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The Past Still Present: Gender, Racial Identity, and Double Colonialism in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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ABSTRACT

The themes of gender and racial identity and their treatment in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* fundamentally inform both novels in uneasy ways that this essay argues hold enormous contemporary importance. In particular, the authors' use of the framework of colonialism produce what, when read from postcolonial perspectives, necessarily creates tensions in the novels between characters that represent the colonists and those of the indigenous characters. These tensions are analyzed through postcolonial theories of hybridity and notions of Other to consider the impacts of these tensions and whether these still exist. However, aligned with these gender and racial tensions is the way the novels' treatment of gender specific consciousnesses, in terms of racial identity, become evident as female characters are made to suffer a double sense of oppression within post-colonial narratives, a condition which I term here "double colonialism," a condition which this essay further argues still lingers today.

Keywords: Gender, racial identity, double colonialism, post colonialism, hybridity.

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The themes of gender and racial identity and their treatment in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* fundamentally inform both novels in uneasy ways that this essay argues hold enormous contemporary importance. In particular, the authors' use of the framework of colonialism to produce what, when read from postcolonial perspectives, necessarily creates tensions in the novels between characters that represent the colonists and those of the indigenous characters can be analyzed through postcolonial theories of hybridity and notions of Other to consider the impacts of these tensions and whether these still exist. However, aligned with these gender and racial tensions is the way the novels' treatment of gender specific consciousnesses, in terms of racial identity, become evident as female characters are made to suffer a double sense of

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oppression within post-colonial narratives, a condition which I term here “double colonialism.” Double colonialism occurs in the novels when patriarchal hegemony combines with colonial subjugation of female characters, thus revealing both embodied senses of gender and race that are relegated to a kind of entrapment which is loaded onto the usual negative treatment of racial identity. For example, the unnamed “Rochester”-like character in *Wide Sargasso Sea* robs the Creole Antoinette of her name by preferring to call her “Bertha” (an intertextual reference to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*) simply because he is “fond” of the name. Since, in the nineteenth century, women gained their status from what society permitted, principally from their relationships with men, usually through their father, marriage, or other arrangement, the fact that Rhys deprives the Rochester character a name, while Rochester denies Antoinette her own, demonstrates an inversion of nineteenth-century socio-cultural (and gender) norms. Rhys’ narrative thus represents a critique of the ethos of the society which permitted, indeed endorsed, such double colonialism. In addition, the changing or denying a person of a name, and therefore a sense of their identity, was also very much a feature of the culture of slavery. Hence, the dominance of double colonialism as oppressing Antoinette further represents a form of slavery as drawn in both gendered and racial terms for, as Rhys writes, Antoinette is “a person without lines of social mobility.” This form of entrapped identity appears as well in Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* as “language and culture [are] key racial markers” within both texts.

Indeed, the double colonialism prevalent within both texts reveals the hybrid form of colonial hegemony, as it moves far beyond colonizing a nation and its people for economic exploitation to the added strictures of racial and gender oppression. From a perspective of postcolonial theories it was the hybrid nature of colonial rule that caused a shift in power, destabilising the way that those in power thought of the indigenous peoples. The colonists’ view of both racial and gender identity is evidenced through the characters of Antoinette and Rochester, the misnamed and unnamed, respectively. In addition, the tensions embedded within the interracial relationships in both the *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The Grass is Singing* speak to the complex, hybrid nature of both the colonists and the indigenous peoples depicted. Postcolonial theorist, Homi Bhabha (2005) has called this hybrid condition an example of a way in which the colonists were “the better to exhibit the eye of power.” The narratives’ recognition of the subjugation of indigenous people, coupled with the deprivation of their identity, thus offers a deeper understanding of the effects of colonialism when analyzed through a postcolonial perspective.

This hybrid nature of identity inherent in double colonialism in the two novels is further revealed in the way the characters relate to the land. In essence the indigenous peoples are deprived of their relationship with the land, which, in a palimpsestic manner, has been written over, covering both their personal and national identity through the fragmentation of the colonization. A disruption in the indigenous peoples’ ability to connect with their natural home and its numinous presence, is further evidence of a dislocation of racial identity colonisation brought about. In several ways, this break from the land for the indigenous characters creates a sense of fear for the colonists; therefore their need both to restrict and confine access is evidenced by Rhys when the former Antoinette is transported from her native land by her husband, in ways similar to the character of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, and confined as a “threatening presence confined to an attic room.” In this intertextual reference, Rhys thus creates a “complex trope of the relation between northern white feminisms and post-colonial feminisms.” In a very real sense, then, when the indigenous person is displaced by the colonist, by claiming the indigenous peoples’ land and/or subjugating the people themselves, a fragmentation of self occurs which is akin to the geographical dislocation experienced by the imprisoned Antoinette/Bertha. In addition, the identification of the indigenous person with the land becomes dislocated.

The fact that the subjugated indigenous peoples represented in Rhys’ novel are also female makes the oppression doubly painful as well as impossible to escape. This affecting representation of double colonialism comes from Rhys’ own perspective which is Creole, and, as Veronica Marie Gregg (1995) has argued, thus “articulates the political values and the emotional and psychological investments embodied in this colonialist discourse.” Rhys also notably grounds her authority in “the social, political, and historical existence of colonialism and the colonialist/colonizing discourses, which remain even when the political structures have been removed.” In fact, it could be argued that, in ways

similar to Maria Edgeworth and the Irish Ascendancy, Rhys has an embedded duplicity of perspective, especially in the ways she represents black and mixed-race characters. Although Rhys states that the perspectives in her novel are not always her own:

If her own thinking is different from that of her texts and ‘characters,’ there are certain recurrent attitudes: the mulatto woman is often tragic, victimized, sometimes beautiful, and often silent. This is unlike the white female characters, who always resist at some level and who are never silent. The maids are always dark-skinned and are either very ‘good’ (that is, loyal, loving, selfless, black mammy types) or very ‘bad’ (indifferent, resentful, or hostile to the Creole). Black and mixed-raced people do not exist autonomously. The forms of (Creole) selfhood that Rhys’ writing elaborates are racially inflected. The profoundly racialized, even racist, structure of her imagination insistently reveals itself in her use of West Indian ‘black people’ as props to the Creole identity and as cultural objects. (Gregg, 1995, p. 37)

What is especially interesting to consider is whether the imperatives that inform the racial relationships within these novels still exist today, or are they instead more appropriately consigned to a period of history which can no longer be said to exist beyond the literary imagination? This essay, in fact, argues that a postcolonial reading makes impossible the total obliteration of any remaining resonance of the kinds of racial relationships described within these novels. The effects that years of colonisation had upon indigenous peoples, in part which these novels describe, cannot be easily erased. The effects of colonialism, such as hybrid identity, civilising the barbarian, and the concept of indigenous people as essentially other, have had lasting impacts upon both the coloniser and the colonised. For this reason, subsequent generations are inherently colonised with socio-cultural influences they did not begin and cannot end. In a sense, the pain of the past is inexorable, and loaded with “the interplay of prohibitions that refer back to one another.” (Foucault, 1998, p.17). In this manner, the ways in which racial relationships and their tensions continue to exist today is forever inextricably informed by the past, and thus cannot be merely glibly consigned to history. Therefore, this essay further compares the past as represented in the two novels in terms of both how they reflect a colonial past and how that past continues to inform the present.

Racial identity, as presented in both Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* (1950) is a complex construction. This is, of course, as it should be, but the source of the complexity is one of the reasons for the pain which the novels succeed in projecting. Unable easily to dismiss a racist, colonial past, these novelists have instead challenged ideas of racial identity which continued to exist long into the middle decades of the twentieth century, and, as it may be argued, in some measure continue to exist today. In terms of contrasts, the framework of Lessing’s novel is very different from that of Rhys’. For instance, the temporal setting of the novels is different: Rhys creates what has been called a prequel to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), published almost a century before Rhys’ work, in which Rhys reassesses the ethos that underpinned the very nature of colonialism. The character from Brontë’s novel upon which Antoinette is based, Bertha Mason, is drawn as a madwoman, and described in animalistic terms:

A figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all-fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (Brontë, 2006, p. 367)

It is first necessary to examine Brontë’s description of Bertha before discussing Rhys’ novel because it speaks so clearly of the idea of what constituted the nineteenth-century ideal of the civilising of the savage, a project so beloved by the imperial colonialist. Brontë’s Bertha is impossible to identify definitively as a “human being” and is readily connected with a “beast” of indeterminate gender as the use of the neuter pronoun indicates. The description “strange wild animal” could not more efficiently or abhorrently be identified as a colonist’s view of the “savage,” to whom subjugation was viewed as a blessing, and not a curse. Moreover, the verb “groveled” suggests much more than movement; it indicates both subjugation and aggressive supplication, as though what is seen is expected. The real horror, here, being that in its day, in the late nineteenth century there was nothing extraordinary about Brontë’s description, or the mindset behind it: the description of Bertha is simply what was expected, and it may further even be argued that “in the late twentieth century the imperial cycle of the last century in some way replicates itself (Said, 1994, p. 45). It is obvious that Rhys drew on Brontë’s Bertha

to inform Rhys depiction of her character of the young Antoinette/Bertha as a way of readdressing the “cultural myopia” of imperialism and offering up both “important feminist and post-colonial paradigms.”

The background informing Lessing’s novel is much different, as it addresses issues of colonialism that were contemporary to the time she was writing, and thus her novel was highly controversial in its depiction of the 1940s’ colonist. Mary, the central character, is also a woman whose entire destiny is governed, and like Antoinette’s is destroyed to a large extent by the imperative to marry in order to avoid the stigma that accompanied women who remained single. Therefore, like Antoinette, Mary is also a victim of the double oppression which women subjected to the colonial ethos suffered. For Mary, although who, in many senses, is a representation of the cruelty of the white colonist towards the black indigenous people, is also a victim, she is, in the main, brought down by both her own inhibitions and bitterness toward the oppression of a society that subjugates both race and gender. The scenes in which Lessing’s narrative describe this racial and gender oppression, or double colonialism, must be analysed in depth to reveal their full significance and the ways in which these persist today.

Additionally, from a postcolonial perspective, in both novels the land itself is essentially a character. The land is fought over in *The Grass is Singing*, while it is representative of subverted sexuality and repression in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. However, the relationship with which both the colonists and the indigenous peoples have with the land reveals much about the racial relationships in the novels:

In just over two pages, Rhys establishes the tension between white and black and between Creole white and English over Emancipation, then between white Jamaican society (colonial middle- and upper-class) and her narrator Antoinette’s white family (Martiniquan widowed mother, two children). (Savory, 1998, p.136)

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the twin colonial imperatives of fear and attraction are both emblematically presented in the description of the garden’s Otherness from which Antoinette withholds complete surrender:

Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible – the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and smelt of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. Underneath the tree ferns, tall as forest tree ferns, the light was green. Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root. Twice a year the octopus orchid flowered – then not an inch of tentacle showed. It was a bell-shaped mass of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see. The scent was very sweet and very strong. I never went near it. (Rhys, 2001, pp.10-11)

The idea that the Biblical “garden,” or Eden, has “gone wild” is a potent image of a land tainted by slavery. Paradoxically, it is said that during slavery, this was not so; there was order and control, but it is not “remembered” by the narrator. The suggestion is that nature has reclaimed the land, that the apparent chaos is in fact nature reasserting itself. Nevertheless, it cannot ever be the same; once damaged it cannot be free of the stain of what has gone before. The narrator, Antoinette, sees the beauty of the garden but is afraid of it and “never went near it.” Moreover, in this scene, Rhys juxtaposes sensual images of life and death, underscoring the changing condition of the country. This is particularly important in the view of the fact that it is the Rochester character’s association with her ethnicity and her “madness” which makes him first suspect, then reject, and ultimately, imprison Antoinette, as well as degrade her by his infidelity with a black maid. In postcolonial terms, this is the trope of civilising the indigenous savage: that is, the identification of the “Otherness” of the indigenous person as “mad” and in need of being tamed. The fact that the garden was once under control like the slaves, yet has returned to a hybrid of both the knowable and the unknowable is semiotic of the way in which the land is intricately woven into the lives of those who dwell on it, whether they be colonists or indigenous.

In addition, Antoinette’s reference to there being no reason after slavery for anyone to work connects with the historical fact that, “the Creoles blamed the post-slavery labour problems on the “laziness” or intransigence of the black people – the solution to which should be importation of a new

labour force” (Gregg, 1995, p. 22). This breakdown of the postcolonial labor system creates a powerful dynamic between the personal relationships in the novel as well as the wider previously essential relationship with the land: “Not only did the Creoles face the crumbling of the plantation system as they had known it, but in Dominica, Rhys' birthplace, they faced challenge from what has been called the Mulatto Ascendancy.” This conflict can be embodied within Rhys' multiple-narrator technique, as the perspective offered by Antoinette is very different from those offered by others, or indeed even by Bronte in her original creation of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. Moreover, Rhys “grasps that her own locational identity as a Creole woman is a function of, and can be made intelligible only in terms of, this period, which was both a beginning and an end. It is this time and space that she elucidates with unswerving persistence in her work.” Therefore, the connection between the various perspectives within the novel combined with the author's creative imperative informed by her background adds to the complexity of racial identity presented not only in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but even beyond:

The Creole account of West Indian history that Rhys' writing articulates has an interesting relationship with the European production of the 'History of the West Indies,' on the one hand, and that of present day professional historians of and from the Caribbean, on the other, who sometimes combine analyses of Caribbean folk, oral, and Creole cultures, with study or revision of European documents and archival sources. And the interpretative and narrative dimensions of history make for interesting interaction among the practitioners of Caribbean history and Caribbean literature. (p. 24)

Therefore, the way in which identity is both brought into existence and challenged in Rhys' novel cannot be separated from her own socio-cultural background: “If, in the 1960s, the socio-political struggles helped to shape critical response to Jean Rhys in the Caribbean, these events and the presence in England of West Indian writers decisively shaped her own perception of the West Indies and her writing” (Gregg, 1995, p. 39).

The same may also be said of Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* because she also appears to find it equally difficult to separate the contemporary political tensions which impacted her own life and those which she recreates within her contemporaneously highly controversial novel. Lessing was born in Iran, but when she was six her father moved the family to Rhodesia where *The Grass is Singing* is set:

[Her father] took his family there in 1925 and bought 3,000 acres of land, on which they made a meagre living. The children were brought up on this remote and isolated farm and for their education were sent to boarding schools—for Doris, a Catholic convent school in Salisbury (now Harare) followed by a year in a state school. She left at age fourteen to become an au pair, to do clerical work for a law office and to serve as a Hansard secretary for the Rhodesian Parliament. She married at nineteen, then left her husband and their two children a few years later.

Thus, Lessing's own racial identity, and to some extent the patterning of her early life, can be viewed as having a profound influence on her writing: “In her twenty-five years in the colony [Rhodesia], she had questioned the tastes and values of her British background, initially finding in African sense data shocks of new cultural recognitions” (Chapman, 1996, p.161). Like Lessing, her central protagonist, Mary, is driven by the need to find an identity for herself in the midst of a culture that she finds abhorrent and from which she is distanced, not only by finding much to criticise in the colonial ethos, but also in her own reflection of it and her desire to find a status for herself through marriage: “The strength of *The Grass is Singing* lies in its powers of social observation” (p. 10). With icy satire Lessing sketches the petty-minded prejudices of Rhodesian life and reveals a harsh, brittle grasp of the effects of racial status on individual people” (Chapman, 1996, p.161).

Therefore, in her novel, Lessing uses a dysfunctional marriage between Dick and Mary Turner to examine the way in which tensions that make a personal relationship painful can also be emblematic of a similar tension between indigenous peoples and colonialists. Hence, Dick

Cannot be simply a kindly ineffectual man, Mary his wife just another inadequate person; instead, they are shown to have absorbed an assured racial arrogance. As the mean product of an environment Lessing loathed, Mary can be permitted no sympathy in her sexual repression which is seen to be another awful manifestation of living in a stultifying, male-bigoted colony. All this may be historically precise with the Turner marriage typifying the mental and social condition of settler Rhodesia. (Chapman, 1996, p.161)

The fact that Mary is shown as openly cruel in gender specific terms adds to Lessing's argument. The “competing identities” which Mary and Dick represent in patriarchal, gender specific

terms are analogous to the competing racial identities which exist within the country. In the same way as Antoinette and Rochester represent gender tensions which connect to the cultural differences at the centre of the narrative, Mary and Dick demonstrate a similar dynamic between men and women which connects to the tensions between the colonized and the colonizer.

Both authors, Lessing and Rhys, are interested in “constructing a unique voice,” within the novels that is a complex mixture of their own backgrounds, gender issues, colonial imperatives, and socio-cultural as well as socio-political debates. The enormity of their challenge is very much evidenced by the fact that no one single issue dominates the novels, the novels themselves are hybrid; the authorial hegemony itself is challenged by the way the novels are constructed. Part of this is related to the dialogic style which each author uses to a greater or lesser effect. Indeed, what Mikhail Bakhtin, whose work on the dialogic was groundbreaking, he names in the novel at large: the multi-linguaged consciousness realised,” (2004, p. 455) is very much evidenced in both these novels. In Lessing’s work, for instance, language features strongly as a semiotic of both difference and segregation. For example, Mary refers to the way that the natives speak as “gibberish,” but she is also affronted by their use of English, and in fact whips Moses because: “white people think it is ‘cheek’ if a native speaks English.” (Lessing, 2007, p.165). This use of language by Lessing, in a Bakhtinian dialogic sense, then, gestures toward an argument that she use to represent attitudes which continue to exist: Language is still as much of a barrier to communication as it is a means of unification: language isolates, identifies, and causes prejudice. The mimetic aspect of Mary’s reaction to Moses emulating so-called “white” behavior is traceable throughout history as a way in which the colonial ethos both encouraged and discouraged the adoption of the habits of Empire which had been sustained by the colonists through generations, “whether through military conquest, occupation and direct or indirect rule, or by way of gun-boat diplomacy followed by economic penetration, or through the export of capital” (Parry, 2009, p. 27). When colonisation was in effect, one of its projects was the imposition of the colonial language. This impress of language on colonized peoples evolved into English as a language of empowerment in both a global socio-political and economic sense. The hegemony of the English language therefore carries embodied within the resonance of the former power of colonisation. Thus, it cannot be argued that the attitudes and values towards cultural identity represented in these novels can be simply consigned to history because the mark of empire and colonisation still exists everywhere, in the language, the land, and the identities of its formerly colonized peoples, while yet remaining ubiquitously associated in hegemonic ways with power.

Language has an immense capacity to empower, and “it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other.” Moreover, as postcolonial theorist, Frantz Fanon, has pointed out, and as the exchange between the characters of Mary and Moses represents, a black person speaks differently to another black person than he or she does to a white person: “The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question” (2008, p. 8). The fact that Fanon’s seminal text chooses to focus first on language first is indicative of its importance as a semiotic of the resonant impact that language continues to have upon different races who were subjugated under colonisation: “To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization. Since the situation is not one way only, the statement of it should reflect the fact” (p. 8). The importance of language in terms of cultural identity, as outlined above, is essential to an understanding of the way that language functions in these two novels and notably continues to function today.

There is no sense in which something as basic as communication can be consigned to a specific temporal zone, and therefore to a set of historical beliefs, attitudes, and values. Both Lessing and Rhys are writing of imagined past events, but the ethos that underpins them transcends any such delineation. Essentially, language is power, and the ability to use it effectively is therefore empowering. Perhaps this is why Lessing makes the character of Mary threatened to the point of violence by Moses’ audacity when using “her” language, a language to which he has no given right of access, and which to possess is also to own both what it can do and what it represents. The colonists shared a language with the world, and thus created a boundary of exclusion by doing so between those who have full

access to the ultimate tool of empowerment and those who do not. Moreover, in a very real sense much indigenous culture, including the languages of colonised peoples, was crushed. The heritage of which Fanon writes as embedded in civilization was simply written over and considered “gibberish” by colonists such as Mary who had neither the wit nor the desire to see that there was something of immense value in the countries that they were literally sacking, much as in the days of the ancients. What is more, the effects of all this continue to be ignored, or at least given its full prominence, “For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man” (Fanon, 2008, p. 82-83).

Lessing further emphasises this linguistic aspect of the relationship between black and white in her novel by having Mary and Moses, the man she whipped, become intimate in their dealings with one another. This occurs after Mary’s apparent strength begins to break down. If, as this essay has argued, Mary and Dick’s relationship is viewed as representing the breakdown of colonial rule, then the fact that Mary’s harsh, cruel, and extreme treatment of the black workers also breaks down in her weakened state embodies this. Moreover, Mary’s murder by Moses as an act of revenge for the whipping he has been given for speaking English is a warning to Lessing’s contemporary society was that the pain inflicted by the subjugation of colonisation will not soon be forgotten. Indeed, at the time, there were already civil rights movements active in force.

A similar warning appears in Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, about how complacency is fulfilled by the attitude of the white characters towards the black servant Myra, who, although thought stupid and indolent, is responsible for the destruction of the estate in an act that foreshadows Antoinette/Bertha’s burning down of “*Thornfield*” where she has been imprisoned by her husband, as was Bertha in Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*. As this scene suggests, “The most provocative theme Rhys tackled in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is race: this too is a kind of placement, a political and economic identity which, driven by the history of white racism, can be the most difficult area for a white writer to try to unravel” (Savory, 1998, p. 134). Despite this, some critics has said that, “every non-white character in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is drawn from the history of white stereotypes of black people: Tia as cheating, hostile nigger; Amelie as lusty wench; Daniel as hateful mulatto; Christophine as black mammy” (p. 134)). Racial identity thus remains complex.

In conclusion, this essay has considered the themes of racial identity and gender oppression as a form of double colonialism in both Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* and Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, arguing further that the conditions that inform these themes are still extant today and are manifested in issues of hybrid identities of formerly colonized peoples, their hybrid languages, and their disaffected relationships with the land. The manners in which both writers employ the structure of a colonial influence create, when viewed through postcolonial perspectives, a sharply provocative satire of the ethos of the colonist. Postcolonial theories of hybridity and Otherness reveal the ways in which the writers present their narratives in order to underscore the tensions related to race and gender. Analysing specific gender constructs in the texts within the context of racial identity, reveals further the double oppression extant within post-colonial texts. It has been argued here that this double colonialism is due to colonialism’s patriarchal hegemony which, when combined with the colonial subjugation of the female characters, illuminates an inherent as well as dual gender- and race-related confinement that informs the implied negativity within the texts in terms of their treatment of racial identity.

As discussed, the protagonist, “Rochester,” in *Wide Sargasso Sea* deprives the Creole Antoinette of her name, re-identifying her as “Bertha” on merely a personal, humiliatingly cavalier whim. As also discussed, this renaming is particularly relevant because women in the nineteenth century, as well as to a large extent in the mid-twentieth century, obtained their status in society from what that society demanded of them, which, in most cases, meant marriage. Indeed, as Lessing shows, the building of a single female life, such as Mary attempts to do before her marriage, is insufficient in the eyes of a dictatorial, restrictive, and patriarchal society. In addition, as this essay demonstrated, the way in which Antoinette is reduced through the Rochester character depriving her of her identity, speaks of the way in which slaves were similarly deprived of their identity, and can therefore be considered a semiotic of subjugation.

Clearly, as has also been argued here, in creating this loss of identity as a mark of the subjugation of colonialism, Rhys works to invert the social norm through her critique: “Rhys’ rewriting

of Brontë not only privileges the Caribbean but does a great deal to move Rochester out of the realm of the Gothic romance and explain his capacity for cruelty” (Savory, 1998, p.133). Moreover, as has been also discussed, the emblem of Mary and Dick’s unhappy marriage represents a similar disintegration of the colonist, with Mary’s murder acting as a warning to Lessing’s generation concerning the seething rage of the subjugated races that was about to explode— as indeed it did.

One of the main purposes of the argument of this essay has been to assert that the themes of racial identity and its tensions which pervade both Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* and Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* continue to exist today. This assertion has been supported by noting the way that language represents both a cultural past as well as the possibility of present empowerment, as the global marketplace continues to use English as a lingua franca, thus revealing the continuing hegemony of a previous colonial power.

In this essay, it has been argued as well that the colonial hegemony with which both texts are involved is a hybrid one. The hybrid nature of colonial rule caused a shift in power, destabilising the way that the entrenched hegemony considered the indigenous peoples, which is apparent in the case of Antoinette and Rochester. The interracial relationships within the novels, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The Grass is Singing*, demonstrate clearly the complex, hybrid nature of both colonists and indigenous peoples. Indeed, the subjugation of the indigenous peoples and the kind of negation of both their culture and identity within the texts continues to exist in contemporary societies on a global scale. Despite the increasing freedom and opportunity which women and people of color in most cultures have achieved, there nevertheless remains the lingering taint of colonial subjugation in terms of both race and gender.

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