recall what has happened, reality and dream slip into each other. Water, eyes, and mirrors become recurring images that signal secrets, unspoken expectations, and a desperate attempt to hold on to some coherent image of herself: "I got used to a solitary life, but my mother still planned and hoped – perhaps she had to hope every time she passed a looking glass" (Rhys, 1966, pp. 3–4). Antoinette, by contrast, has never learned to hide. The moment she can no longer recognise herself in the mirror marks the complete loss of identity.

Seen from this angle, Antoinette's madness is not merely an individual pathology but a form of resistance and revolution against colonial and imperial authority. Madness itself becomes a Third Space in which those driven to the margins can briefly glimpse themselves in the mirror. Antoinette lives in a world that offers her, ultimately, only this fate: a liminal territory of insanity where she can neither fully belong nor fully disappear. This is close to what Bhabha describes when he writes that "the non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space—a Third Space—where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences" (Bhabha, 2000).

To read madness in this way is not to romanticise suffering, but to acknowledge how deeply social and political structures shape what counts as "insanity." In Antoinette's case, madness is produced at the intersection of empire and patriarchy; yet it also becomes her only available language of protest. Within a system that denies her speech, property, and self-definition, retreating into this Third Space allows her to protect something of herself, even as it destroys her.

The madness that marks Antoinette's story is, above all, the product of a violent clash between a colonized Creole woman and the intertwined forces of imperial and patriarchal authority. It does not need to be read only as an individual "mental disorder." *Wide Sargasso Sea* is divided into three parts and each section allows a different voice to narrate personal experience. Within this shifting structure, "madness" becomes difficult to define in clinical terms. It emerges instead as the cumulative effect of social and cultural pressures: misfortune appears as a

specifically feminine condition, or as a patriarchal strategy designed to diminish and contain the female characters. Under such a regime, there is no neutral or "innocent" truth on the side of power. Those who control institutions also control the story, and thus decide who is sane and who is mad. Women who question the status quo, who refuse the prescribed line of behaviour, are quickly branded as unstable or insane. Because the institutions that certify madness are themselves embedded in male hegemony, there is almost no one in a position of authority to question these diagnoses. Women who might speak on behalf of other women are silenced once more.

Within this framework, Antoinette's fate echoes that of her mother. She recounts to Rochester the story of Annette's life, the fire at Coulibri, Pierre's death, and her mother's subsequent mental collapse. Rochester does not believe her; he suspects exaggeration or even deceit. Yet the narrative suggests that, for Antoinette, "a part of her" died the day of the fire, just as her mother's reason was shattered by grief. Remembering and retelling this family history becomes a kind of foreshadowing: it signals the possibility, even the inevitability, that Antoinette will follow her mother into madness. The oppressive pressure on her voice, and the way her memories are dismissed and mistrusted, indicate that she has reached a breaking point. Her trajectory appears mapped out in advance by a system that pathologizes women who cannot conform.

Rhys presents Antoinette/Bertha as a figure who cannot accept the rigid masculine control that structures her world. Rochester's progressive erasure of her identity is one of the most striking signs of this control. He begins calling her by another name—"Bertha"—a name that has no organic connection to her past. One evening he says, "Don't laugh like that, Bertha," to which she protests, "My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha?" His only explanation is chilling in its arbitrariness: "Because it's a name that I'm particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha" (Rhys, 1966). The issue is not simply the substitution of one name for another, but the ease with which a man in a position of power can redefine a woman's identity according to his own desires. By accepting this imposed name—because she has little room to resist—Antoinette becomes divided against herself.

Rochester's betrayal goes further than the renaming. He not only humiliates her emotionally and sexually, but also desecrates the island that was once her only refuge, partly through his liaison with Amélie, a woman from Antoinette's own community. In doing so, he destroys Antoinette's last point of orientation—her sense of place. As O'Connor observes, he strips away "her sense of hope, of

belonging, of ownership, autonomy, and ultimately her own sense of personal power" (O'Connor, 1986). Antoinette herself articulates this rupture in a bitter confrontation:

"Do you know what you've done to me? It's not the girl, not the girl. But I

loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate. I used to think that

if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you

have spoilt it. […] I hate it now like I hate you and before I die I will show

you how much I hate you." (Rhys, 1966)

Her hatred for Rochester spreads outward: it contaminates the island and, ultimately, rebounds upon herself. She no longer believes she can become a "respectable" woman or live a happy life there. At this point her psychic collapse accelerates. Rochester takes her to England, locks her away in the attic at Thornfield Hall, and she finally responds with an act of spectacular violence—burning the house and leaping to her death.

As Gunner notes, Antoinette's madness and her last dream, in which she sets the house on fire and jumps from the roof, have often been read "as signs of her defiance against the colonial and patriarchal power structures" (Gunner, 1995, p. 143). Her final act is both self-destruction and revolt: she destroys the emblem of colonial authority even as she destroys herself. The novel also invites readers to look back to Annette. By highlighting the mother's own instability and apparent "frivolity," Rhys suggests that the absence of maternal love and security plays a crucial role in Antoinette's fractured identity and later breakdown. From childhood onwards, Antoinette is desperate for her mother's affection, yet constantly pushed aside in favour of Pierre, who requires more care. Despite this neglect, she continues to love and admire Annette. That painful loyalty illustrates how deeply Antoinette's sense of self is bound to a maternal figure who is herself breaking under the combined pressures of gender, race, and colonial history. Antoinette's recollection of her personal and family history can also be read as a deliberate narrative strategy that foreshadows her own descent into madness. Her repeated return to traumatic memories functions as an early sign that she has reached a psychological breaking point and, like her mother, is likely to be judged "insane." Years of emotional repression and silencing culminate in an eventual explosion of feeling. Rochester's persistent refusal to address her by her proper name is one of the clearest signs of his refusal to acknowledge her individuality

and uniqueness. Antoinette repeatedly protests: “My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha” (Rhys, 1966: 111). Rochester’s response—“Because it’s a name I am particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha” (Rhys, 1966)—exposes the arbitrary, colonizing power he exercises over her identity.

This renaming carries an intertextual weight. In Jane Eyre, “Bertha” is the name of the mad Creole wife confined in the attic; in contrast, “Antoinette” evokes Marie Antoinette and is historically associated with elegance and royal femininity. By stripping her of the name Antoinette and replacing it with Bertha, Rochester symbolically drags her from a position of dignity into a pre-scripted role of madness and monstrosity. As Chesler argues, “in a patriarchal society, men assign features of madness to women when they do not act and behave according to one’s sex-role stereotype” (Chesler, 2005, p. 57). From the beginning of the marriage, Rochester regards Antoinette as a “mad Creole girl,” reading any behaviour that does not conform to his expectations as irrational. When he learns more about her family history, his suspicion hardens; he quarrels with her and insists on using the name Bertha, even after discovering that it was one of her mother’s names (Rhys, 1966, p. 94). The act of renaming thus becomes both a symptom and a cause of her fragmentation.

Before moving to England, Antoinette still has a fragile hope that life in the metropolis will offer a new beginning. As a colonized subject, she imagines that the centre of empire might grant her peace and stability, “I have been too unhappy, I thought, it cannot last, being so unhappy, it would kill you. I will be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me…” (Rhys, 1966).

Her hope echoes Frantz Fanon’s assertion in The Wretched of the Earth that “for a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity” (Fanon, 1963). Antoinette seeks exactly this dignity in England. Yet this desire is complicated by the fact that she is both a woman and a colonized subject. In A Dying Colonialism, Fanon remarks that “she is a woman (...) that (...) she is not welcomed in this society” (Fanon, 1965). Antoinette is therefore doubly unwelcome: as a Creole from a colonized territory and as a woman in a patriarchal order.

Rhys depicts Antoinette not as a passive victim, but as a figure who struggles—however unsuccessfully—against patriarchal and colonial domination. She is not naturally submissive; she repeatedly seeks escape, challenges Rochester’s

control, and attempts to assert her own will. As previously noted, she is subjected to double oppression by colonial power and by a dominant husband, and the more she resists, the more she is pathologized. Rochester increasingly interprets her difference as proof of insanity: "She thirsts for anyone – not for me ... She'll loosen her black hair and laugh and coax and flatter (a mad girl. She'll not care who she's loving). She'll moan and cry and give herself as no sane woman would – or could. [...]

Till she's drunk so deep, played her games so often that the lowest shrug and jeer at her" (Rhys, 1966).

Here, female sexuality is framed as excessive, dangerous, and "mad," and Antoinette's body is metaphorically treated as a territory to be invaded and controlled. In colonial discourse, women's bodies often stand in for the land itself, a resource to be conquered by Western men. Rochester continues to call her Bertha, fully aware that she dislikes the name, insisting upon his right to define her. As Spivak notes, 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, 1985).

From Rochester's perspective, the signs of Antoinette's "madness" seem to intensify as the narrative progresses. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, however, this madness can be read as a resistant and rebellious tool. It becomes a form of counter-discourse against both imperial and patriarchal power. Madness, in this sense, functions as a kind of Third Space, a liminal zone where Antoinette refuses the normative identities imposed upon her. Homi Bhabha captures this liminality when he argues that "the non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space—a Third Space—where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences" (Bhabha, 1994). Antoinette's madness thus marks both her exclusion and her last, desperate attempt to escape the web of double colonization.

Antoinette pursues a form of pleasure, safety, and autonomy in the Third Space of her memory and imagination. Within the novel, she cannot fully belong to any place or community; consequently, she is never truly content. From the beginning to the end, Antoinette longs to escape oppression, and when no social or legal escape is possible, she turns inward: she embraces anger, retreats into the mirror, and seeks refuge in solitude to feel secure. In the end, she "wins" her struggle

against colonial and imperial control only by burning the house and claiming freedom through death in this Third Space.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the Third Space becomes both the site of revenge and the only possible site of happiness for Antoinette. Madness is her shelter in isolation. Even though Rochester repeatedly attempts to silence her and to deny her any space for self-expression, Antoinette still manages, in certain passages, to tell her story and defend herself, even if this remains a failed attempt in the eyes of patriarchal authority:

"No, I said I was always happy in the morning, not always in the afternoon and never after sunset, for after sunset, the house was haunted, some places are. Then there was that day when she saw I was growing up like a white nigger and she was ashamed of me, it was after that day that everything changed. Yes, it was my fault that she started to plan and work in frenzy, in a fever to change our lives. Then people came to see us again and though I still hated them and was afraid of their cool, teasing eyes, I learned to hide it" (Rhys, 1966, p. 109).

Antoinette is repeatedly stripped of identity and belonging by the combined force of patriarchy and imperialism. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is thus a singular work in exposing the condition of the suppressed, the repressed, and the under-represented, whose experiences are examined through postcolonial, feminist, and postmodern lenses. Within Caribbean literature, it arguably offers one of the most powerful depictions of double colonization, charting how alienation, identity crisis, and the pressures of colonial and patriarchal systems culminate in Antoinette's madness and tragic death. O'Callaghan describes this structure of exclusion as typical for Creole wives in Caribbean fiction:

"With neither blackness, nor Englishness, nor economic independence to sustain her, [the white Creole woman] is excluded from all groups that matter to her and subjected to cruel paradoxes: having privilege without power; sharing oppression without the solidarity and support of fellow victims . . . the product of two cultures, she is denied and despised by both" (O'Callaghan, 1993).

While *Wide Sargasso Sea* has often been read in direct dialogue with Jane Eyre, particularly regarding its rewriting of race and gender, the present study treats Rhys's novel as an autonomous text and introduces Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject to analyse Antoinette's identity crisis. By examining the interplay between race and gender in Rhys's narrative through Ania Loomba's discussions of colonialism and postcolonialism, and by linking these to psychoanalytic

feminism and Kristeva's concept of abjection, it becomes possible to understand why Antoinette loses her sense of self and how madness functions within a colonial and patriarchal order. Race and gender become mutually reinforcing metaphors that abject "the other within," driving the subject toward psychic disintegration.

The critique of imperial tendencies in certain strands of feminism largely draws upon Edward Said's understanding of colonial discourse. For Said, colonial discourse is a cultural mechanism that reproduces the conquered "other" for Western consumption. Both orientalists and some Western feminists, he argues, attempt to speak for the Third World through a shared dogma: the assumption that "they" cannot represent themselves and therefore "must be represented." In this framework, "women of the Third World" become yet another object of Western knowledge. Said's analysis, influenced by Foucault's theories, foregrounds the connection between the production of knowledge and the exercise of power, revealing how institutions that regulate everyday life participate in constructing this binary. His core argument is that orientalism—or the study of the Orient—ultimately operates as a political vision of reality that enforces a rigid opposition between the familiar (Europe) and the strange (the Orient) (Said, 1978).

As a postcolonial novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* foregrounds the structures of oppression and domination within the colonial and patriarchal society in which Antoinette lives, and shows how, under the combined pressure of race and gender, she is gradually forced to abject her own identity. Her subjectivity is trampled upon, mocked, and fragmented by almost everyone around her; she is never allowed the space to respect herself or to develop a stable sense of who she is in relation to others. As someone who is continually othered and abjected, she never fully enters the symbolic order which, according to Kristeva, separates the subject from the abject and is crucial for the formation of identity. Instead, Antoinette is compelled to repress and disown parts of herself, and in this liminal zone between object and subject – as something despised and rejected – she slowly begins to lose her sense of self. Like the abject that must be hidden and denied because it threatens the borders of the subject, Antoinette must also be locked away in the attic, a desperate attempt to control and silence that which cannot truly be contained and continues to pose a threat. In the end, she defies her enforced position as an outsider to the symbolic order by choosing to destroy and escape the house that has sought to confine her to a life of abjection.

CONCLUSION

Antoinette, as a fictional figure, embodies the precarious situation of women who live within a patriarchal society under the pressure of imperial forces. Throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she is depicted as struggling to resist patriarchal structures that seek to control her, efface her subjectivity, and deny her a stable identity. This thesis has examined the burden of patriarchy on women, showing how patriarchal codes undermine women's rights and autonomy through the example of Antoinette. One of the clearest signs of this domination is Rochester's insistence on renaming her "Bertha" because, in his view, she does not conform to the expected loyalty and obedience of a wife as defined by patriarchal norms. This act of renaming functions as a symbolic assertion of imperial authority and male domination.

The analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea* has demonstrated that double colonization affects both Antoinette and her mother, Annette, in profoundly destructive ways. Their identities are repeatedly reshaped and overwritten—Annette Cosway becomes Annette Mason, while Antoinette Cosway becomes Antoinette Mason and then Antoinette Rochester, before being finally reduced to "Bertha." These successive renamings illustrate how colonial and patriarchal powers work together to destabilize and appropriate female identity.

Rochester's persistent use of the name "Bertha," despite Antoinette's explicit resistance, reinforces her sense of dispossession and disorientation. His insistence reveals that Antoinette is denied a voice in determining who she is; she is positioned as a voiceless object under the combined pressures of patriarchy and colonial authority. Within the narrative she is repeatedly likened to a "doll," a figure that can neither act nor speak back, and thus cannot effectively resist either colonialism or patriarchy. By refusing to acknowledge her chosen name and Creole identity, Rochester systematically erodes her sense of self, isolates her socially and emotionally, and prepares the ground for her physical confinement in the attic. This escalating pressure pushes Antoinette toward questioning not only her name but the reality of her own identity and belonging.

Rhys, through Antoinette, also reflects more broadly on the status of women in society and the ways in which they are made to doubt their own reality through a mixture of social norms, fantasy, and ideological manipulation. A woman's position, in this framework, is determined by a society that defines her name, her role, and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. This "dependence syndrome" leaves women vulnerable to the desires and decisions of men. Antoinette's

secondary position in her relationship with Rochester exemplifies this: she is constantly reinterpreted through his gaze and narrative. When Antoinette asks whether England is "like a dream," Rochester reinforces the notion of England as dreamlike, superior and desirable, encouraging her to idealize the colonial centre and to devalue her own land and heritage. This deepens her confusion and intensifies her alienation from her Caribbean origins.

Rochester's renaming of Antoinette ultimately reveals his position as a colonial settler who assumes the right to name, classify, and possess everything within the colonized space. Antoinette's enforced transformation into "Bertha" is part of a broader process in which her identity is destabilized so that her husband, as colonizer, can take full control. The name "Bertha" carries literary associations with the "madwoman in the attic" of Jane Eyre—a figure described with unruly hair, wild eyes, and animalistic traits. By imposing this name on Antoinette, Rochester marks her as irrational, uncivilized, and inferior to himself, thereby relegating her to a lower social and symbolic status. Caught between these competing images and names, Antoinette is finally left to wonder whether her original identity was ever real, or whether she has always been living inside someone else's dream.

The troubled marriage between Rochester and Antoinette mirrors the wider difficulties that women face under patriarchal systems. Rochester attempts to abandon Antoinette on the basis of rumours about an illegitimate Creole child, using unverified accusations of sexual immorality to undermine her respectability and credibility. In this representation, Antoinette is figured as morally suspect and ultimately untrustworthy, both as a wife and as a potential mother. These allegations, together with the violent act of renaming her "Bertha," expose the mechanisms through which patriarchy and colonialism work together to regulate and punish women who do not conform. Moreover, Rochester not only fails to understand Antoinette, but also refuses to acknowledge her fears, emotions, and psychological fragility. His indifference deepens the confusion surrounding her identity, heritage, and sense of belonging. Antoinette's position is further complicated by her in-between status: she is not fully accepted in her native Jamaican environment, nor is she embraced by the English, which pushes her into frustration and a desperate search for a stable identity as a Creole woman.

A second major concern of this thesis has been the relationship between colonialism and the loss of identity. Through a blend of selective truth and fantasy, Rochester constructs an idealized image of England in Antoinette's mind, intensifying her desire to travel there. She repeatedly questions him about

England and listens attentively; yet, as Rochester himself notes, her ideas about England remain fixed and idealized. Upon arriving in England, Antoinette experiences profound displacement. At first, she attempts to behave like an Englishwoman—an example previously discussed under the concept of colonial mimicry—but soon realizes that she cannot sustain this performance. Colonialism is thus shown to generate a cultural consensus in which political and socio-economic dominance takes the form of male and "civilized" superiority over women and "primitive" others. Women are expected to accept the stereotypes and roles prescribed by this consensus, and any refusal or deviation is quickly pathologized as "madness." Women who resist colonial and patriarchal norms are thus labelled mad not because they lack reason, but because they challenge a system that demands their obedience.

The imposition of this cultural order by imperial and patriarchal forces further intensifies the difficulties of women like Antoinette, who belong fully to neither Black Jamaican society nor the Western metropolitan centre. This liminal position subjects her to a severe identity crisis, aggravated by colonial discourse that repeatedly portrays non-Europeans and women as passive, childlike, or dependent, or alternatively as sexually aberrant, emotional, and outside the bounds of "proper" society. The thesis has argued that the failure to recognize this social peculiarity—the structural in-betweenness of Creole women—is a key reason for the persistent identity crisis experienced by Antoinette and by many women in formerly colonized societies.

The burden of this crisis points to the need for pluralism and hybridity, yet such plurality is difficult to achieve within cultures that continue to uphold patriarchy and imperialism. As a result, the struggle for self-definition often takes violent or radical forms. Antoinette's final act of setting fire to the house can be read as a desperate attempt to free herself from imperial and patriarchal control and to reclaim, however tragically, her own agency. In Rhys's portrayal, the colonized subject suffers an identity crisis produced by imperial power, which attempts to rewrite heritage through renaming, discursive manipulation, and the creation of seductive fantasies that ultimately leave the colonized displaced and estranged from both self and homeland.

The final theme explored in this thesis has been the relationship between double colonization and madness. The combined forces of patriarchy and imperialism are shown to drive women into what is labelled "madness" from the perspective of male colonizers. Antoinette's insanity is represented as the direct result of her in-between position between two cultures and her oppressive marriage. As a

Creole woman, she belongs fully neither to the Black Jamaican community nor to white Europeans; both reject her. In her troubled marriage, Rochester stands as the representative of imperial power, exercising control over her body, name, and narrative. Antoinette feels constantly threatened and endangered by both her husband and the wider colonial environment. Her attempts to resist this layered oppression—being both a woman and a colonized subject—produce what is pathologized as madness. Her dreams and fantasies, especially her idealized vision of England as a place of refuge, collapse into disappointment once she confronts the reality of exclusion and confinement in the metropole.

Antoinette's inability to find answers to her questions of identity, belonging, and freedom leads her to respond violently to the burden imposed by imperial and patriarchal authority. In this sense, her madness is not a simple clinical condition but a political and existential reaction to double colonization. Women who challenge patriarchal and imperial norms are easily classified as mad, and Antoinette's "insanity" functions as a label used to silence her resistance. At the same time, madness becomes for her a form of Third Space—a symbolic site where she can retreat, imagine, and reclaim a sense of autonomy that is denied to her in the social world. Her refusal to accept the name "Bertha" and her repeated insistence that Rochester stop calling her by that name signal a refusal to surrender her identity, even as he insists that he prefers and "dreams" of her as Bertha.

Ultimately, the loss of identity, sustained alienation, and constant othering push Antoinette towards a final act of rebellion: setting fire to the house and jumping from the attic. This act can be read as her rejection of imperialism and patriarchy in their entirety. Rhys suggests that without such radical acts, women trapped in structures of double colonization cannot achieve genuine freedom. Madness, in this context, functions as a mode of rebellion and a last available strategy of resistance rather than merely a symptom of mental illness. In summary, women who live under the joint pressures of patriarchal and imperial power are subjected to forms of oppression that frequently drive them to resist in ways that are then labelled as insanity. Antoinette's madness should therefore be understood as the product of these intersecting forces of imperialism and patriarchy, rather than as an individual psychological defect.

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CV

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Anneme

Bu kitabın başına düşen bu satırları, 52 yıllık ömrüne yedi çocuğun yükünü, derdini, sevincini sığdıran anneme yazıyorum. Babamı 2014'te kaybettikten sonra on yıl boyunca hem anneden öte bir anne, hem babadan öte bir baba oldu. Aslında babam hayattayken de hayatı kolay değildi; maddi manevi ne acı, ne sıkıntı varsa önce kendi yüreğine gömdü. Biz yokluk çekmeyelim, "eksik büyüdük" demeyelim diye kendisinden kısmayı alışkanlık yaptı. Saçlarına düşen aklar, yılların değil, her gün sessizce verdiği mücadelenin iziydi. Yine de sofraya koyduğu bir bardak çayı bile gülümsemeyle ikram eden, yorulduğunu belli etmeyen bir kadındı.

En büyüğümüz otuzlu yaşlarının başındayken, torunlarının sesini daha doya doya duyamadan, 2024 yılında akşam vakti bir trafik kazasında aramızdan ayrıldı. O gün, sadece annemizi değil, evimizin direğini, gölgesine sığındığımız limanı kaybettik. İçinde fırtınalar kopsa da girdiği her ortamı şenlendiren, kahkahasıyla evi ısıtan, kendi canı yanarken bile "Ben iyiyim" diyebilen oydu. Babamın yokluğunu bize hiç hissettirmeden, evin içindeki bütün boşlukları kendi varlığıyla doldurdu. Bugün hem biz yedi kardeş, hem torunları, adını andığımız her an kalbimizde aynı anda büyüyen bir sızı ve sıcak bir tebessüm duyuyoruz.

Bu kitap annemi anlatmıyor; bambaşka bir hikâyenin kapısını aralıyor. Ama benim için artık her satır, onun geceleri uykusundan çalıp bize kattığı emeklerin sessiz bir devamı. Elinde tuttuğun bu kitabın önüne bu satırları koymam, annemin hayatına yazılmış küçük bir teşekkür, içimizde hiç dinmeyecek bir özlemin ve ruhuna gönderilmiş derin bir duanın ifadesi olsun.

Annemin aziz hatırasına…

DUVAR