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The Subaltern in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Voyage in the Dark* and *Smile Please* by Jean Rhys

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1) INTRODUCTION

Jean Rhys was one of the most prominent female authors of the twentieth century. Due to her hybrid identity, since she was born in the West Indies, on the island Dominica, to a family of white Creoles in the post-emancipation era, her works often discuss the questions of race, gender, social status and identity both in the West Indies, as well as the Metropole- the centre of the British Empire. Her status as a Creole woman in the British society, as well as her position of the Creole writer in the British literary canon, prompted her to comment on the position that she, and other people like her, occupied. Depending on the position of the person who analysing her, she is either white or of mixed race, a woman but not a lady, a daughter of a doctor, but still not a member of the upper class. Her works are impacted by great changes that occurred in the twentieth century. During that period, there were many discussions about the relationship between the Metropole and the colonies and what it meant for those across the Atlantic – the others – that is, those who formed a part of the Empire, but were perceived as second-class citizens. Many of them, just like Rhys herself, travelled to London in order to educate themselves or to find a job, but they were unable to fit into the strict British society and meet the criteria set for them, which resulted in even greater alienation from the mainland and Britain itself that was simultaneously holding and rejecting them. It all culminated during modernism which witnessed the creation of numerous works of art in which artists would express their discontent with the current social order, political issues and perception of nations and cultures. It was a time of the strengthening of national identity and anti-colonialism, especially in the works of female colonial writers – one of whom is Jean Rhys.

Although Rhys touches upon various topics related to colonial life, this paper shall place the focus on Gayatri Spivak's notion of the subaltern and how it manifests itself in Rhys' two novels, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark*, as well as her autobiography, *Smile Please*. More specifically, it will discuss who Rhys perceives as the subaltern and the way in which their inferiority is presented. For that purposes, the term "subaltern" and its significance in the post-colonial literature will be explained with regards to Rhys's characters and their background. Furthermore, the notion of the subaltern will be analysed through the position of the colonials both in the West Indies, as well as in the heart of the British Empire – London. Since they are placed in a *limbo* between occupying both, the position of the colonizer and the colonized, they are rejected by both of the communities. For example, one of the most distinguishable elements of the colonial as the subaltern is the aspect of the skin shade, and its importance in both societies. Furthermore, guided by the idea presented in *Jane*

Eyre that the notion of being a Creole bears bad enough connotations, but that being a Creole woman bears even worse, the paper will discuss the position of the Creole women in both, British and colonial society. The protagonists of all the three works analysed are Creole women of similar background and with a similar experience of the world around them, treated as second-class citizens and left dependant on the men around them. Lastly, this paper shall analyse the notion of home, by applying Jameson's theory of spatial disjunction, and how the land that is unknown to the British affects their perception of the colonials.

2) THE COLONIAL AS THE SUBALTERN

In order to analyse how the notion of the subaltern is developed in the above-mentioned works by Jean Rhys, one must first fully understand what that term implies. One of the most prominent critics to discuss such subject is Gayatri Spivak, who, in her paper "Can the Subaltern Speak", examines the representation of the subaltern in the Western culture and literature. She defines the subalterns as the people who do not form a part of the elite. They are the oppressed ones who do not have the right to tell their story. On the contrary, their story is retold by those who do have a voice – mainly, the oppressors. The oppressed, mostly colonial women, as Spivak analyses, are spoken for by the dominant white males, or as she states, by "white men [who] are saving brown women from brown men" ("The Subaltern" 92). Nevertheless, it is not women they are saving. They are, rather, consolidating with and preserving their imperialistic power, since, by "saving" the women, they are taking away their voice, changing and reshaping their identities so that they take on a role that the dominant culture deems appropriate.

Rhys, too, considered herself to be a victim of the imperialistic system. Although she was a white Creole, she constantly struggled with her identity. She was white, but she wanted to be black, and yet, in London, she was thought to be of mixed race. Her autobiography *Smile Please* reflects the fragmentation of her identity and the process of self-rejection. As presented by Savory in her book *Jean Rhys*, "What her story signifies is the sense of self-rejection and outsider status within her own family circle which was fed perhaps both by her own subversive reaction to restrictive domestic conventions and her internalisation of the ways colonial whites were seen by others" (31). While analysing her autobiography, one should always keep in mind the nature of such mode of writing. Although the reader tends to accept certain events narrated as fact, the truth is, the autobiography should be read as a "subjective truth" (Smith and Watson 13), meaning that, although it may narrate a historical

event, the narrator can still provide his/her version of the event, justify his/her actions, or purposefully distort the truth. Moreover, the memory is rarely reliable, since it can fade and/or trick due to time, as it is the case with *Smile Please*. In *Smile Please* the narrator's experience of the world around her is often contradictory and selective, but she conveys the concerns that are echoed in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, such as those related to gender, skin shade, or descent.

2.1. Who is Creole?

The term "Creole" is very complex, due to its unstable nature and it can differentiate depending on the context and the country where the term is used. One of the definitions provided by *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* states that a Creole is, among other, "a person of European descent born in the West Indies or South America". Nevertheless, there are many problems in regards to this definition. It emphasizes the displacement of a Creole in the New World but it does not specify the ambiguity this term might have regarding the skin colour, nor social status of a Creole. In some countries, a Creole is a person of mixed descent (mostly European and black), while in other countries it refers to a person of European descent, born in the colonies. Therefore, the Creoles are placed in between the colonizers and the colonized. They are the ruling class in the colonies, but they are often looked down upon in the Metropole since they are perceived as *not quite white*, as it was case in the West Indies. As Homi K. Bhabha presents, there is a need the colonizers feel to make the colonized – or, in this case, the Creoles – similar to them. The others are expected to resort to mimicry, in order to improve themselves and come closer to what is supposed to be their ideal – the colonizers. In that process of colonial mimicry a different other should be created, or, as Bhabha explains, the other becomes a subject of "difference that is almost the same but not quite" (130). In other words, even if the Creoles are expected to mimic the white Europeans, they will most certainly be viewed as "not quite/ not right" (Bhabha 132). They might pass as white, but they will never be "white enough", they might speak English, but that is not quite the English they should be speaking. That is, they are almost equal to the Europeans, but not quite.

Rhys was interested in the position of the Creoles in the West Indies, since they are "both there and elsewhere, inheritors of Englishness that are also unequivocally Caribbean and who display unmistakable signs of duality, fragmentation and loss when confronted with the materiality of the metropolitan other" (Murdoch 255). The "otherness" often created a distorted image of the Creole in Britain, since they were perceived as lesser persons (Rhys,

Anna Morgan), or almost animal-like, as it was the case with Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. When Bertha is introduced to the readers, she is presented as a beastly figure, dangerous to the society, completely lacking in self-control. “It was a discoloured face — it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments. [...] The lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed; the black eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes” (Brontë 281). Bertha is perceived as a ghastly figure that evokes no compassion, but rather causes terror in the lives of the people around her. She, a Creole woman, is brought from her native country into a foreign land and locked up under the pretence of having mental illness, therefore, unable to fulfil the roles of wife and mother assigned to her. The unknown, or the other, cannot be comprehended so it has to be rationally explained through familiar experience. Therefore, Antoinette’s behaviour is presented as inherited madness and Rochester is presented as a victim of a cruel game. “Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations? Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard!—as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points” (Brontë 290). Rhys was interested in portraying the unexplored in the character of a Creole woman in the British canon, especially in the modernist/postmodernist era when the already established notions were being questioned. In the words of Murdoch,

By deliberately underlining and interrogating the apparently oppositional tropes of metropolitan and creole identity, both by metonymically relating Rochester to the patterns of colonialism and slavery at work in the Jamaica where he accrued his wealth, and particularly through her complex portrait of the “madwoman in the attic,” this “prequel” to Brontë’s text deliberately destabilizes received, supposedly singular notions of “colonizer,” “colonized,” and “creole” as they were used in 19th-century British prose (256).

Rhys, just as the protagonists in her novels, struggled with her identity, nationality and race. In *Smile Please*, she offers the analysis of the appropriateness of her birth name, Gwendolen, which means “white” in Welsh, in the country where she, as a fair white girl, stands out (4). She struggles to accept her race. As she is surrounded by black servants, she longs to belong, to become a part of the community. Nonetheless, as a white woman of a European descent she possesses higher socio-economic status and therefore cannot associate herself with black servants. On the other hand, she does not consider herself English. She was taught the English language and culture, but she could never perceive it as her own. Moreover, she rejects it, and when asked, she states that she is of Celtic descent to further emphasize her

status of the colonized. As explained by Savory, “[Rhys] rarely mentions Britain or the Celts in her surviving texts, but there is no doubt she constructed herself as Celtic in the context of British society. The Celts, and most especially the Welsh, have historically been the colonised people of Britain.” (26). Therefore, her sense of self had to be established against the ruling national and political identities, which is all but simple. The yearning to belong and to become an integral part of a community is the main cause of the identity crisis in Rhys, as well as her female protagonists; they are not accepted in their native countries while being labelled as the other in the Metropole.

3. NOT QUITE, NOT WHITE

All three of the protagonists of the works analysed in this paper should form a part of the ruling class in the West Indies, since they are born in the ruling white colonizers’ family. However, they are born after the abolition of slavery when the freed slaves start to regain authority, especially in Dominica. The process of Emancipation brings immense problems to European planters; their wealth diminishes and their safety is brought into question. The Creoles’ position is once again uncertain, since they understand the danger that the riots represent for their safety, but they refuse to acknowledge that the root causes of the rioting were the slavery and injustice that the blacks had to suffer during the era of colonialism. There is, in Mardorossian’s words, “the planter class’s typical amnesia” (1075) when it comes to understanding the reasoning behind the riots. Annette, Antoinette’s mother, does not seem to comprehend the reasoning behind the riots nor does she attribute them to the previous events. Nevertheless, she is not as ignorant as her English husband, Mr Mason, who has a completely distorted perception of the events occurring in the West Indies.

‘They are curious. It’s natural enough. You have lived alone far too long, Annette. You imagine enmity which doesn’t exist. Always one extreme or the other. Didn’t you fly at me like a little wild cat when I said nigger. Not nigger, nor even negro. Black people I must say.’ ‘You don’t like, or even recognize, the good in them,’ she said, ‘and you won’t believe in the other side.’ ‘They’re too damn lazy to be dangerous,’ said Mr Mason. ‘I know that.’ ‘They are more alive than you are, lazy or not, and they can be dangerous and cruel for reasons you wouldn’t understand.’ ‘No, I don’t understand,’ Mr Mason always said. ‘I don’t understand at all.’ (*Wide Sargasso Sea* [WSS] 19)

Annette, who was born and lived in the West Indies is aware of the political situation, although she refuses to accept it. She corrects Mr Mason regarding the race designation and his perception of the blacks as *noble savages*. Mr Mason, just as Mr Rochester later, cannot fathom that the British Empire is changing, so they are left vulnerable to all the consequences

of their ignorance. Mason claims that the blacks are lazy and benevolent even during the night when the black rioters arrive to his estate Coulibri, threaten his family and burn his house to the ground, leaving the Mason family fleeing for their lives. Antoinette, although considered a member of the white planter's class, makes a clear distinction between herself and Mason, by calling him "white pappy" (WSS 20). Mardorossian concludes that she did that to offend him (1076), as if she wants to emphasize the difference between the two of them, but he only laughed at it. However, what she did is express her fondness of the West Indies, or black, culture wherein she thought she belonged. The similar sentiment is expressed in all of the three Rhys's works where each of the female protagonists at some point expresses her desire to be black and to become a full-fledged member of the community.

3.1. Wish to be black

In *Smile Please*, the protagonist, upon learning her mother thinks black babies are prettier than the white ones, exclaims: "Dear God, let me be black" (*Smile Please* [SP] 26). The blackness implies inclusivity, a sense of belonging to the native population. On the other hand, the black people Rhys was surrounded with were her nurses and servants that introduced her to the unfamiliar culture. For example, her nurse Meta used the images and myths related to an ancient religion, *Obeah* – such as zombies, *soucriants* (women-vampires) and *loups-garoux* (werewolves) to scare little Rhys so she would behave. On the other hand, a black servant named Francine indirectly introduces her to Obeah by teaching her the incantations before every story filled with jokes and humour. Francine appears as a character in *Voyage in the Dark* – as a black person who once again causes Anna's envy and desire to be black. As Anna claims, "I wanted to be black, I always wanted to be black. I was happy because Francine was there [...]. Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad" (*Voyage in the Dark* [VD] 31). To be black means to be free, while the white people are expected to follow certain rules and behave in a certain way. Anna sees her equivalent in Francine, up to the moment when she gets her period, since that means she has become a woman, like Hester. "Being white and getting like Hester, and all the things you get- old and sad and everything. I kept thinking, 'No... No. . . . No. . . .' And I knew that day that I'd started to grow old and nothing could stop it" (VD 72). Rhys voices her sympathies for the black community and simultaneously excludes herself from it, marginalizing her Creole characters and placing them outside of two opposing worlds. Antoinette is the prime example of such marginalization, since in her childhood she is shunned by a little girl, Tia, who is her equal in everything but the skin tone. Although Antoinette, as a child, seemingly sees beyond

the skin shade when playing, the socioeconomic system taught Tia that they are in fact different, and she proclaims it during their argument,

She hear all we poor like beggar. We ate salt fish - no money for fresh fish. That old house so leaky, you run with calabash to catch water when it rain. Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money. They didn't look at us, nobody see them come near us. Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger. (WSS 14)

Tia voices the concerns expressed in the Creole community, since they are “old time white people” as opposed to the “real white people”, whose authenticity is confirmed through their wealth and ability to live outside of the black community, unlike the Creoles.

3.2. Passing as white

Despite their wish to be black, as descendants of white colonials, Anna and Antoinette's physical appearances allow them to pass, or attempt to pass, as white. Anna is brought to London in order to become a member of the upper social strata, which ultimately proves to be impossible. Although Anna looks nothing like the black population from her island, she has adopted their manner of speaking, behaving and temperament, distinguishing her from Britons and subjecting her to the imperial gaze. The sense of inferiority is constantly placed upon her, as well as the other colonials since they are perceived as intruders who come and take away work from those who “rightfully” deserve it – from the “true” subjects of the British Crown. As Murdoch points out, “As a transplanted, white creole Caribbean subject, [Anna] belongs, in principle, to the colonial elite, and should have been able to inscribe herself into her maternal culture without difficulty. But the colonial surrogate family structure into which she falls provides neither warmth nor welcome” (258). It is almost impossible to inscribe oneself into the culture that refuses to accept her and, moreover, raises concerns whether her blood is as pure as the blood of the members of the middle and high class. Even Hester, Anna's stepmother, brings her genealogy into question, by mentioning the uncle who, as she says, has an offspring in every colour of the rainbow. In the West Indies, it was often the case that the colonizers had sexual intercourse with their black slaves, who would get pregnant and give birth to their illegitimate children. It is referenced in all of the novels analysed in this paper, so it does not surprise that the fear of miscegenation is brought up when determining one's social position. Furthermore, it highlights the racial diversity that took place in West Indies where, according to Mardossian, “the blackness is an effect of the discursive context and not an essential identity is made clear by the various stages

Antoinette's racial identity goes through in Rochester's eyes or by the difference its intersection with class makes in the whites' perceptions" (1085). In other words, the notion of blackness is shifting according to the position and worldview of the subject that is analysing it. Sandi Cosway, although coloured, enjoys the prestige of a white man, while Daniel Cosway is an illegitimate child and therefore, rejected. Antoinette, although a white Creole, is perceived by Rochester as having similar features to a black servant-girl, Amelie, which once again fuels his suspicions that he has been tricked into marrying a girl of mixed race.

The question of race changes the dynamic of their marriage, further alienating and commodifying Antoinette. The marriage between a well-connected British man and wealthy Creole heiress is nothing more than a transaction of goods between two white men, Mr Rochester and Mr Mason. Antoinette has no say in such a transaction, and she is ultimately left powerless. As analysed by Ferguson, "Antoinette has embraced one of the few spaces a powerless woman can occupy – that of the sexually desirable female – now that she has married and thereby relinquished her inheritance. In this one respect, although she is not ostensibly forced, her short, ardently sexual relationship to the 'master' resembles a familiar aspect of the relationship many female slaves endured with white owners" (7). Since the emancipation is well under way, the colonizers can no longer own the slave. However, their marriages to Creole women resemble the master-slave relationship, where the slave's fate depends on the master's volition. Furthermore, this perception of the Creole women as the new version of slaves is echoed in *Voyage in the Dark* as well. One of Anna's features that Walter comments on is her teeth. He admires their shape and health, just as slave-owners and plantocrats used to check the health of slave's teeth before purchasing him. Furthermore, her body is commodified and used for pleasing the master, in this case, Walter, until he no longer needs it. Rochester, on the other hand, does not let go of Antoinette, even when he no longer desires her. To let her go means to lose power, and he cannot fathom it. The last attempt of enslaving Antoinette is changing not only her last name, as it is a custom in marriage, but also her first name from Antoinette to Bertha, as she is later known in *Jane Eyre*, and then to Antonietta-Marionetta. The act of changing Antoinette's name is a very symbolic one, since it takes away the last piece of her identity and persona, leading her into, what he calls insanity. "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that's obeah too" (WSS 88). Antoinette has spent her life with Christophine and knows the power of changing one's name. Once she is locked in Thornfield Hall and watched over by Grace Poole, she once again reflects on the importance of the name, by

stating that Grace's actions do not reflect her name, which should not be the case, since "[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" (WSS 107).

Rochester deliberately asserts his power by changing her name, just as slave-masters changed their slaves' names, thus completing the process of colonization. Spivak comments that "[in] the figure of Antoinette, whom in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rochester violently renames Bertha, Rhys suggests that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism" ("Three Women's Texts" 250). Nevertheless, Rhys, as much as she places emphasis on the naming of the female characters and the process of renaming as a power-move, also denies the male protagonist his name. It is the critics that view *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a prequel to *Jane Eyre* that refer to the male protagonist as Mr Rochester. However, Rhys does not specify it at any point in the novel. Moreover, Spivak denies the claims that Rochester has a rather advantageous position in the novel, since he is the one narrating and dominating the second part of the novel, by saying that "Rhys makes it clear that he is a victim of the patriarchal inheritance law of entailment rather than of a father's natural preference for the firstborn: in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rochester's situation is clearly that of a younger son dispatched to the colonies to buy an heiress" ("Three Women's Texts" 251). While he, as a younger son, is silenced by Rhys, he, nevertheless, establishes his dominance by attempting to silence those that he deems weaker than him, in which he succeeds with Antoinette. Ultimately, the silence does not represent the victory, and, as stated by Mardossian, the one speaking is not always the dominant one, as s/he is usually perceived in the Western culture (1082). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the subaltern – the Creole woman – although silent, still resists and finally breaks free.

4. WOMAN AS THE SUBALTERN

4.1. Rhysian protagonist

As it has been previously stated, Anna and Antoinette are not only subaltern because they are Creole, but because they are Creole women. According to Carr, they were "reputed to be even more corrupt the men [...], they were seen as 'intemperate and unchaste', those harsh condemnatory Victorian words that would drop like dead weights [...]" (46). Creole women were strangers in the country that had been presented as their homeland, a place to which they

should truly belong, more so since they are of the same skin colour and they speak the same language, and yet, they were not “quite” British, or at least, not British enough.

Rhys herself experienced a similar position as a woman and a writer. Having been born in the West Indies and having spent the majority of her adult life in the United Kingdom, she too felt like she did not belong. Her thick accent prevented her from becoming an actress, marking her as different from the rest, and yet, while in her native Dominica, she was considered too pale and too blonde to fit in. Moreover, when she became a writer, she was marginalised once again. According to Johnson, “Rhys holds a peculiar place among modernist writers – the interstitial position of a woman perceived as a 'marginal writer' not quite West Indian, not quite English” (47). Her status as a writer has provoked many debates regarding her position in the literary canon, just as her position as a Creole woman did in the twentieth-century British society. The motif of statelessness, especially from a standpoint of a Creole woman, was often voiced through the principal figures in Rhys’s novels, insomuch as the term “Rhysian protagonist” was employed by literary critics, such as Linett, in regards to the protagonists who are “after all, poor, badly educated, female, and often colonial subjects exiled to the metropolis” (Linett 438). Rhysian protagonist – as in this particular case, Anna and Antoinette – is helpless, unable to change her course of action. When she finally attempts to break free from the moulds imposed on her by the British society, this attempt results in her death – whether literal (Antoinette) or figurative (Anna).

Rhys presents her female protagonists as women whose position of subjectivity is denied. They are restricted by the codes they must obey – an obedient wife, a lady in the society. These are the social figures they should strive to imitate or mirror, and in which they constantly fail to succeed. Antoinette fails to be a wife of a well-connected, but impoverished, British man. Although she attempts to play the role that was assigned to her, her background prevents her from succeeding in it. On the other hand, Anna is constantly reminded by Hester that she has failed to integrate. “I tried to teach you to talk like a lady and behave like a lady and not like a nigger and of course I couldn’t do it. [...] Exactly like a nigger you talked — and still do” (VD 65). Unlike Antoinette, Anna seems to be proud to reject the social norms, or at least those norms that Hester wants to impose onto her. She accepts her marginality in the society, and moreover, defies every male and female character who attempts to label her and her behaviour and moves freely in the space that she should not be occupying. Cunningham recognizes the importance of such defiance and identifies it as one of the motifs in Rhys’s writing,

Rhys's description of the unbecoming of woman represents a disruption of the feminine relationship to patriarchal forms of power[...].Rhys narrativizes negative feminism in her depiction of Anna, a subject who refuses to cohere, who chooses to disintegrate, rather than to activate, the self under the models of femininity available to her. [...] Rhys's depiction of Anna is a deft example of negative feminism; by writing the disintegration of the feminine subject rather than its formation, she offers a critique of patriarchal femininity (390/391).

Much of Rhys's fiction is teeming with indirect critique of patriarchal, or, in this case, British society which is still reliving their glorious days of colonialism and immense economic power, and anyone that threatens the already unstable social structure is deemed an intruder. Rhysian protagonist therefore, reflects the viewpoint similar to the one presented in Virginia Woolf's fiction. Both Rhys and Woolf see their female protagonists as stateless, exploring the cosmopolitanism by roaming the streets, looking at the others, or being looked at (Clukey 439). Anna's occasional walks along the streets of London present the opportunity to comment upon the landscape, architecture and the society into which she has been forced. The process of street-haunting serves as a form of temporary liberation from society's norms. For example, Anna even dares to call the unhelpful officer "a damned baboon – fair baboon, too, worse than a dark one every time" (VD 148). The streets, regardless of the danger they might represent, emphasize Anna's statelessness since she feels free to reverse the racial slur, which she might have come across in her native Caribbean home. Nevertheless, even there, in their birthplaces, the ordinary stroll presents an unordinary activity, since they could be attacked or mocked by the black community which started regaining their authority.

4.2. Creole women: a Hottentot

The motifs and characteristics pertaining to Rhysian protagonist are employed in Rhys's autobiography *Smile Please*, which narrates Rhys' transition from her native island of Dominica to England. The experience of England is described in the chapter, conspicuously named "It began to grow cold", implying not only a change in climate, but also a change in perception of England. The first pages tell a story of a misfit who fails to feel "at home" and grows to resent England, a sentiment voiced in both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark*. As Savory explains, "The idea of definitive national origin and affiliation is a source of anxiety for Rhys's protagonists. For Rhys herself nationality was complicated by her exile and her race: also England did not value her Caribbean origin" (28). Consequently, none of Rhys's protagonists are viewed as English, nor valued as Caribbean. Antoinette tries to introduce the beauty of the West Indies to her English husband; however, her attempts are

futile. Rochester equalizes the wilderness he sees with the untamed spirit of his wife which then results in his contempt and escape to England. Anna, on the other hand, glorifies her birthplace, emphasizing its colours, lifestyle and even her genealogy to everyone around her, yet nobody seems to listen or show any interest. Finally, she is approached by a man who has supposedly visited the West Indies, but he sounds so insincere that she realises she cannot trust anyone, denies her place of origin and claims that she is from Manchester.

Although nobody is willing to listen to her talking about her homeland, Anna's background is often commented on, either by her equals: the other chorus girls, or by those who feel superior to her due to their sense of belonging to the centre of the imperial force. Maudie explains that Anna is always cold because she was born someplace warm, without even trying to define or geographically specify Anna's place of birth. Moreover, the other chorus girls refer to her as a "cow", a "virgin" or a "Hottentot", belittling her as the unworthy colonial woman. The term "Hottentot" is a derogative term for colonials born in the "hot place", insinuating that their characters must, too, reflect the conditions they were living in. That is, their blood boils – they are prone to "bursting" or having manic episodes. Their physical appearance was also analysed. Murdoch states that the term "Hottentot" used to design a perception the Europeans had regarding the colonized – a species between the human and animal, who possesses the most basic of the human needs – mainly, to breathe, to eat, and to procreate. A great emphasis was placed on the female body, which should have had prominent features, especially the body parts related to procreation (261). Lastly, they are the others, the "not quite",

Anna's assimilation to tropical heat-as-difference thus continues a European discursive tradition of creoleness as otherness, with the white subject doubly and paradoxically inscribed as both nonblack and non-metropolitan, its dual framing as that which the other is not rendering it the epitome of the colonial neither/nor. The colonial discursive trajectory, then, centered in the metropole, acts as a discourse of exclusion, trapping subjects like Indiana and Anna in a no-woman's-land of duality, difference, and exclusion (Murdoch 261).

Anna navigates through the no-woman's land by constantly shifting from wanting to make it on her own to looking for the acceptance and protection from men. She interchanges the necessity to belong to England with the need to be needed, or at least desired. At the beginning of modernism, when the austere British society just begun the transition from their Victorian beliefs and norms, sexuality was still a taboo topic. As stated by Atherton, "In Rhys's novel, the tension between what is imposed upon women and what they instinctively

desire leaves women confused and disorientated, on a journey that does not lead to any sense of clarity or empowerment, as is implied by the title” (151).

The class system presents Anna with only two options – to be a lady or a prostitute. Due to her position of a chorus girl, Anna is leaning towards the latter. At one point in the novel, she comes home late one day, and her landlady calls her a tart, “I don’t want no tarts in my house, so now you know” (VD 30). The proclamation firstly insults Anna, but she later accepts it as a badge of honour. Since she cannot and will not be the lady Hester always wanted her to be, she will lead her life the ways she wants it. When she meets a wealthy Londoner, Walter, she plays the role, claiming she is not a virgin, which sounds improbable, even to him. Nevertheless, they commence a relationship in which she exchanges her virginity for a financial stability. Although having accepted the role of the “fallen woman”, she attempts to adapt to the role tailoring it according to her needs. The book Anna Morgan reads in the opening pages of *Voyage in the Dark*, Zola’s *Nana*, represents the character Anna wants to become; Nana is determined, highly sexual and uses every man she can to quench her lust and move upwards. Nonetheless, Anna comes to represent her opposite. According to Murdoch, “[While] Nana is depicted as triumphant, “devouring” Parisian masculinity and its attendant wealth [...] Anna (itself an anagram of Nana) comes across as a victim, one almost verging on the pathetic, who accepts money for favours while, from a social perspective, she succeeds only in running in place” (260). Having failed to be a lady and a prostitute, she strives to reinvent her identity, which untimely leaves her running in circles.

4.3. Creole women: a Marionette

In her attempt to build her own persona, Anna Morgan extends her role of a chorus girl to her whole life. The very first line of *Voyage in the Dark* is the following: “It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known” (VD 7), emphasizing the metaphor of the theatre, where the first act has ended and the new one is about to begin. Just as she does her hair and make-up before going up on the stage, she gets ready before going to town. Her growing obsession with her clothes and overall appearance demonstrate her wish to play the role she has set for herself. Every once in a while, Anna makes a remark regarding the poor state of her current clothes, and fantasizes about new pieces she would buy once she has money, and the status it will bring her. Her state of mind is reflected through Maudie’s words, “She looked at my dresses and kept saying, ‘Very ladylike. I call that one very ladylike indeed. And you’ve got a fur coat. Well, if a girl has a lot of good clothes and a fur coat she has

something, there's no getting away from that'" (VD 45). However, all of her performance is directed towards attracting male attention and being desired. She gets almost disappointed when her effort to look nice is not noticed by Walter, so she keeps asking him about her appearance and enticing compliments regarding her physical appearance. The moment when he refuses to indulge her is the moment their relationship goes awry, "I was so nervous about how I looked that three quarters of me was in 'a prison, wandering round and round in a circle. If he had said that I looked all right or that I was pretty, it would have set me free. But he just looked me up and down and smiled" (76). Anna's life resembles one of a marionette in the theatre, where her looks define her value and her choices are approved by the director – a man.

On the other hand, Antoinette does not express a wish to be desired by a man to such an extent as Anna does, but she does accept the role of being Rochester's wife, sexual desire being one of them. Nevertheless, since by way of the act of marriage she has forfeited her legal and symbolic power, Rochester becomes the director of her life's story, and every suspicion raised regarding Antoinette's background makes him impose his dominance even more. First, he villainizes her, or as explained by Fayad, he makes her his Eve, "He starts with the basics. Swiftly, writing out a familiar scenario, he starts his projections by creating an Eve. Bound by his Victorian attitude towards sex, he presents in Antoinette a temptation that he, at best, feels ambivalent towards [...]" (232). Furthermore, he starts discovering family secrets and creating his own version of Antoinette, blaming her for every seemingly fantastic event, associating it with the Obeah she must have learnt from Cristophine, equalizing her character with the character of her schizophrenic mother and he starts calling her by her mother's name, Bertha. Finally, he makes her passive, calls her a marionette, since she has no longer any right to make any decisions regarding her life, "I could see Antoinette stretched on the bed quite still. Like a doll. Even when she threatened me with the bottle she had a marionette quality" (WSS 90). Her role is completely reduced to the one of a passive doll, doing what she is told, without any resistance. She cannot, or does not want to, run away from him, letting him completely overtake her and control her actions, just as a real string marionette, "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. Or *could*. Then lie so still, still as this cloudy day. A lunatic who always knows the time. But never does" (WSS 99).

Antoinette has become a marionette in Rochester's eye, but in the Caribbean culture, her passivity can be perceived as becoming a zombie-like figure. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the

Obeah defines the “zombi” as “a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead” (64). In other words, the state of being a zombie is perceived as deep slumber, disorientation, state on the verge of life and death. Since Antoinette is already enslaved by the traditional norms imposed by marriage, Rochester takes her identity away, piece by piece, until she is completely stripped of her humanity as well as the ability to speak, and left as a character of a mad ghost roaming the halls of Thornfield Hall. The man has imposed his dominance over the woman, and his triumph is complete,

If I was bound for hell, let it be hell. No more false heavens. No more damned magic. You hate me and I hate you. We'll see who hates best. But first, first I will destroy your hatred. Now. My hate is colder, stronger, and you'll have no hate to warm yourself. You will have nothing. I did it too. I saw the hate go out of her eyes. I forced it out. And with the hate her beauty. She was only a ghost. A ghost in the grey daylight. Nothing left. (WSS 102)

Antoinette is placed outside of the West Indies, outside of society, and out of sight, into her windowless room in the attic. She mentions that she does not even have the looking glass to see how she looks now (WSS 107). She was also denied a looking glass when she was schooled in the convent on the pretence that it promotes vanity. The symbol of the mirror is prevalent in many of the Rhys's books, indicating the duality and split personality of her protagonists. Emery explains that, in Rhys's works, there is always some kind of indication of split personality, be it the reflection in the mirror, in the window shops, paintings, which visually represent the internal conflict in the protagonist and confirming their status of a misfit (xiii). Antoinette first sees her mother constantly checking herself in the mirror to assure herself of her beauty and of the power she should represent, regardless of the black community that has started regaining their power. Furthermore, Antoinette looks at Tia as her black counterpart, with nothing separating them except for their skin-tone, which in the end comes to be an insurmountable difference. However, in the scene where the Cosways are banished from burning Coulibri, the two girls, although on the opposite sides, mirror one another; one is hurt and rejected while the other is hurting, and rejecting, a mirror-reversed image. Lastly, both Antoinette and Anna have to affirm their identity, their position in the society by looking at their reflection in the mirror; Antoinette recalls a scene from the convent where a nun checked her reflection in water, “smiling to see if her dimples were still there” (WSS 33), as to see whether she is still herself. In the final scene where Antoinette breaks free from the attic room, she sees her reflection, “It was then that I saw her – the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her” (WSS 112).

Having affirmed her identity, she reclaims the symbolic power taken from her, awakes from her zombie-like slumber and plunges to her liberation.

The reliance on the male figures in the lives of Antoinette and Anna ultimately leaves them without any agency; they become marionette-like, depending of the money and their approval, until they recognize their passivity and attempt to regain the power. While Antoinette ultimately succeeds, Anna remains unable to change the course of the downward spiral of her life and she is “sentenced” to relieve it all over, to be born again. However, it was not Rhys’s original decision. In the original version of *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna was supposed to die due to the complications during abortion, since death is presented as an act of breaking free. Nevertheless, Rhys’s *male* editor decided that the ending was too dark and as such, it would not please the audience, so Rhys was forced to rewrite it. Consequently, Jean Rhys, just as her female protagonists “was denied agency; her destiny was also controlled by patriarchy, and she was doubly disempowered, having no authority over her own or her protagonist's life, within or without the text” (Atherton 159).

5. HOME AS A PLACE OF OTHERNESS

The notion of space is a neglected but rather important one in critical texts that deal with modernism and postmodernism, since it pinpoints one of the main preoccupations of that time: where to locate the Others, the ones who politically belong to the Empire but they are not accepted by those living in “the homeland”. In other words, the understanding of space aids in comprehending the connection between imperialism and modernism. As Jameson explains,

The relationship of domination between First and Third World was masked and displaced by an overriding (and perhaps ideological) consciousness of imperialism as being essentially a relationship between First World powers or the holders of Empire, and this consciousness tended to repress the more basic axis of otherness, and to raise issues of colonial reality only incidentally. (40)

Since the booming economy of the British Empire was mostly based on trade of goods and commodities imported from the colonies, the recognition of the other could not be neglected for long. The rise of capitalism saw the translocation of the centre of the market place, such as London: the industry is no longer located in industrial cities, but rather somewhere away, in places unfamiliar to the subjects of the Empire. It created a “spatial disjunction” (51), a term used by Jameson to explain the impossibility of understanding an important part of British imperialism. The Britons would never be able to grasp the course of life in colonies, the exploitation, unfairness, or rather “the structural connections between that

and this, between absent space and daily life in the metropolis” (Jameson 51). He later concludes that

This new and historically original problem in what is itself a new kind of content now constitutes the situation and the problem and the dilemma, the formal contradiction, that modernism seeks to solve; or better still, it is only that new kind of art which reflexively perceives this problem and lives this formal dilemma that can be called modernism in the first place. (51)

Rhys was aware of the relationship of the space with what is present and what is absent in the literature. As previously stated, her works reflect the life on the verge of being English or the other, white or not quite white, a lady or a prostitute, the dichotomies that were mostly ignored in the works written in that time period. In order to underline the difference between the metropolis and the space that was absent from writing, or the “Jamesonian spatial gap” (Johnson 48), Rhys emphasises the notion of space. Her protagonists are representatives of the space that is *there somewhere*, (mis)placed in the metropolis, they look on the world around them through the perspective of their homeland. Although the Creole protagonists, Anna and Antoinette, were taught about the British culture and landscape, they could not fully perceive it, or they romanticized it in order to like it, which ultimately failed.

5.1. The West Indies as home

Anna Morgan was taken to London against her own will after her father’s death. Having seen the city she was taught about, she cannot but feel disappointed with its dullness and repetitiveness. Anna sees whole London as a place of commotion of people, houses and street where everything looks exactly the same. “There was always [...] a grey stone promenade running hard naked and straight by [...] a Corporation Street or High Street or Duke Street or Lord Street where you walked about and looked at the shops” (VD 8). The emphasis is placed upon the city structure as well as the names that in a way demonstrate what is appreciated: male titles associated with patriarchy and rigidity of the system and the commerce that brought the money necessary for building the city. On the other hand, Anna describes her native Dominica as colourful, vibrant, and full of life. Atherton makes a connection between Anna’s open expression of sexuality or the repression she feels in England and the climate difference, which she “links symbolically with the difference between her country of birth and England, the former suggesting a climate conducive to expressions of primal and unbridled carnality, whilst grey, urban England with its cold formalities and strict codes of etiquette, demands the suppression of such desires” (153). Not

only is the city grey and cold, but both Anna and Antoinette, upon arriving to London, are enclosed in spaces provided by men; in the beginning, Anna supports herself with the minimum salary she receives, but once she is courted by Walter, she quickly becomes accustomed to lavish lifestyle. She is aware of the importance of money and the social position and how it reflects in one's lodging, and she strives to afford an accommodation as near as the city centre as possible, but to do so, she trades her virginity for financial security and luxurious lodgings, which last as long as her relationship with Walter. On the other hand, Antoinette's lodging shrinks as she grows older, first moving from her estate Coulibri where she was free to roam, to the monastery provided for by her father, to the honeymoon house where she finally surrenders her power to her husband, to her final lodging at the Thornfield Hall attic, with no door or mirror, leaving her only with her red dress as the last proof of her identity.

The importance of the red dress or the colours in general, is stressed in both *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Savory explains Rhys's colour coding and the importance of red colour as follows. "Most of the time, colour coding is consistent throughout Rhys's texts (including her draft and her letters), though a single colour often has a number of important meanings. For example, she exploits the conventional signification of red as passion, [...] though there are many subtle uses to which she puts it (88). Red in Rhys's writing represents not only passion, but life, vigour and power. When Antoinette's half-brother Richard claims he does not recognize her, she is certain that he would have recognized her if she was wearing her red dress. When she manages to escape the room in the attic, she sees red everywhere, indicating the freedom she might have. Lastly, she lights the fire and sees red sky, which reminds her of all the colours of the West Indies. "[...] I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it" (WSS 112). The final fire symbolizes the awakening from her zombie-like state and reclaiming her life. In contrast to the redness of fire and the life that it brings to Antoinette, for Anna, once she is about to give herself to Walter, there is no passion left in her, the fire is out. "I lay there for a long while, listening. The fire was like a painted fire; no warmth came from it. When I put my hand against my face it was very cold and my face was hot" (VD 24). When the fire goes out, what is left is greyness and cold. The colour grey is very symbolic in Rhys's writing because it becomes almost a synonym for lifelessness of London. Apart from Anna's and Antoinette's experiences, Rhys, too, in her autobiography employs the colour grey to contrast the dullness of the metropolis with the vibrant and lush colours of the vegetation on her native Dominica.

“I looked for one bit of warmth and colour but couldn't find it” (SP 87). The tall apartment complexes and business centres leave no room for vegetation, especially of the kind that is found in the West Indies, the one that Rhys often refers to in her works.

In *Smile Please* there is a whole analysis of the plants and vegetation in general, where the narrator describes the garden on her estate Geneva, that Rhys claims inspired the description of vegetation in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She depicts, in great details, the smell of frangipani flowers, plants in her garden, their colours, type and how each of them is special in their own way. Once in England, the plants are no longer named nor described, they are perceived by the English only as a type of decoration, nothing more. Anna attempts to change their, or in this case Walter's, point of view. When he points to the white flowers, or as he calls them “these little bright sweet things” (VD 77) and asks Anna whether there are similar flowers in her native Caribbean, she demonstrates her knowledge regarding flora, as well as her inability to transfer her emotions regarding the subject. “I said, ‘Not quite like these.’ But when I began to talk about the flowers out there I got that feeling of a dream, of two things that I couldn't fit together and it was as if I was making up the names. Stephanotis, hibiscus, yellow-bell, jasmine, frangipanni, corolita.” (VD 77/78). She almost feels ashamed for naming the plants, since in England nobody really cares about the names, let alone her description of said flowers. In the minds of the English, the vegetation there, far away in the unknown, is lush, and that is all there is about it. The plants Anna sees in London are artificial, nameless. And yet, they seem to fit into the hostile environment Anna experiences in London, since their leaves are stretched and sharpened, reminding Anna of the spiked iron railing on the streets of London that threaten, delineate, prohibit the entrance to those unwanted, the others. Antoinette, once brought to England, has no experience of vegetation, since she is locked in one room; however, upon arrival, she sees “grass and olive-green water and tall trees looking into the water. This, I thought, is England” (WSS 109). As soon as the colour scheme changes from bright vibrant colours to dark, murky shades of green, yellow and grey, it is the sign that the setting has changed from the West Indies to England

The change in colour scheme and the setting is emphasized insomuch that it almost becomes idealised by the Rhysian protagonists. The memories of their birthplaces are no longer memories, they become a living, organic thing, a part of their identities, a place of comfort and all of the protagonists, in their darkest hours, resort to escapism. Antoinette, once trapped in the attic, relieves her childhood through the faint scent of her dress. “The smell of vetivert and frangipanni, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering. The

smell of the sun and the smell of the rain”(WSS 108). The scents are a rare proof of her life before becoming imported commodity, a reminder of happier times. Just as Antoinette, Anna too has flashback to her previous life when faced with the abortion-related complications. Affected by blood loss, Anna has a hallucination of a carnival she saw as a little girl, but this time the carnival features not only masked characters, but also people and events from England, which adds to the overall feeling of nausea and dizziness, until it all ends in a welcoming darkness. The motif of the carnival signifies the final freedom to be whoever she wants to be, away from any prescribed norms, or, as explained by Murdoch, “Carnival is inherently a postcolonial celebration of identity, multiplicity, and ethnic and historical survival, in which subversion, parody and performance play equally critical roles in defining and disseminating a national sense of self” (269). By returning to the carnival, she, just as Antoinette does by putting on her red dress smelling of frangipani, reclaims her Caribbean identity.

5.2. The West Indies as a colony

Although Antoinette and Anna struggle with their Caribbean identity, especially in England, they do not lose it at any point. Moreover, Anna underlines it in every moment possible, not only by describing it to the other, but also by specifying the position of Dominica on the world map. “Lying between 15° 10' and 15° 40' N. and 61° 14.' and 61° 30' W. A goodly island and something highland, but all overgrown with woods” (VD 17). It is the urge to bridge the Jamesonian spatial gap, to (re)present the world of the others, there somewhere. However, in order to do that, everything has to be simplified, in a way, or at least be comparable to the English experience, or else it won't be understood by the English, or even more, it will be considered threatening to the existing order.

The primary example for such behaviour is the male character in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Mr Rochester, who arrives to the West Indies on, what feels like, a neo-colonizing mission. His family has the necessary social connection, but they lack money, so they sent the younger son (therefore, not the heir) to marry a rich Creole heiress for her dowry. A similar event occurred when Antoinette's mother married a British man. Such a transaction is greeted only by those who benefit from it, while the guests insightfully comment, “Dance! He didn't come to the Caribbean to dance – he came to make money as they all do. Some of the big estates are going cheap, and one unfortunate's loss is always a clever man's gain” (WSS 17). Therefore, Rochester is almost forced to travel across the sea into the unknown land, so his contempt and

ignorance regarding the West Indies reflects his bitterness regarding the situation. He describes the language he hears as a “debased French patois” (WSS 39), meaning it is not nearly as estimated and elaborated as English language. Since it is not known, it must be dangerous. Rochester believes that all of the characters seem to speak patois when they want to hide something. It makes him fear the conspiracies they may be plotting against him, and leads him to believe that every communication in patois, especially between Cristophine and Antoinette is, in fact, plotting, “But whatever they were singing or saying was dangerous. I must protect myself” (WSS 90). Nevertheless, the power is in the number, and when similar dialects are spoken in England, they are not only considered threatening, but also distinguishing, since they determine one’s origin thus labelling them as the other. In that sense, Hester is adamant about Anna’s dialect and manner of speaking, since she is aware of the fact that it distinguishes her from the other ladies who do not talk “like niggers” (VD 65). It is a feature that is alluded to in Rhys’s autobiography, where she stated she had to leave the Academy of Dramatic Art since she could no longer afford it, while reality is, according to Savory, that “Rhys was rejected by the theatre school because of her West Indian accent and failure to accommodate to the expected standard British voices then thought essential to an actor’s employability” (10). Therefore, the language, the dialect and the accent affect the way the British perceive the colonials, be it as the other, the subaltern, or as a threat.

It is not only the people from the West Indies that intimidate the British, but the mere landscape seems to provoke uneasiness in those who are visiting it for the first time. Rochester describes his experience of the island as follows, “Everything is too much, I felt as I 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” (WSS 41). It is a different sentiment than the one the reader experiences while reading Antoinette’s account of her childhood and the landscape that defined her as a person. The landscape in the West Indies, as beautiful as it might be, represents the untamed territory, just as his wife. As explained by Savory, “The physical and spiritual landscape of Caribbean topography and climate and cultural identity interconnect: In Antoinette’s husband’s mind there is a fear of brightness which is threatening because he cannot control it as he has learned to control himself” (145). The wilderness, the lushness cannot be contained or controlled, and that kind of disobedience terrifies the English. Hester escapes the West Indies the first chance she has, taking Anna with her and forcing her into the familiar symbolic order, recreating the colonizer-colonized relationship that occurred in a similar fashion just decades ago. Rochester, on the other hand, attempts to symbolically

recolonize the West Indies, but he is met with counter-attack by both the black population and the Creoles. His frustration with the failure is echoed though the threats he seems to find everywhere: in the staff's whispers, Christophine's Obeah, Daniel's letters, and finally in the nature itself.

I was tired of these people. I disliked their laughter and their tears, their flattery and envy, conceit and deceit. And I hated the place. I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it. (WSS 103)

The only way to escape from colonization is to colonize, and that is what Rochester does. He physically escapes back to England, to safety and stability of the order, taking Antoinette with him. Since she is the one who is now the other, alienated and placed outside of the system, she is labelled as a madwoman.

Finally, the fear of the subaltern, the necessity to colonize them and look down on them is perfectly expressed through the titles of all of the three Rhys's works analysed in this paper. *Smile Please* refers to the first memory narrated in the autobiography when the narrator has to pose for a photographer. Posing and standing still seems as a difficult task for a little girl, but she has to stand still otherwise the photos will not come out the way they are supposed to. Similarly, she, as well as other Rhysian protagonists, is expected to put on a façade or to be someone she is not when in Britain. All of them have to adopt a new manner of speaking, completely ignoring their dialects, they have to behave as proper British ladies and obey the rules they do not understand. The meaning behind the title *Voyage in the Dark* is quite similar. Although, according to Savory, the novel's working title was *Two Tunes* since it distinguishes between two worldviews – the British/colonizers and the others/colonized. Nevertheless, Rhys finally opted for the title *Voyage in the Dark*, since, as stated by Savory, it places “critical connection between emotions and the perception of colour which is the fundamental key to this complex essay on race, gender, class and nationality as they play on sexuality” (90). Anna persistently compares the colours, landscape and people in the West Indies with those in England, while she keeps going in circles, or rather downward spiral which ultimately lead to the reassuring darkness. Lastly, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is perhaps the most indicative of the relationship between the colonials and the colonizers, since Sargasso Sea is a part of the Atlantic Ocean that has no shores, but it is delineated by four sea currents. The Sea

lacks in planktons, which is the main food supply to fish; the only form of life that excels there is a seaweed named Sargassum that reproduce mostly by fragmentation, and not sexually as the majority of plants, floating on the surface and, allegedly, ensnaring the ships that travel through the Sea. Ferguson concludes that the name of the novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is indicative that “[these] colonizers, old and new, the name suggests, cannot reproduce themselves. They can only engender further distorted self-images” (13). The colonizers have become a dying species and their power is diminishing whether they accept it or not. They cannot thrive in a new space but they drift helplessly in the system they know, entrapping everything and everyone that is different.

6. CONCLUSION

The notion of difference is the main motif in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as well as *Smile Please*, where it is explored in various terms – the difference in race, gender, social position or place of birth – all of which makes the Creoles subaltern in comparison with the ruling class. Jean Rhys was interested in representing the Creole women and inscribing them both into the literature and dominating societies. Nevertheless, they were perceived as the others, the not quite, incomprehensible, and ultimately, unworthy of the attention. Therefore, their identity was two-sided. On one hand, they were the ruling class in the West Indies, with their power diminishing with the growing emancipation of the black people, while on the other hand, they were taught English language and culture, and yet, they could not properly fit in. The Rhysian protagonists express the desire to go native, to be black, but their socioeconomic status does not allow it. Yet, when arriving to the Metropole, even though they can pass as white, they are the subaltern. Their bodies are commodified, and their relationships with white men resemble that between a master and his slave-woman. Moreover, the nature of their relationships is such that their virginity is traded and their identity is changed in order for their partners to gain full control over them. They are transformed into marionettes who are putting a performance, or they are placed into a zombie-like state, only to awaken, enticed by the smells and memories from their childhood home, and claim their freedom. The homeland is the symbol of vibrating life-force, since it is plentiful in vegetation and colours, opposite of the grey, orderly, sterile England.

To conclude, in the works analysed, Rhys acknowledges and analyses the particularity of the Creole women, especially in regards to the new period of postmodernism, the period of rapid changes and realization that the British Empire is no longer as stable as it has once been.

Rhys herself was often ambiguous and conflictive regarding her identity and the questions of identity, which reflects both in her autobiography, as well as her novels. Critical of the imperialism and the way the imperialistic powers perceived those that were placed above the familiarity of their known world and sphere, she presents the stories of the Creole women and gives them the ability to speak.

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ABSTRACT

Jean Rhys was interested in portraying the unexplored in the character of a Creole woman. Her novels *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark*, as well as her unfinished autobiography *Smile Please* employ the notion of difference as the main motif: the difference in race, gender, social position or place of birth – all of which makes the Creoles the subaltern in comparison with the ruling class. The subalterns do not have the right to tell their stories- the dominant culture takes away their voice and reshapes their stories. The position of the Creole, where they are placed in the “limbo”, between the colonizers and the colonized makes them unfamiliar, strange, and almost animal-like in the eyes of the British. However, in the 20th century, although being Creole was bad enough, being Creole woman was even worse- they were presented as unchaste and intemperate. They express the desire to go black, to belong to the native communities; however that is impossible due to their socioeconomic status. On the other hand, they cannot pass as white, since the British society perceives them as lesser humans, due to their peculiar accent and the possibility that they are of mixed race. Their bodies are commodified, they are perceived almost as slave-women, the marionettes, the zombies, unable to control their destinies, waiting to be awakened by a memory of their homeland. Rhys, as a Creole woman herself, was, too, ambiguous and conflictive regarding her identity and her nationality. The question of the difference and sense of belonging prompted her to discuss the position of the Creole women and their place in the society of the 20th century, as well as represent the space that is “there somewhere”, unfamiliar to the British. Critical of the imperialism and the way the imperialistic powers perceived those that were placed above the familiarity of their known world and sphere, she presents the stories of the Creole women and gives them the ability to speak.

KEY WORDS: post-colonialism, Jean Rhys, the subaltern