

The “Third Space” and the Questions of Identity in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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Abstract

In this paper, I claim that the “third space” extends beyond Western hegemonic discourse on identity and self, demonstrating that identity is not a singular and a stable subject but a multiple and fluid one. This article demonstrates that the “third space”, while opening the avenues for pluralities and negotiations, unsettles and problematizes the issues of identity, belonging, and home in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Discussions on why Antoinette’s position as a Creole in Jamaica problematizes her status and identity, and what barriers negate her self and her sense of belonging are central to this research. I further investigate the roles of Western hegemonic presence in Antoinette’s subjectivity, and her sense of liberation and autonomy. Antoinette’s position in a liminal space not only jeopardizes her identity, her longing for home and belonging, but also creates a hybrid identity that emerges in a moment of historical transformation in Jamaican history. Hybridity interrogates and deconstructs the Western hegemonic assumption of stable subjectivity and meaning. Destabilizing the notion of the Self and the Other as envisioned by Western mainstream narratives, hybridity proposes that the Self is constructed by multiple ideologies and multiple discourses. Antoinette’s occupation of a hybrid position in *Wide Sargasso Sea* dismantles the stable binaries of white/black, colonizer/colonized category of Western discourse and questions identity formation based on the West as the ‘Self’ and the non-West as the ‘Other’ as in Edward Said’s contention in *Orientalism*.

Key words: Third Space, Hybridity, Creole, Self, Liminality

Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) depicts Antoinette Cosway, a white creole woman and descendent of the colonizers, forced to madness in a confinement in an attic. She is divided between her white creole identity and her affiliation with and attachment to the colonized, black inhabitants of postcolonial Jamaica. Black Jamaicans reject Antoinette because her father was a slave-owner and the English people marginalize her because she comes from the West Indies. Trapped between two different cultures, Antoinette inhabits an interstitial space shaped by European and Caribbean cultural traditions. She is neither fully accepted by the colonized black people nor by the white European colonizers. She continuously struggles to negotiate between the completely opposing expectations and spaces of black Jamaican and white European cultures. Consequently, Antoinette falls into a state of "in-betweenness" or a "third space" the terms suggested by Homi K Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*. By bringing Caribbean cultural legacy into mainstream literary discourse, Rhys not only questions Charlotte Brontë's depiction of a creole in *Jane Eyre* as inferior but also makes it apparent that the Caribbean cultural inheritance is equally important. Therefore, an interpretation of Antoinette's position needs to go beyond the binary oppositions of white/black, colonizer/colonized, subject/object categories of Western discourse.

Rhys writes *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) in order to give life to Bertha Mason, a Jamaican creole who is locked in the attic as a madwoman by her English husband, Rochester. Rhys argues that Bertha is completely undermined and negated in Brontë's novel. Brontë's silences over Bertha's identity and history drive Rhys to break the unspoken and deliberately neglected

white creole’s identity in *Jane Eyre*, and give her a voice that humanizes this supposedly inferior creole. Rhys’ interrogation of Brontë’s text subverts the notion of identity based on the binary construct of black and white and validates Antoinette’s quest for identity and belonging while also challenging Western hegemonic expectations and conditions.

The definition of “creole” goes beyond the binaries of black and white. Creole is neither a black nor a white category. Creole possesses the qualities of both black and white races and cultures. In this sense creole marks a break from the black/white, African/European categories of identifications and establishes a new domain – a “third space”. The meaning of the term “creole” varies in different societies and over time. Creolization historically refers to a process specific to particular colonial sites and moments of history in the Caribbean and the Latin America. *Post-Colonial Study: Key Concepts* outlines “creole” as initially referring to “a white (man) of European descent, born and raised in a tropical colony. The meaning was later extended to include indigenous natives and others of non-European origins” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2000, 57). The familiar terms to define creolization— fusion, syncretism, transculturation, hybridity, mestizaje— are also descriptors of the cross-cultural conditions historically emergent from the polities and societies established by Atlantic slavery across the Americas. Initially a single definition of creole may have been sufficient to include all the colonial societies during the early stages of colonialism. But as the populations of the colonial sites began to expand into diverse social, political and economic stratifications, the definition of creole also expanded to incorporate more heterogeneous social positions.

This multiplicity of meaning demonstrates that creolization on a fundamental level signals the process of intermixing and cultural changes that take place in the Caribbean, especially the former colonial societies where the ethnically and racially mixed populations are the product of European colonization.

Caribbean histories and cultural processes are multidimensional, making a complex postcolonial creolization process. Creoles, in the Caribbean, have always negotiated and manoeuvred within intertwined histories of diverse but linked places constituting the world economy, in which creolization is understood as an ongoing dynamic with the complex but open system. Creolization taken as a dynamic process, facilitates an engagement with theories of social change, making for their linked but specific articulations. From its emergence as a hybrid product, creole is always on a move for change through cultural interactions specific to particular culture and locations. Caribbean identity is largely shaped by creolization— a fusion of the colonial metropolis with the colonized region, with very significant cultural interactions and negotiations. White colonizers imposed the division between creole and non-creole valorizing white purity, located outside the creole space. “This valorization, at the root of white supremacy”, according to Percy C. Hintzen, “became the foundation principle of colonial power, privilege, honour and prestige” (Hintzen 2002, 93). Most importantly, the division between creole and non-creole marked the desire of colonizers to remove their own products— the creole— from the centre and label them as the “Other”, ignoring the fact that the colonizers have also undergone notable cultural changes, and thus have fallen from the “purity”. In Brathwaite’s opinion, Caribbean society emerged both from the forced assimilation of Black to the dominant European colonial norm and behaviours, and from the inadvertent interculturaltion of White into African-derived norms and behaviours and vice versa. On the one hand, Blacks were forced to follow White’s language and cultural practices in the process of colonization; on the other hand, Whites inadvertently consumed and embraced Black cultures and ways of life. In this way Blacks and Whites, both, were divorced from their initial cultural position acquiring a new and unique status. This creolization process was facilitated through socialization – through “seasoning” and imitation

during the period of slavery (Brathwaite 2005, 298-99). Furthermore, the acculturation took effects on both the sides, but the non-creole continued to force a system, which deliberately denied the accommodation of the differences sustained by cultural transformation in the process of creolization. Hintzen points out that to be Caribbean "is to occupy the hierarchical, hybridised, 'creole' space between two racial poles that serve as markers for civilization and savagery" (Hintzen 2002, 93). This hybridization is the result of various racial and cultural mixing and ongoing "seasoning". However, White creole is located at the top and the Black creole at the other end of the creole continuum, creating yet another hierarchy and difference.

Creolization debates at present extend beyond the confines of colonization era and destabilize their initial point of departure in slavery, plantations, indentureship, emancipation and post-emancipation era as the scholars seek to address the fundamental socioeconomic and cultural transformations underway. Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato argue that the concept of creolization has undergone tremendous expansion "migrating from its original uses and now often employed to signify the complex social and cultural dynamics set off by global processes of cross-cultural interaction" (Cohen and Toninato 2010, 15). The question here is how changes affecting the process of globalization have refurbished and undermined creolization projects that have brought the Caribbean region and people to a Caribbean placement. The essential markers of creolization processes are identified as a culture created in the context of oppression. However, the colonial mission was inconsistent and applied differently from one colony to another, the differences need to be addressed, especially the oppressiveness obtained during slavery and colonization, and decolonization process and postcolonial exercise of power. In addition, the creolization processes "obtain elsewhere, yet connected, as are those places where Creole resettle in migrant, even diasporic communities, then the creolization dynamic and the post-

Creole imaginary's reach, are global projects and processes, making the Caribbean only one particular site" (Crichlow and Northover 2009, 202). Accordingly, Caribbean creolization's manifestation relate to, or are articulated with other creole manifestations elsewhere so that the Caribbean creole practices are constantly reproduced and transformed by various cultural transactions produced under varying conditions within wider world. Crichlow and Northover argue that the nature of modern creolization process is "historically contingent, strategic, complexity entangled and situated politics of 'selective creation and cultural struggle' to define or express places, and relatedly present; to represent and reproduce spaces and its foldings of the present; as well as to engender newness (that is post-Creole spaces) in the world" (Crichlow and Northover 2009, 24).

Even though creole is already a distanced identity from the western white literary consciousness, white creole remains at the privileged position in the hybridized, new cultural space, and occupies a role of colonizer in the Caribbean society. Nonetheless, glorification of European's cultural and racial purity becomes unattainable even in White creole's representation and practice. As a result, creole identity distances from the ideal European cultural practice and myth of group purity, remaining at the Other side of the pure European blood, even though, White creole is at the privileged position in the creole framework. In addition, this privilege becomes a burden for the White creoles as they are entangled between the Blacks' anger, and White European's dispossession of their White identity. The Caribbean becomes a location where the civilization, as represented by the colonizers and, savagery, as represented by the non-Europeans, encounter and where both become transformed. Charlotte Brontë, in *Jane Eyre*, deliberately neglected this reality of cultural changes of both the colonizers and colonized, and depicted Bertha Mason as a savage ignoring Rochester's injustice and authority. Rhys seeks to empower Antoinette Cosway, the heroine of

Wide Sargasso Sea, born as a white creole in Jamaica who has interestingly similar stories with her author, Jean Rhys, born also as a white creole in Dominica—both the Caribbean countries.

The daughter of a Welsh doctor and a white creole mother, Jean Rhys' experiences as a creole in the Caribbean, and in the most part, her unhappy life in France and England are revisited in her literary works and reinforce the concept that Caribbean culture and values as significantly important in the making of creole identity. As soon as Rhys leaves Dominica for England she begins to feel disconnected with her home and her roots. In her unfinished autobiography, *Smile Please*, Rhys says, "All my childhood, the West Indies, my father and mother had been left behind; I was forgetting them. They were the past" (Rhys 1981, 94) in a "cold, dark, country" (Rhys 1981, 111), which was so unsettling that she found "my love and longing for books completely left me" (Rhys 1981, 111). Rhys' identity is very volatile and multiple, "In the colonial Caribbean, she belonged to the elite, but in England she was working-class as a chorus girl and an outsider as a Creole" (Savory 2009, 13). Rhys' journey from Dominica, a colonial margin to—England and Paris—metropolises marks her relocation and dislocation, a cultural and psychological break in her life forcing her to seek for her position in the world amidst the negotiations of cultural differences. Identity is not a universal and timeless subjectivity as the Western humanistic ideals propose but, "Rather than being a timeless essence, what it is to be a person is said to be plastic and changeable being specific to particular social and cultural conjunctures. In particular, subjectivity and identity mark the composition of persons in language and culture" (Barker and Galasinski 28). Rhys' writing intensifies an awareness of the complexity and variety of the Caribbean culture, at the same time problematizes the Western polemics and hegemonization of the non-Western identity. By defying conventional patriarchal prescriptions Rhys goes beyond her own racial, and gender identities and questions the conventional

stereotyping of Caribbean subjectivity.

Rhys' challenge to unearth Brontë's depiction of Caribbean creole as an inferior creature not only destabilizes the Western assumption that perpetuates the notion of whites as a pure race and therefore superior, but also problematizes white's lack of acknowledgement that they are also a part of transformation process. Rhys is encouraged to deconstruct a Western text bringing the Caribbean legacy to the centre of the literary canon, strongly establishing the fact that the Caribbean cultural heritage is equally important. Rhys, in an interview with Hannah Carter, reveals:

The mad wife in *Jane Eyre* has always interested me. I was convinced that Charlotte Brontë must have had something against the West Indies and I was angry about it. Otherwise, why did she take a West Indian for that horrible lunatic, for that really dreadful creature? I hadn't really formulated the idea of vindicating the madwoman in the novel, but when I was rediscovered I was encouraged to do so. (qtd. in Nunez 1985, 287)

Antoinette's occupation of a hybrid position in *Wide Sargasso Sea* dismantles the stable binary of white/black, colonizer/colonized category of Western discourse and questions identity formation based on the West as the Self and the non-West as the Other. Hybridity, by destabilising the notion of stable identity and Self as envisioned by Western grand narratives, proposes that the Self is constructed by multiple ideologies and multiple discourses, with multiple intersecting routes and interactions. In Jonathan Rutherford's view "In the hierarchical language of the West, what is alien represents otherness, the site of difference and the repository of our fears and anxieties" (Rutherford 1990, 10). Rochester seeks the Otherness in Antoinette for "its exchange value, its exoticism and pleasures, thrills and adventures" (Rutherford, "A Place Called Home," 11) she can offer, but does not see her an equal

counterpart. Rochester does not embrace and respect Antoinette’s values. In other words Antoinette does not belong to Rochester. Antoinette’s frustration and instability stem from her inability to belong to any particular community and culture. As a white creole, she oscillates between the European world of her ancestors and the Caribbean culture into which she is born. Her position as a white creole in Jamaica with a European background problematizes her identity belonging to neither of them fully, and thereby creating a hybrid status— an in-between space. Rhys, through Antoinette’s “in-between space” or a “third space”, takes a position that identity is ambivalent and crucially challenged in the hegemonic colonial setting, as Bhabha contends:

The importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity [to me] is the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge. This “third space” displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (Rutherford 1990, 211)

This suggests that Antoinette’s hybrid position displaces black Jamaican culture and Western white culture further, questioning the Western notion of the construction of identity based on the Self and the Other. For Bhabha hybridity questions, “master narratives of duality, multiculturalism, and apartheid” (Bhabha 1996, 74) and gives rise to “something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Rutherford 1990, 211). Antoinette’s position in an interstitial space—a new space emerged out of an interaction between the colonial and the metropolitan cultures—seeks a construction of identity based on the displacement of white and black category. Henceforth, Antoinette has to constantly interact and negotiate

between two opposing cultures and undo the binary construct in order to retain her autonomy and existence.

Brontë's depiction of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, a creole mad woman imprisoned in the attic, and her deliberate Othering perhaps infuriate Rhys and enforce her to dismantle the prejudice of Western writer to a creole in Jamaica. Rhys' attempt opens up the avenues to explore Antoinette's mind and, thus helps to understand the elements that drive her to her apparent madness. By giving her a voice to tell her own story, Rhys liberates Antoinette allowing her to express and share how she negotiates and validates her identity amidst the tension of black Jamaican and white European cultures. Furthermore, Antoinette, like Rhys, is able to write back to the European hegemonic discourse that deliberately undermines her recognition and status as a human being. Rhys, by going back to Bertha's life in *Jane Eyre* and exploring her self and identity, creates a counter narrative and subverts the imposed knowledge of a Western text. John Thieme observes:

The practice of writing back to Europe as a strategy for unwriting Empire may be perceived more generally in Caribbean works (contexts) in which a relationship with a pre-text from the European literary canon is not overt, but in which there is nevertheless a clear counter-discursive encounter with the former colonizer. (Thieme 1998, 81)

Moreover, *Wide Sargasso Sea* presents a counter discursive encounter to *Jane Eyre*'s hegemonic perspectives on a Caribbean creole and sheds light on the unspoken experiences and deliberately undermined identity of a marginalized woman. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Mad Woman in the Attic* argue that "the dehumanization of Bertha Mason Rochester, the Jamaican Creole whose racial and geographical marginality oils the mechanism by which the heathen, bestial Other could

be annihilated to constitute European female subjectivity" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, xxxvi). Gilbert and Gubar, in their work, introduce troupes and metaphors to describe women's position in the patriarchal society and question if it is possible to liberate women by using pen, a metaphoric symbol for penis, "What does it mean to be woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority, as we have seen, are overtly and covertly patriarchal" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 45-46). They do not see the possibility of women's complete liberation until women are able to dismantle the narrow patriarchal boundary safeguarded by its language. They suggest that the women writer must break down the patriarchal definition, which reduces women "to extreme stereotypes (angel, monster) drastically conflict with her own sense of her self—that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 48). In *Gilbert & Gubar's The Madwoman After Thirty Years*, Annette R. Federico argues that the image of mad woman has moved away from "cabin'd, cribbed, confined" to cultural and critical domain, however, the fundamental questions remain – "questions about agency, voice, authority, self-knowledge, autonomy; about the hidden injuries of false choices, circumscribed choices, the 'vexing polarities' feminists have identified and fought against" (Federico 2009, 14). Rhys, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, revolves around these fundamental questions of women's liberation and autonomy and seeks to dismantle the prescribed knowledge that women are the other of men.

By positioning Antoinette in a "third space" of a creole identity, Rhys, on the one hand disqualifies the notion of identity based on black/white, colonizer/colonized binary categories, on the other hand, seeks to negotiate between two opposing cultures and find an acceptable space of tolerance for a new hybrid reality. Helen Tiffin argues that, "Post-colonial cultures are inevitably hybridized, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity" (Tiffin 1995, 95).

In order to create identity postcolonial culture invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them. Tiffin further points that, “it has been the project of post-colonial writing to interrogate European discourses and discursive strategies from a privileged position within (and between) two worlds; to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in the colonial domination of so much of the rest of the world” (95). Rhys’ attempts to talk back and write about the silenced subjects subvert the annihilated history and provide agency to her heroine, Antoinette. Through the “canonical counter-discourse”, as Tiffin calls it, Rhys unveils the basic assumption of British canonical text and dismantles the misreading of marginalised characters. Writing back to a Western text, Rhys unsettles the imposed knowledge about a Caribbean creole and critiques the altered image of Antoinette turned Bertha in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.

Postcolonial Caribbean society is not able to address and enhance the expectations of the colonized people after its emancipation but lingers on and sustains in the older residues of colonial project – the divide between white and black, colonizer and colonized. Emancipation does not offer a new structure, power relations and hierarchies but leaves the void for more dangerous clashes and differences. Antoinette’s stepfather, Mr. Mason, an English master of the Cosway plantation, represents the metropolitan English who came to Jamaica to impose order and to make money after Emancipation. When the Black Jamaicans come to burn down Coulibri Mr. Mason can’t do anything to save it. The burning down of Coulibri tears down all the hopes and expectations of Antoinette’s peace and happiness. The death of Antoinette’s parrot, Coco, in the fire foreshadows Antoinette’s doom and subjugation. Both Antoinette and the parrot are controlled and reduced by a metropolitan Englishman who ironically supports the idea of liberation. The parrot’s wings are cut off by Mr. Mason so it can not fly away when the ex-slaves burn the house

as Antoinette describes it, "He made an effort to fly down but his clipped wings failed him and he fell screeching. He was all on fire" (Rhys 1968, 22-23). On the other hand Antoinette's desire for freedom and happiness is restricted with her marriage with Rochester. Antoinette's own society considers her as a white cockroach. Her hope for a better life with a respectful recognition of her identity is continuously challenged. Rochester does not consider her worth of any respect, "I would touch her face gently and touch her tears. Tears – nothing! Words – less than nothing. As for the happiness I gave her, that was worse than nothing. I did not love her" (Rhys 1968, 78). From this point it is clear that Rochester wants to possess her as a commodity, a personal property, which he could manipulate and consume as per his desire. Antoinette is merely an object to fulfill Rochester's passion, his thirst for his sexual needs and his financial greed. He admits that, "The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition. No provision made for her (that must be seen to)" (Rhys 1968, 59). Antoinette is dismissed from any right to the thirty thousand pounds paid to Rochester to marry her. Her financial route is completely cut off leaving Rochester with full authority over Antoinette's financial access consequently disabling her from exercising any of her own power over Rochester. Christophine, one of her maids suggests that, "All women, all colours, nothing but fools. Three children I have. One living in this world, each one a different father, but no husband, I thank my God. I keep my money. I don't give it to no worthless man" (Rhys 1968, 122). Antoinette, however, is helpless and her lack of financial strength weakens her agency and necessitates her dependence to Rochester.

On the one hand, Antoinette is disconnected from her Jamaican society, the black Jamaicans hate her and call her the white cockroach, who does not belong to them. On the other hand, white Europeans do not accept her as a pure white race who represents a European colonizer class. Under these circumstances, Antoinette occupies a hybrid position

belonging neither to Jamaican society nor to the Western European culture. Her condition does not fall under the Western binary category of black/white, colonizer/colonized, but challenges any attempt to understand her identity through the concept of subject/object position. Though she is constantly othered by the existing class and culture, she bears a “third space”, which goes beyond the binary concept and demands a different scrutiny and observation to explore her self and sense of identity. Her position as a hybrid character in a “third space” subverts Western desire to retain “the myth of group purity”, which propagates the endless human history of conquest and annihilation. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002, 35). Bhabha contends that the concept of hybridity describes the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity. In “Cultures– in Between” Bhabha argues:

Strategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the ‘authoritative’, even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign. At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. (Bhabha 1996, 58)

Even though, Bhabha thinks that hybridity opens up the new space of negotiation where the articulation of power could be equivocal, Rhys does not present any possibility of negotiation of West and non-West but pushes them more into an even larger distance and conflictual position in which West is the Self and non-West is the Other. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* argues that, “To be non-Western (the reifying labels are themselves symptomatic) is ontologically [thus] to be unfortunate in nearly every way, before the facts, to be at worst a maniac, and at best a

follower, a lazy consumer who ... can use but could never have invented the telephone" (304). Antoinette is not able to subvert her annihilated designation and her denigration in Brontë's novel but falls into the same discourse which Rhys's claims to challenge. Consequently, Rhys' views remain within the codified discourse of Western hegemonic norm, which deliberately undermines the colonized people as "they", as Said in *Orientalism* argues (Said 1994, 7). Said opines that the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony. Said claims that the West has associated the word West or Occident with the "self" and the word East or Orient with "the other". That is, the West has developed and maintained its own identity through inventing "the other" (Said 1994, 2). Rochester, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, exercises and propagates Western hegemonic power, which consistently denies Antoinette's position as his equal partner but perpetuates to inferiority and commodification. Furthermore, Rochester validates Western hegemonic norm. When Rochester comments about the new place saying: "Everything is too much, I felt as rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger" (Rhys 1968, 42), it is clear that the new place and person failed to match his expectation. He not only negates Antoinette but also all the Jamaican people, their culture and their land.

Antoinette knows that her husband views her as inferior because she's a white creole woman, not a pure European blood. Her husband fulfills his father's desire for him to marry a white creole and inherit a big sum of money. He is paid thirty thousand pounds for marrying Antoinette and it goes as planned as one of Rochester's letters to his father reveals, "All is well according to your plans and wishes" (Rhys 1968, 46). Rochester is expected to play a role of the Western hegemonic power that controls and suppresses a supposedly uncivilized woman. He is never attached to

anything – neither the place nor the girl is he married to. Describing a place set for their honeymoon, Rochester says, “It was all very brightly colored, very strange, but it meant nothing to me. Nor did she, the girl I was to marry. When at last I met her I bowed, smiled, kissed her hand, danced with her. I played the part I was expected to play” (Rhys 1968, 46). Influenced by his father in England, Rochester is merely acting out a formerly conceived plan of possessing a supposedly innocent, beautiful and submissive Jamaican girl. Equally important is the assumption built upon the notion that West is superior to non-West, and has the power to control and consume it without restriction as the Western imperialists possessed the virgin lands, colonized them and exploited to satisfy their greed for power and wealth. Furthermore, Rochester aspires to tame Antoinette as a domestic servant to fulfill his sexual passion and his father’s desire to marry a Jamaican girl, thus inheriting a large sum of money. However, Antoinette resists and consistently denies her husband’s perception of the Jamaican people, their language, their culture and their unique identity. Antoinette’s resistance to Rochester’s authority and her denial to succumb to his patriarchal power clearly displace a “hegemonic centrality of the idea of norm itself” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002, 36), and rejects the vision imposed by historical distinction between metropolis and colony, attesting that the monolithic perceptions are less likely in postcolonial settings. She is aware of the consequences of emancipation and its ugly face. She has gone through the series of tragic events – losing almost everything she possessed; her Coulibri house, her brother Pierre, her mother, and her black friend Tia. Furthermore, Rochester continuously undermines her emotion, her sense of self and attachment to her place and her people, which pushes her further down to an existence of complete alienation. At this point she feels she must act out and speak back against the wrongs she has been made to bear. When she overhears Rochester having sex in the next room with Amélie, one of the black maids at their honeymoon house, her hope

for any negotiation with him breaks down forever. Feeling completely isolated, Antoinette attempts to attack Rochester with a piece of a broken glass of a wine bottle providing Rochester with enough ground to call her mad and lock her up in the attic in his house in England.

Rochester subjects Antoinette to a multiple violence. He removes Antoinette from her cultural origins, dissolves her link to her mother and dismantles her already fractured sense of identity. As Antoinette understands, "Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass" (Rhys 1968, 117). Antoinette's ultimate doom as a prisoner at Rochester's mansion in London is an example of power exercised by a man over a woman. Antoinette's madness is not a result of a degenerate heredity but an effect of patriarchal oppression. Antoinette's deterioration is the consequence of her location in a colonial society, which not only institutionalized slavery but also divided her society on the basis of colour and place of birth. This prejudice makes Antoinette, despite her whiteness, less than English and therefore the Other. However, Antoinette's attempt to tell her story saves her from being misunderstood. Her narration about her situation and her ability and strength to create her story gives her power and autonomy to tell the truth, which otherwise would be told by Rochester or some other person. A reader can easily understand that she is a victim of her society and her husband but Antoinette's effort to shed light on her situation from her own perspective clearly demonstrates her attempt to find identity and recognition in an oppressive, hegemonic, male centred world. Her narration is an attempt to break the Western patriarchal discourses defining women as the "Other". Antoinette, therefore, dares "to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project" (Cixous 2007, 1643) through her story, if not through her actions. Antoinette's story destroys the possibility for Rochester to mislead and misinterpret her condition, "To prevent the false telling of her story by others – the lie –

Antoinette must tell herself in the first person following the conventions of narrative order” (Mezei 1987, 197). The secret of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is Antoinette’s heroic attempt to tell her story. The significant thing about the narrative is not Antoinette’s descent into madness in the figure of the madwoman locked in the attic but rather her reasons of engaging in the act of narration. Antoinette prevents the fabrication of her story by telling it through her own words in first person narrative style. At the end Antoinette awaits for an uncertain future but “By her act of narration, she retains her tenuous fragile hold on sanity, on life itself, since to narrate is to live, to order a life, to ‘make sense’ out of it.” (Mezei 1987, 197). Antoinette’s counter narrative of the Western discourse reinforces and validates her deliberately undermined self and identity as a white creole.

Language becomes one of the important issues that divide the metropolitan centres from the colonial sites. Western ideals perceive English as a standard language so as to measure one of the qualities of being “pure” English, undermining a significant mixture of other languages with English. This notion of a language change by the inclusion of other languages and cultural influence disqualifies the claim of English as “pure” and standard language. Seeing English as a homogeneous language clouds the ability to see linguistic changes, variability, heterogeneity and hybridity as universal features of language. The ideology of language purity and standardization also prevents a language from changing. The implication of a language change or a language being a creole, and therefore inferior is that language is receptive to cultural influences, most notably from colonization and migration. Therefore, English language also becomes a site for constant change and evolution where “constant influence of other languages on English, whether through colonization or through immigration” (Hogg and Denison 2006, 1) brings continuous changes and differences in the earlier uses of English, thus attesting its nature of hybridity and transformability. According to Richard Hogg and

David Denison language gets changed through linguistic factors such as innovation and diffusion and also the extralinguistic factors such as cultural contacts and population movements, therefore language is "hopelessly unstable" phenomenon (Hogg and Denison 2006, 39-40). Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* argue that, "The discussion of postcolonial writing is largely a discussion of the process by which the language, with its signification of authority, has been wrested from the dominant European culture" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002, 7). Rhys' uses a language that expresses the emotions of her characters. Jamaican patois used by some of the black Jamaican characters in the novel presents authenticity because it possesses the character to simplify and eliminate the redundancies of standard language, and because it has the power to express all the communication needs of its speakers. The language used by the black servant, Christophine, and Antoinette's half-brother, Daniel establishes itself as an alien language set against Rochester's standard English. But Rochester, being the representative of the European colonial power, discards the varieties of English in Jamaica and undermines its recognition. When he comments about Christophine, Antoinette's black maid saying "Her coffee is delicious but her language is horrible ... I can't say I like her language" (Rhys 1968, 56-57), he is consciously positioning himself at a higher rank of the colonial power and deliberately negating her language as inferior. It is the denial of an English colonizer's acceptance of the pluralities and differences in language, its contexts and thereby the cultural differences. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue:

The world language called english is a continuum of 'intersections' in which the speaking habits in various communities have intervened to reconstruct the language. This 'reconstruction' occurs in two ways: on the one hand, regional english varieties may introduce

words which become familiar to all english-speakers, and on the other, the varieties themselves produce national and regional peculiarities which distinguish them from other forms of english. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002, 39)

Rhys questions the singularity of English and strengthens her characters through their uniqueness of language and their expressions in Jamaican patois. Rochester's inability to understand and acknowledge patois not only disqualifies him for any of his attempts to know their culture but also distances him from the Jamaican people.

Antoinette's psychological and physical dislocation from her home complicates her desire of remaining attached to her Caribbean society. Even though this society is hostile to her, she enjoys this place. She says, "I love it more than anywhere in the world. As if it were a person. More than a person" (Rhys 1968, 74). Antoinette is more attracted to black culture than the European culture because it seems to give her more freedom and power to live as a human being. Her desire for home in black Jamaica resonates with Rhys' own desire to be a black woman, as Peter Wolfe argues:

As a girl Jean Rhys wanted to be black because blacks enjoyed life more than her fellow whites. Antoinette, too, ... prefers the vibrancy of the blacks to the stiffness, hypocrisy, and profiteering of the English plantation owners and their families. Whereas the other whites seek to subdue Jamaica, Antoinette glories in it – walking through its forests, swimming in its lakes, and gaining inspiration from its beautiful vistas. (Rhys 1981, 137)

Rhys' own words in *Smile Please* testify to her perception of black girls as more liberated than the whites. She says, "Black girls on the contrary seemed to be perfectly free. Children swarmed but negro

marriages that I knew of comparatively rare. Marriage didn't seem a duty with them as it was with us" (Rhys 1981, 51). On the contrary Rochester's perceptions and values are identified as the reflections of the European system of imperial control through which he thinks and acts. He constantly strives to produce a narrative, which appropriates his desire of controlling Antoinette in terms of class as well as sex and race, and confines her in an attic. But Antoinette resists his desire for control by rejecting the ominous name "Bertha" and continuously challenges his ideals about Caribbean people and culture. Her outright denial of Rochester's attempts to rename her Bertha testifies her desire to retain her uniqueness and identity, "in Rhys's novel, Antoinette's actions are justified. Her befuddled mind is the logical consequence of all she has endured, and in the final analysis, as Antoinette walks with the lighted candle down the steps of her tower, she is making a choice for light rather than darkness" (Nunez 1985, 292). Nunez points towards some hope in Antoinette's choice for light but does not see any significant action for a radical break to liberate her and claim her autonomy.

Antoinette gets sympathy of the reader, and her actions may be justified but she is not able to transcend the dichotomy between an angel and a monster, and create her own language to break the boundaries of the Western discourse. Antoinette fails to serve the purpose of the male-centric, Western hegemonic expectations and becomes a victim of the Western patriarchal authority and oppression. Her choices are limited and operate within the premises of colonial power structure. In addition, her hybrid position can only problematize the Western hegemonic understanding built upon the binaries of black/white, colonizer/colonized categories but does not offer her any power to act and make a difference in her life. Even though she is positioned in a "third space", a new space for possibilities for authority and agency, this "third space" becomes just a temporal space for Antoinette to achieve autonomy. "Third space" does not provide a safe ground for Antoinette's identity formation. She is

trapped again in a male-oppression and becomes a victim of a patriarchal dichotomy of male and female differences. Antoinette experiences similar situation as that of her creator, Rhys, who thinks that, "I would never be part of anything. I would never really belong anywhere, and I knew it, and all my life would be the same, trying to belong, and failing" (Rhys 1981, 124). In order to challenge the established structure, and assert her identity and belonging, Antoinette must overcome the boundary of male centric colonial domain by dismantling its prejudices. However, Antoinette only awaits for her liberation dreaming to burn down Rochester's mansion and find her way along the dark passage.

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