Patriarchal Trauma and (the limits of) Psychoanalysis across Time, Place and Race: Female Suffering in *Washington Square*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The Joys of Motherhood.*

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Contents

Abstract

If, as is widely claimed, literature reflects social norms, cultural values, class struggles and 'social facts' about, and (scientific) knowledge available at the time in which it was written, Shoshana Felman's claim in *Writing and Madness* also seems valid: "Historically, literary knowledge mirrors psychiatric knowledge and in many ways competes with it" (3). This provides a frame for my discussion of three novels in this thesis: Henry James's *Washington Square*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea,* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. These novels, written by authors living in very different times and places, all portray the suffering of women as a result of patriarchal trauma in three distinct historical and geographical settings: early Victorian New York, early Victorian West Indies and colonial Nigeria, respectively. These texts all reflect socio-cultural practices that subordinated women (at the time of writing and/or the time in which they are set), and all "mirror" *or* "compete with" psychological and psychiatric knowledge dominant at the time of writing. They are linked by a common thread of trauma that affects the mental well-being of the female protagonist(s), whether this be depression, suicidal ideation or 'hysteria.'

I argue that in each of the three texts I discuss, we can find clues about the author's intellectual and cultural milieu – dominant ideas that were being discussed and debated at the time – and this can tell us something about developments in psychology and psychoanalysis in the (almost) century traversed by their publication dates. It is my claim that the scientific discoveries and psychological theories of the time in which the authors wrote similarly left their mark on the novels and the ways in which the (female) protagonists are portrayed. My discussions of the novels thus traverse patriarchal Darwinism and its influence on the nascent 'science' of psychology and Freudian psycho-sexual theories of development; it also considers the challenges to these scientific and medical forms of knowing (women) raised by second-wave feminism and object relations theory, and African womanism. I discuss how these novels reflect changing understandings of trauma, patriarchy and womanhood and the relationship between them; I also argue that they are open to reinterpretation via developments in trauma theory over the past century, as the reader views them through differing 'apertures' (in James's term): from theories of female 'hysteria' to broader understandings of intergenerational and postcolonial trauma.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Suffering is a part of life and gender specific suffering perpetrated by cultural beliefs and practices is my main focus in this study. For many years I have been drawn to the portrayal of suffering women in the different texts I read, not because there was anything 'new' in these, but because to me it became evident that the chains that bind women to a common suffering transcended race, geography, and time. These chains are in every society where traditional and cultural practices cause female trauma and are usually sanctioned by patriarchal authority over women. Patriarchal trauma, as I refer to it, is thus a central element in the three novels I have chosen to discuss in this thesis.[1] The trauma experienced by the female characters in these texts is not simply the result of "punctual" events but as Greg Forter writes, is "more mundanely catastrophic … the trauma induced by patriarchal identity formation rather, say, than the trauma of rape, the violence not of lynching but of everyday racism" (260). He continues, stating that such traumas are "so chronic and cumulative, so woven into the fabric of our societies, that they cannot count as 'shock' in the way that Nazi persecution and genocide do in the accounts of [trauma theorist Cathy] Caruth and others" (260). Michelle Justice offers a similar definition: "I define *patriarchal trauma* as an act causing mental anguish to a woman and perpetrated against her because she is a woman. I use the term to encompass violent, catastrophic harms but more particularly to pinpoint the traumatic effects of the quotidian, systemic deprivation of women's autonomy" ("Abstract").

Patriarchal trauma is an invisible chain that crosses the colour line and has bound women through the ages in literature and in life. It occurred to me that women all over the world, now and in the past, may look different on the outside, but their gendered struggles have much in common. The female protagonists in *Washington Square* by Henry James, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys and *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta are all victims of patriarchal trauma and for each this results in heartache and unspeakable pain. But the protagonists' trauma is exacerbated by intersecting cultural values and societal pressures that

[1] In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the enduring effects of patriarchy on women and the trauma it causes. In a book published in 2019, Dr Valerie Ryan identifies and defines what she refers to as "patriarchy stress disorder," the cumulative effect – emotional, physical and mental – that is the result of gender inequality, experienced over time: "The collective intergenerational trauma shows up as an invisible barrier to women's success, happiness and fulfillment," she argues. See also *Patriarchy and Its Discontents: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, edited by Jean Petrucelli, Sarah Schoen and Naomi Snider, Routledge, 2023 (preview available online).

differ between the novels. This is not surprising, as each of the novels has a distinct historical and geographical setting: early Victorian New York, early Victorian West Indies and colonial Nigeria, respectively. They were also written at different times in world history – 1890, 1966 and 1979 – by authors from vastly disparate cultures who brought distinct concerns, kinds of knowledge and assumptions to the task of writing. According to sociologist Milton C. Albrecht, writing in 1954, psychologists (generally) accept that "stories … reflect the stress patterns and emotional needs of audiences, arising out of shared cultural and social life" (426). He claims that although it does not account for how shifts in cultural mentality occur, literature shows the *symptoms* of mental strain evident in the culture at the time of writing and in the intended audience. He suggests that literature reflects the "spirit of the age" through its presentation of "norms and values [that reveal] the ethos of culture, the processes of class- [and, I'd suggest, gender-] struggle, and certain types of social 'facts'" (425).

In the 70-odd years since Albrecht made the above assertion, such ideas about the relationship between literature and societal knowledge/assumptions have been broadly accepted and also expanded and developed in many ways. Some psychoanalytic literary critics, for example, argue that literature not only reflects symptoms of cultural dis-ease but also forms of psychiatric knowledge available at the time of writing. In this vein, Shoshana Felman claims in her "Preface to the New Edition" of *Writing and Madness* (1978/repr. 2003), that "Historically, literary knowledge mirrors psychiatric knowledge and in many ways competes with it. Some of the writers in the nineteenth century [with which she is concerned] naturally mimic or replicate the insights of psychiatry; others defend against those insights and contest the power that the clinical perspective yields" (3).

Other critics in this field argue that careful attention to literature can throw light on the author's psychology, his or her own dis-ease(s), or values and assumptions. (One recalls here Freud's famous assertion that the literary text is a symptom of the artist's pathology or neurosis).The reader here is cast in the role of the analyst, the text is understood as the author-analysand's words from the (confessional/ witnessing) 'couch.' Such literary critical theorising is not surprising given that psychoanalysis, in most general terms, both elicits and tells stories. Indeed, Freud turned to literature to map his understanding of psycho-sexual development (the Oedipus complex, drawn from Sophocles' tragedy being the best-known example). Psychoanalysis has been used over time to explain human behaviour and will be used in this study to examine the causes and effects of gendered trauma in the literature I

consider. Freud's interest in how psychoanalysis could explain the suffering of individuals in society and his versatility in theorizing how apparently 'internal' and 'external' states of being are connected, makes his work applicable to the different social contexts in my study. That said, there are limits to the usefulness of Freud in a discussion of patriarchal trauma, as I will discuss. Moreover, the caveat proposed by Stanley J. Cohen in his book *Between Author and Reader: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Writing and Reading*, is one I take seriously: "psychoanalytic theory is never to be pasted onto texts" (8).

Nonetheless, psychoanalytic literary criticism is premised on the idea that writers create stories and characters that behave and think like real human beings (even in fantasy literature in which non-human animals or creatures are portrayed as psychologically rounded). It follows that it may be possible to 'diagnose' unconscious drivers in characters' behaviours and expressions and do so using tools and theories that post-date the time of publication. Whether this may also invite us to diagnose the author's unconscious or repressed drives and impulses – so "reading the author" in his or her words in the text – is something that has been extensively debated.[2] My claims in this thesis are rather more modest. I argue that in each of the three texts I discuss, we can find clues about the author's intellectual and cultural milieu – dominant ideas that were being discussed and debated at the time – and this can tell us something about developments in psychology and psychoanalysis in the (almost) century traversed by their publication dates.

The social contexts portrayed in the three novels I discuss clearly affect and influence the protagonists' inner psychic lives. I will argue, moreover, that the scientific discoveries and psychological theories of the time in which the authors wrote similarly left their mark on the novels and the ways in which the (female) protagonists are portrayed. *Washington Square* was written when the discipline of psychology was in its infancy by a man – Henry James – who moved in the progressive intellectual circles in which ideas of interiority and the psyche were being discussed and debated – not least by his brother, William. He was also, as I will argue, familiar with and perhaps influenced by Darwinian theory which posited 'proof' of female biological and mental inferiority. Early developments in psychology and psychoanalysis attempted to explain human behaviours and 'state of minds' in the late nineteenth century, leading, of course, to the ground-breaking work of Sigmund Freud. This

[2] See for example, Merav Roth, *A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Reading Literature: Reading the Reader*, Routledge, 2019.

was a point in history where predominantly male psychology was analysed and explained using empirical evidence. Nonetheless, despite the limited understanding of female trauma at the time, in *Washington Square* Henry James uses free indirect discourse to portray the 'streams of consciousness' (as theorised by William James) in the minds of his characters, including his female protagonist, Catherine Sloper, as she comes of age in an early Victorian, urban-American household. James portrays the Darwinian mindset of Catherine's father and how his 'scientific beliefs' about the inferiority of women bolster his assumptions about and cruel, authoritarian treatment of his daughter, with devastating effects. He writes from a late Victorian perspective that, I argue, exposes the damaging consequences of patriarchal trauma. His portrayal is inflected by nascent psychological theories that would later be articulated in the work of Freud. Despite inviting sympathy for his protagonist, he nonetheless writes from a decidedly male (scientific) position that results in complex ambiguity, especially at the novel's end.

In contrast, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, written by a woman more than 80 years later, offers a feminist psychoanalytic view of women, set at a time (early Victorian) almost exactly the same as Washington Square. The geographical setting is very different, however, as are the historical events that dominate the novel: the West Indies, shortly after the emancipation of slaves. Jean Rhys's main focus is on her white Creole protagonist, Antoinette/Bertha, as she gives a voice, and a back story, to Charlotte Brontë's 'mad' Creole wife of Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. In the novel, Rhys's Antoinette/Bertha is not 'mad' because of an inherited (female) disposition to hysteria, nor as the result of a specific punctual trauma. Her psychic disintegration is the consequence of cumulative abuse by the men in her life and, notably, her mother who is herself a victim of the same, suggesting that the patriarchal trauma experienced by these two women is intergenerational. While there is no strong evidence to suggest that Rhys was familiar with feminist developments in psychoanalytic theory that built on and challenged Freud's work, it is well-known that she rejected Freud's theories about the female psyche, particularly the sexualised aspects of this. She wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* at a time in which second-wave feminism was on the rise in England, where she was living. Her intellectual circles were likely to have been influenced by the work of influential psychoanalysts like Melanie Klein and her interests in children's development, particularly their relationships, from birth, with (m)others. I argue that Rhys's novel reflects this developmental stage of psychoanalytic theory and its evolution to becoming more inclusive of issues relating to the female psyche. I discuss Rhys' novel as her feminist stance against

Freud's conclusion that the (female) trauma he and Breuer identified was caused by sexual fantasies. She shows other social and environmental pressures, including ones to do with patriarchal abuse, maternal relationships, and racial identity, as the cause of female 'hysteria.'

Many critics, following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, argue that "*Wide Sargasso Sea* provides us with a sympathetic representation of white Creole alienation at the expense of the black Creole perspective" (Mardorossian 1072). As I will discuss, this is a moot point. What can be stated with certainty, however, is that Rhys is a white writer. While it can be argued that her concerns with the 'in-betweenness' of her protagonist's racial/cultural identity invites us to consider the invidious position of the former slaves in the novel, it remains true that the in Rhys's desire to give voice to Brontë's "madwoman in the attic," black characters are given no voice at all, apart from what the (several) white narrators say for them. The opposite is true in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). This novel, written by a Nigerian woman in the wake of decolonisation, offers an African womanist view of patriarchal trauma that also encourages readers to contemplate the effects of (post)colonial trauma. Feminist psychoanalysts like Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, as well as postcolonial feminists like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, offer useful insights into female trauma in this novel which portrays the psychic terrain of black women living during the colonial era, and who suffer a combination of (transgenerational) patriarchal and historical trauma. I argue that a wider range of contemporary theories of trauma, ones that take account of the combined, and enduring, effects of racial and gendered oppression, are appropriate to a discussion of the portrayal of trauma in Emecheta's novel.

My hypothesis is that different developmental stages in the disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis are reflected in the texts I discuss, and this offers us insights into the changing and diverse ways in which patriarchal trauma has been theorised. The emergence of psychoanalysis from its inchoate stages in the late 19th century is reflected in *Washington Square*; adaptations, and challenges, to its fundamental concepts by feminists and sociologists in the mid-20th century can be traced in *Wide Sargasso Sea*; and more inclusive ways of understanding trauma that take account of intersecting oppressions and transgenerational abuse are evident in *The Joys of Motherhood*. The lives and experiences of each author has a bearing on the characters and stories they write about. Henry James was part of an elite Victorian family and the brother of a prominent (early) psychologist and, as the collated correspondence between the brothers evidences, the cross-pollination of their thinking would

have been likely. Jean Rhys's *Black Notebook* records her deep disdain of Freud's ideas of the female psyche, and she wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* at the start of the era of second-wave feminism that was characterised by challenges to (and a dependence on) Freud's thinking in the work of feminist psychoanalysts like Melanie Klein. Buchi Emecheta studied sociology in England in the 1970s, eventually gaining a PhD in the subject. It is inconceivable that she would not have been introduced to contemporary feminist scholarship at this time, a time in which, moreover, decolonisation was occurring all over the world and the discipline of postcolonialism was starting to emerge. Initially Freud was ambivalent towards and rejected cultural specifics, reducing cultural dimensions to neurotic adaptations, but this approach has changed over time. Many psychoanalysts and psychologists now seek to understand patients' intrapsychic lives by also considering how aspects of cultural identity shape the psyche. In this thesis I seek to extend such thinking to the analysis of female trauma as it is portrayed in the three novels I discuss.

Catherine Sloper comes from a wealthy family and has a sizeable inheritance from her mother, but still bears the burden of societal expectations in the form of filial obedience, mental and emotional abuse, and manipulation instigated by her father, resulting in heart break and mental torture at the hands of the man who is supposed to protect her. Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea,* a Creole woman from a former slave-owning family, endures uncertainty and anxiety in the face of poverty, possible homelessness, mental and physical abuse and also suffers heartbreak, betrayal, grief, loss, entrapment, and a mental breakdown at the hands of her step-brother and husband. Finally in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego, the daughter and love child of a prominent African chief, is not spared from the pain of societal pressure due to failed maternity, spousal abuse and – ironically – eventual motherhood. I question why these women all appear helpless to the forces that torture them, and this leads me to consider the psychological understandings of the times in which they were set and written.

These novels are written within a period of almost a century between 1890 and 1979, but the binding chains are similar in terms of cultural expectations and social mores designed to keep women in their place. Evoking a psychological lens, Albrecht says, "the stories in literature reflect the stress patterns and emotional needs of audiences, arising out of shared cultural and social life" (425). Although it does not always account for shifts in cultural mentality, literature often shows the symptoms of mental strain at any given time in history and many sociologists have charged it with reflecting the 'spirit of the age' through its presentation of social 'facts.' Psychoanalysis, which has been used over the past century or so to explain

human behaviour, will be drawn on in this study to examine the causes and effects of gendered trauma in the selected texts. Freud's interest in how psychoanalysis could explain the ‘suffering’ of individuals in society and his versatility in theorizing how apparently ‘internal’ and ‘external’ states of being are connected, makes his work applicable to the different social contexts in my study. At the same time, however, the texts I consider also show the limits of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Chapter 2: Terms, Concepts and Contexts

In the chapters that follow, I discuss the patriarchal trauma experienced by the female protagonists in three selected texts, drawing on a number of terms and concepts as these have been used in science, psychology and psychoanalysis in the 90-odd years that are covered by their publication dates. I offer a brief summary of relevant terms, concepts, and contexts below.

Washington Square was written towards the end of the Victorian era by a man who moved in the prominent American – and European – intellectual circles of the day. During the Victorian era, the wealth of the growing middle class meant that women no longer had to work alongside their husbands and brothers as they had done in earlier centuries. Men and women's roles became more sharply defined with women, thought to be physically weaker but morally superior to men, largely confined to the domestic sphere. Writing of this time in history, Richard D. Altick states, "a woman was inferior to a man in all ways except the unique one that counted most [to a man]: her femininity. Her place was in the home, on a veritable pedestal if one could be afforded, and emphatically not in the world of affairs" (Altick 54). The authority of religious theology, which had undergirded patriarchalism for centuries, was now supplemented by a range of scientific 'proofs' about the ostensible differences between men and women that extended beyond the reproductive system to secondary sexual characteristics. The immensely influential work of Charles Darwin, a biologist, geologist, and naturalist, reinforced such thinking. Gendered differences, according to him, could be explained by the process of natural selection through which species adapt and change. In *The Origin of Species* (1859), he argued that evolution occurred because those individuals of a species whose traits enhanced their chances of survival were the ones who were most likely to survive and reproduce and so contributed the most, and fittest, offspring to the next generation. Over time, this resulted in improved species-adaptation to the environment as advantageous traits became more common.

Darwin's later work, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), added the principle of sexual selection (the struggle for mates) to his theory of evolution. He theorized that human males contend with other males for females with whom to procreate and those who are stronger and more intelligent are more likely to mate and reproduce, transmitting their favourable traits to their *male* offspring. Since females were not involved in the

competitive process, Darwin argued, they inevitably lagged behind males in evolutionary terms. This placed females closer to children, or less evolved races, than males. Women therefore resembled the young of their species in moral and intellectual development just like the 'primitive' races who were also derogatorily viewed as being like children compared to the evolved male adults of civilised races. "Thus," writes Darwin, "man has ultimately become superior to women." In short, "The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shewn by man attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than woman can attain – whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands…" (qtd. Richards 36). According to Steven Nur Ahmed,

> [Darwin] states that women are analogous to lower 'races' in that they are more emotional than intellectual or rational. The superiority of men over women is a product of a higher intellect in men with correspondingly less emotional orientation in them than what is in women. Thus, for Darwin, there is a physical basis for the qualitative difference between men and women. In fact, he says of women's intuition, imitation, and rapid perception that '…these faculties are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilization.' (37)

Darwin viewed it important for men to safeguard women because a woman's fundamental duty was to produce healthy children (to carry forward the man's genes) and so they needed to be protected from diseases or improper lifestyles. In this way, his 'science' was used to justify the maintenance of women in the safety of the domestic sphere. Kimberly A. Hamlin asserts of Darwin's views on gender that they

> often rearticulated the dominant, patriarchal views of his era. In the nineteenth century, prescriptive literature and social customs dictated that men inhabit the worlds of commerce, labor, and politics, while women controlled the home, the family's spiritual life, and the children. Such a division of labor was considered natural, civilized, and in accordance with God's will. (2)

Alison Winter is quoted by Jeanette King as suggesting that gender therefore became a particularly significant variable for defining intellectual identities and social roles in contrast to earlier periods when gender was less important than gentility in determining social significance (13). Many assertive statements about sexual differences stemmed from simple anatomical observations that were used as the basis of judgment about mental operations.

Darwin's theories underpinned many scientific experiments and claims in the developing new 'sciences' of psychology and psychoanalysis that were interested in the human mind in the later decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Their influence on philosophers and scientists like William James and Sigmund Freud give them a pivotal role in this study. Darwin's ideas, and those of early psychologists/psychoanalysts also had a significant impact on the literature produced by men who moved in the same intellectual circles, such as Henry James, as I will elaborate in my next chapter. Their influence, albeit in a negative way, can also be seen in the writing of women influenced by second-wave feminist ideas and feminist psychoanalysis in the mid-twentieth century, such as Jean Rhys. Indeed, Rhys writes against the biological essentialism of Victorian men who theorised female (mental) frailty, positing patriarchal abuse and maternal neglect resulting from such abuse, as the cause of female 'hysteria' in writing back against not only to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) but the figure of the Victorian 'madwoman' more generally, as I will argue in Chapter Four.

William James was one of the leading figures in the new 'science' of psychology in the United States that were intrigued by the theory of evolution. Eugene Taylor notes that "James was the earliest American to make psychology physiological by placing the subject matter of the discipline in the context of evolutionary theory. Sensation and perception, cognition, emotion, instinct, habit, and more, he grounded in functional adaptations of the nervous system to the environment" (7).[3] This resulted in what came to be known as functionalism which posited causal relationships between internal states and external behaviours. As is widely known, "By linking a perceived mental inferiority of women to the mechanism of evolution, Darwin seemingly brought scientific proof to support a cultural truism. In so doing, he reinforced Victorian strictures that maintained women in a subservient state, which now could be justified on the basis of biological determinism" (Murphy 221). Building on Darwin's ideas, William James argued that our physical bodies produce our feelings and thoughts and that differences in the bodies of men and women resulted in qualitative differences in the way each gender felt and thought.

Given the widely held Darwinian notion that women's bodies were weak and inferior, it is not surprising that James said the same of their emotions. According to Stephanie A. Shields,

[3] Lucas McGranaham offers a book-length study on the relationship between the thinking of Darwin and William James in *Darwinism and Pragmatism: William James on Evolution and Self-Transformation*, Routledge, 2017

James's comments on the differences between men and women, "reveal the belief that feminine emotion has a different relation to reason than does masculine passion" (81). Erin C. Tarver and Shannon Sullivan are even more direct, drawing attention to "the pervasive and explicit sexism in [William] James's philosophy. … [H]is scholarly work and personal life are steeped in forms of patriarchy and rugged individualism that embrace manliness and men at the expense of women and possibilities for their lives" (2). Charlene Haddock Seigfried similarly comments on "the depth of misogyny" revealed in William James's work (15). Of course, William James is not Henry James. Nonetheless it is reasonable to suggest a strong degree of cross-pollination occurred between the thoughts of the brothers. This is certainly evident in the interest both shared in human consciousness. William James pioneered the transformation of psychology into an independent science in his publication of *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890. In this, he described consciousness as a stream**.** This was a continuous succession of experiences, sensations, stimuli, images, ideas, emotions and conceptions that appear before our conscious awareness and then pass away.

Discussing the intellectual connections between William and Henry, Joan Richardson writes that "the common interest of the brothers in the nature of consciousness underwrote their separate endeavours as psychologist and author, respectively" (84). She continues, of Henry,

> his characters often illustrated psychoanalysis *avant la lettre*. The science of mind was offered for all to explore [in his novels]. Throughout his career, Henry James observed in the same way as a clinical observer the human animal grappling with experience now realized to be uncertain, ultimately unknowable, transient, without purpose except for what each creature devised in a world made of words. (90)

Certainly, Henry James is widely recognised as one of the early forerunners in the development of what is now referred to as the 'stream of consciousness' literary technique to render the interiority of characters' lived experiences. While he does not use stream of consciousness in *Washington Square* in the strict sense of the term as we define it today, he uses free indirect discourse to give his readers insight into the minds of his characters, as I will discuss. Whether or not Henry James was influenced by what some commentators, such as those quoted above, have described as William James's misogyny, has been much debated by feminist literary critics. I will review these varying claims in my chapter on the novel in which my focus is on the patriarchal trauma experienced by Catherine Sloper, largely as a result of her father's treatment of her.

Ideas about the 'natural' inferiority of women have been challenged for centuries, alongside debates about the female 'mind.' Perhaps best-known of the early voices who challenged male hegemonic ideas was Mary Wollstonecraft who announced in her writings – most forcefully in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) – that the sexes were equal intellectually and demanded educational opportunities for women. Later in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century the first wave of feminism, sparked by the first formal Women's Rights Convention in 1848, arose in Europe to advocate for women's right to pursue an education and to freely exercise their talents in the form of paid activity. Opponents (men and women, many of whom were intellectuals) found these claims scandalous, and they retaliated with traditional arguments that 'proved' the inferiority of the female sex. The German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fitchte, for example, argued in *The Science of Rights* that "partial submission of women would be humiliating, therefore women should submit totally to their men" (qtd. Figes 125). According to philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued for equality among men, this did not extend to the equality of men and women. Quite simply, he asserted that women needed to rely on men for their well-being because they were less rational than men.[4] This philosophical debate raged into the nineteenth century with philosopher John Stuart Mill (and Harriet Mill) joining the call for women to have legal status equivalent to men in *The Subjection of Women* in 1869. Suffice to say, the debates about women's 'nature' and characteristics would certainly have been familiar to the educated and widely-read Henry James.

One of the 'scientific' claims made by men in the Victorian era at the time was about the predisposition of women to 'hysteria.' This idea was not new. In fact, the term was first used by Hippocrates in 5th century BC because he believed this disease lay in the movement of the uterus (the Greek word for uterus was *hystera*). Andrew Scull offers this:

> In women, so one Hippocratic text read, 'the womb is the origin of all diseases.' It was not just that the female of the species was differently constituted from the male; she was also fundamentally inferior: moister, looser textured, softer, with spongier flesh. Her body was more readily deranged –for example, by puberty, pregnancy, or

[4] Wollstonecraft quotes Rousseau as saying, "Once it is demonstrated that man and woman are not, and should not be constituted the same, either in character or in temperament, it follows that they should not have the same education. In following the directions of nature they must act together but they should not do the same things; their duties have a common end, but the duties themselves are different and consequently also the tastes that direct them. After having tried to form the natural man, let us also see, in order not to leave our work incomplete, how the woman is to be formed who suits this man." (Section 5.1 of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*)

> parturition, by menopause, or by suppressed menstruation, all of which could impose profound shocks on her internal equilibrium (for her wetter constitution produced an excess of blood, which regularly needed to be drained from her system); or by the womb wandering about internally in search of moisture (or, later, sending forth vapors that rose through the body), disturbances that were held to be the source of a great variety of organic complaints. (13)

Well into the nineteenth century, hysteria was believed to originate in the uterus with incomprehensible symptoms that almost exclusively afflicted women and could include partial or hemi- paralysis, convulsions, anxiety or fear, helplessness and total or partial sensory loss, including loss of sight. This mental condition was considered from two perspectives which were scientific and demonological and traditionally treated with herbs, sex and, paradoxically, sexual abstinence.

Historically women were described as susceptible to a 'temporary insanity' and more prone to commit any unusual or outrageous act during menstruation. Also common was a disease among women known as 'reflex irritation' which was any disorder of the reproductive organs which could cause pathological reactions in other parts of the body. Throughout many centuries, links were made between female physiology and insanity, and in turn between insanity and impure thoughts which was echoed in the anxieties articulated in religious discourses about women's potential for sin, trapped as she is in her body – an idea encapsulated in the figure of Eve in the biblical book of Genesis. Sexual women were represented as not only bad, but sick and unnatural as well as unwomanly, and aberrant sexuality was often linked with other kinds of gender transgressions.

Hysteria became a generic diagnosis for all female complaints not immediately identified by doctors and became a magnet for the misogyny of the white academy. This was until French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot is merited with elevating hysteria to the status of a neurological disorder, to which both male *and* female patients were pre-disposed by heredity, after his systematic study of mental illness and the effectiveness of hypnosis in hysteria. Towards the end of his life, however, he argued that hysteria was a psychological condition that, although more common in women, was also experienced by men. Charcot wrested hysteria from mythology and religion into science by proving that suffering women were ill and not recipients of divine punishment or possessed by the devil.

While Charcot (initially) defined hysteria as a neurosis with organic origins, Sigmund Freud – who was significantly influenced by Charcot's later work – argued that hysteria and neurosis were not somatic but involved the re-experience of past psychological trauma. In 1895 he published *Studies on Hysteria* with Josef Breuer, an Austrian physician and physiologist, in which three types of hysteria were outlined: defence, retention and hypnoid hysteria. "*Hysterics*," they concluded, "*suffer mainly from reminisces*," or memories that were repressed in the unconscious until they returned to consciousness, often many years later, in the altered form of psychiatric symptoms (Breuer and Freud 7; emphasis original). They concluded that "the physical manifestations of hysteria were not a result of nerves or disorders in the physical body. Instead, physical symptoms were brought on by mental trauma" (wellcomecollection.org). After falling out with Breuer, Freud famously went on to propose that neurosis was the result of failed libidinal evolution (which led to his later theorisation of the Oedipus and Electra complexes) and that not only was "there was frequently a sexual component in cases of hysteria" but rather "that sexual trauma was always and everywhere the root cause of the disorder" (Scull 144). Freud in, *The Aetiology of Hysteria* (1896), revealed his shocking and perhaps most disputed finding: "…at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are *one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience*" *(*qtd. Horovitz 249). He then went one step further to insist that "the repressed 'memories' of childhood seduction were fantasies, not real events"; "It was an account that placed fantasy at the root of neurosis" (Scull 145; 146). Such claims were angrily dismissed by Jean Rhys, as I will discuss in Chapter Four. Among other things, I will argue that in *Wide Sargasso Sea* she provides a portrait of the psychological impact on women of maternal relationships and also challenges the Freudian assumption that all desire is male.

Petra Bueskens notes that "Freud was particularly quiet on the subject of mothers, with his distinct stress on the father-son relationship as it played out in the Oedipus conflict" (4). Although she notes that Freud began to pay attention to the role of mothers in the latter years of his career, she insists, "at its inception there was a psychic-social schism at the heart of the psychoanalytic project that took shape around the construction of femininity beginning with the daughter's relation to her putatively 'castrated' mother' (9). It fell to women analysts and (feminist) sociologists in the 1930s, '40s and '50s to challenge the sexism inherent in Freud's accounts of psycho-sexual development. As Beuskens suggests, at this time, "Psychoanalystic theory made a decisive turn to the mother in the writing of Melanie Klein and later object relations theorists" (11). Before discussing this "turn" in more depth, it is

necessary to briefly recount some of Freud's fundamental theories and claims as this will better enable an understanding of how feminist psychoanalysis developed in the mid-twentieth century. This, in turn, will support my claims about the influence of such developments on Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Freud made two key and enduring contributions to psychoanalysis: his theorisation of the unconscious and of infantile sexuality. The former argues that people's behaviour is strongly affected by 'unconscious' impulses about which they know very little and over which they have only limited control. These are drives or desires or impulses that "are 'in' the mind yet are not available to introspection and hence are hidden away from conscious knowledge" (Frosh 6). Further, these impulses are observable when people act in ways that are apparently irrational. Irrational acts include overemotional responses to things, oddly self-destructive decisions, compulsions, weird slips of speech, and bombastic or denigrating self-presentations. Freudian psychoanalysis was organised around the idea that sexual impulses were the main source of drives, repressed in the unconscious, that motivated behaviour. If unsatisfied, these drives create a negative state of tension. The object of the drive, he argued, is external and changes through development. One of the main roles of the analyst, then, is to trace the ways in which these drives are expressed and satisfied. Freud's theory assumed that the sexual drive operated from birth but was expressed in different ways during development. He argues that a central feature of human psycho-sexual development is the way in which what he termed the Oedipus complex is negotiated. That is, how infants manage the restrictions placed on their sexuality by society (corroborated in the figure of the father, especially).

The biological sexual drive gives rise to the fantasies and behaviours associated with (repressed) sexuality and is expressed in various ways in the unconscious and conscious lives of individuals. Freud then argued that there were always opposing prohibitive forces (or ego-preservative drives) at work because the free expression of sexual urges could lead to the destruction, rather than mere pleasure, of the individual. This group of drives acts against the sexual drive to prevent the ego from being overwhelmed by anxiety or being placed in situations of sexual rejection. The conflict between sexual and ego-preservative drives is what produces repression of certain desires in the unconscious.

These ideas were most fully theorised in what Freud referred to as the Oedipal complex which was, he claimed, the foundation of individual development and the core of what he

termed ‘civilization.’ The fundamentally masculine theory posits in male children an unconscious wish to kill the father and sexually possess the mother. Freud believed that incest taboos, as well as regulations of sexuality, protect against this, creating universal social structures. Early sexuality was described as a search for pleasurable release of tension created by the drives and was expressed through oral impulses. Developmentally, these were followed by anal impulses and then phallic and genital ones as the child focused on different erogenous zones. For boys, the breast remains an object of desire throughout this development because it is experienced as part of the (desired) mother; the phallus stands as a threat that is bound up with the father. While the boy seeks sexual union with his mother, he is aware that the far more powerful father stands in the way of his passion. The ‘pleasure principle’ is thus opposed by the ‘reality principle,’ forcing a compromise on the part of the child or, as Stephen Frosh writes, the realisation that, “No: this far and no further you may go; this wish cannot be fulfilled” (79). The natural incestuous desires of the child are restrained by a number of prohibitions that are internalized as they mature: the castration complex, repression, and identification. Almost as an afterthought, Freud posited a mirror-opposite theory for the development of girls, the Electra complex, in which the female child desires the father, jealously resents the mother, and is forced to internalize prohibitions that ensure ‘civilised’ development – which includes the desire for a baby to substitute for her lack of a penis.

Freud argued that little girls soon become aware that they lack the male-preferred sexual apparatus (the penis being larger and more visible than her own phallic centre of gravity, the clitoris), resulting in ‘penis envy’. This led him to argue that the girl child must deal with a more difficult developmental process. This is because she must cope with two emotional moves not required of the boy and both involving painful loss: first, giving up her phallic, male focus on her own 'penis', the clitoris, and secondly, transferring her desire from the mother to the father. This leads the girl to experience a mixture of impassioned and negative emotions. She gains a general sense of her own inferiority in the world linked with the relative ineffectiveness of her genitals in providing satisfaction for the sexual drive; she feels rage at the mother for having created her like that, in her own image; and she develops a passionate envy of the real thing, the penis possessed by father and brother alike. In consequence, her identification becomes an ambivalent one: she despises the mother for being insufficient and hates her for having made her the same; but she also both identifies and

competes with her in wanting the father for herself, in wanting to take her place and be desirable in a world of men.

Freud's infamous theorising of psycho-sexual development is well-known. But following World War One, in observing the 'shell shock' of returned soldiers, Freud began to reconsider some of his ideas. It was not only drives towards forbidden pleasures that were repressed in the unconscious, he now argued. Repression was sometimes the result of completely the opposite: the inability to consciously acknowledge events and experiences that were far from pleasant, ones that were traumatic. Freud presented unconscious phenomena as dynamic in the sense that unconscious ideas (or memories or drives) are always trying to make themselves heard and felt but are opposed by various mental defensive strategies. These 'defence mechanisms' function to prevent disturbing ideas (or traumatic memories) from coming into conscious awareness. Repression is also referred to as 'motivated forgetting' – the mind is 'motivated' to 'forget' certain events and experiences that are too unsettling or anxiety-producing because of the distress, pain, and grief they caused initially. These ideas or memories, repressed in the unconscious, are always pushing for ways to break through to consciousness. There are various kinds of defence mechanisms, according to Freud, including denial, displacement, splitting and dissociation.[5] Extreme forms of these are pathological and result in "an interruption in the integrative functions of memory, identity, motor behaviour and consciousness," according to Wells and Jones (334). This can cause blankness, spaciness, distraction, fuzziness, and confusion, as well as affective dissociation such as feeling alien or believing others to be strange or unreal, or feeling like one is standing next to oneself or watching oneself as a way to escape the intolerable experience of the core self (splitting). In dissociating one will trance out, lose memory, and often present with disorganised thinking and confusion.

Freud later abandoned his investigation of trauma, but the effects of two world wars resulted in the resurgence of interest in trauma in the later decades of the twentieth century by other theorists, psychologists and psychoanalysts as a means of describing the emerging evidence of long-term psychological distress experienced by returning soldiers. Trauma then was used to create a language and method for understanding the effects of exposure to war, including nightmares and flashbacks which had previously not been named or properly understood. These are re-enactments in the present of psychic events that have not been safely consigned to the past that retain the visual and affective intensity of lived experience and disrupt the

[5] See Frosh, pp. 56- 67.

present with flashbacks and terrifying nightmares of an unknown past that exceeds the self's relatively coherent and integrated story about itself. Post-traumatic stress disorder, forerly known as 'shell shock,' is now understood as a psychiatric disorder that affects not only soldiers, but anyone who

> has experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, or rape or who have been threatened with death, sexual violence or serious injury. These are intense and disturbing thoughts related to their experiences that are experienced long after the traumatic event has ended. Exposure to a traumatic event or repeated exposure to horrible details of trauma can trigger PTSD (what is posttraumatic stress disorder?)

In *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Cathy Caruth, a leading trauma theorist towards the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, posits two inherent paradoxes of trauma which were already recognised by Freud in his notion of *nachtraglichkeit*. This can be loosely translated as 'afterwardness,' and signals the idea that the memory of an event, rather than the event itself, is imbued with traumatic significance. Caruth comments on the unusual temporality of trauma when she states that it "is not experienced as it occurs but is fully evident only in connection with another place and in another time" (qtd. Visser 273). The literal yet latent nature of the traumatic experience, she claims, means that "a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness" (qtd. Visser 274). This is a notion of trauma as an experience which keeps returning in the mind of a sufferer yet remains inaccessible to conscious knowing or understanding. The inaccessibility and concomitant "unspeakability" of trauma explain its resistance to therapeutic recovery. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman argues that it is precisely this that makes retrospective narration a powerful and empowering therapeutic tool, enabling integration of traumatic experience and aiding healing and recovery – not unlike Freud's "talking cure." The jury is out, for some theorists, on whether such re-narrativisation is aporetic, leading to increased indeterminacy or whether it is therapeutic, enabling a "working through" and eventual resolution of trauma.

Relatedly, it is to Freud that we also owe influential theories about loss and death that are relevant to the textual discussions in this thesis. These initially found expression in his *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917). Mourning, according to Freud, is the 'normal' or 'healthy' reaction to "the [traumatic] loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction

which has taken place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (Freud qtd. Frosh 243). Mourning is characterised by sadness that lifts after a time and is proportionate to the loss involved. In contrast, Freud described melancholia as a deep depression originating from an inability to acknowledge (and so retrospectively narrate) the reality of a loss and hence grieve it fully. Melancholia is unresolved; it continues as a kind of unconscious craving that has no outlet. According to Freud, melancholia was the product of a conflict between the ego and the superego: "The superego, which represents the prohibitions and injunctions of reality, attacks the ego (through severe criticism) producing symptoms of guilt, self-denigration and often forms of paranoid thinking. This makes it impossible to come to terms with loss, because of the self-accusation that result" (Frosh 95). Melancholia is thus a pathological condition in which mourning cannot properly take place, and for that reason allows loss to poison the mind resulting in symptoms that include painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of capacity to love, inhibition of all activity and lowering of the self-regarding feelings. It can present in a wide range of pathologies from hysteria to psychosis.[6] This distinction between 'healthy' mourning and 'unhealthy' melancholia is relevant to the textual discussions that follow in this thesis.

As noted above, many feminist theorists have taken Freud to task for having largely ignored the role of the mother in childhood development. They argue his thinking lacked a nuanced understanding of the pre-Oedipal relationship between the mother and infant and how this came to shape, underscore and determine identity, including feminine identity. In the early period of his classical psychoanalytic theory, the mother was an unexplained absence leading to missing explanations of the child's attachment, particularly of the daughter to the mother. A curiously subjective gap in Freud's thinking exposes the paucity of his analysis of mothers and inability to conceive of the significance of maternity. Roy Schafer holds this opinion:

> Freud was not prepared to think about mothers very far… evident in how little he said directly about them and about relationships with them, and correspondingly, how little he said about how they appear in transference, the resistance and formation of ego and super ego systems. Additionally, his writings showed virtually no sustained interest in their subjective experience – except for their negative feelings about their own femininity and worth. (quoted by Bueskens 5).

[6] See Frosh, pp. 140-145.

Barbara Thaden's claim, with respect to many absent or dead mothers in Victorian literature, is relevant to my consideration of both *Washington Square* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* in which the protagonists' mothers are dead or emotionally/literally absent, respectively:

> It may be a psychoanalytical theory claim that a good mother simply has little place in the stories we tell ourselves because psychological maturing involves separating ourselves with our mothers… [This may] have remained unacknowledged for so long because they did not easily fit into the world view of male academics or that of the first waves of feminist academics. (4)

Women analysts of psychoanalysis from the outset charged Freud with sexism on a range of fronts, from his notion of 'penis envy' to the absence of mothers in his theories of psycho-sexual development. That said, even though feminists criticised some aspects of psychoanalysis, their work was also enriched by it, and a fraught, but often productive dialogue ensued between the "father of psychoanalysis" and the "mothers of psychoanalysis" (in Petra Buesken's term) from about the middle of the twentieth century. One of these is Klein whose work is credited for providing a new focus on women's psycho-sexual development which included the centrality of mothers and motherhood.

Klein's writing marked a decisive turn to the mother (i.e. maternal figure, which need not be biologically essentialised as female) which was later followed by object relations theorists. She provided a clinical gaze on the pre-Oedipal period and the intense albeit 'phantasised' relationship between infant and mother. Her vision remained firmly within the borders of Freudian drive theory, but her theories inaugurated a shift to the earlier stages of development highlighting the primacy of the mother in the child's and thus adult's mental life. According to Klein's theory the mother's breast (or a non-biologically-essentialised equivalent if the 'breast' is a bottle offered by a man or adoptive mother) is the first internalised love object for the infant. On her account, the infant is beset by hostile fantasies and primitive aggressive wishes that are gradually, though never completely, overcome. Klein also introduced the concept of the splitting of good from bad objects and complete objects into partial ones. She detailed the intrapsychic processes of 'introjection' and 'projection' in the acquisition of an internal sense of self and external other. The importance of her theory lay in the delineation of two developmental positions which are the 'paranoid-schizoid' position associated with the infant's omnipotent fantasy to possess, control, and destroy the mother and the 'depressive position' defined by an acceptance of the mother as a separate other, a 'whole

object,' who is not and never was under the infant's control. The 'paranoid- schizoid' developmental stage occurs early in life but is retained as a way of functioning that is called on throughout later development and in adulthood to deal with stress and trauma and is governed mainly by defences of splitting and projection. In emphasising the primacy of the mother for psychological development, Klein relegated the father, Oedipus complex and castration to a secondary role, as observed by Diane and Hodges who say:

> In Klein's work, the oedipal struggle is subsumed and consequently redefined in terms of depressive anxiety and the attempt to restore the mother as a whole object. At Klein's developmental turning point, she emphasizes depressive anxiety rather than castration anxiety .....Moreover, since depressive anxiety is never fully overcome, the subject is never finished with the mother. Ultimately the work of symbol formation, art and culture themselves, can be attributed to our attempts to make reparation, to regenerate the mother. (qtd. Bueskens 11)

For Klein 'the mother' is an internal spectral figure we all seek in unconscious phantasy to devour, destroy, and finally repair in our envy, fear, and guilt. Klein's focus, then, is not on the 'real mother,' but the 'maternal imago' or unconscious representation of mother, such as her breasts, milk, insides, body parts, genitals, in relation to the fulfilment and frustration of drives. She is a figure of splitting, introjection, and projection. 'Reparation' is the most important new development as a resolution of the depressive position as a result of which, through a variety of processes, the ego feels it undoes harm done in phantasies of maternal engulfment and restores, preserves, and revives objects and transforming the idea of aggression from destructive desire to a relational complex containing positive possibilities including the formation of loving relationships.

Klein's notion of 'parentification' is a boundary distortion, described by Wells and Jones as "a process in which parent and child roles are reversed in a family" (331), with long-term negative interpersonal and intrapsychic consequences for children. Parentification affects lifelong relationships and is associated with masochistic as well as narcissistic personalities because it impedes the child's development of a 'true self' as the child prematurely internalises the parents' ego ideal and abandons their own true wishes, needs, and goals. At the same time, it promotes a 'false self' that is formed in the image of parental expectations, for example, to be all-giving (the masochist child), or to be spectacular and achieve greatness (the narcissist child).

Donald Winnicott, who was Klein's student, went on to shift this internal focus to the external 'environment mother' and was more concerned with the actual practices of care than with the intrapsychic realm of phantasy. He created the notion of the 'good enough mother' who provides the right balance of love and loss, satisfaction and frustration of desire. This mother gradually 'fails' the infant over time so that they can adjust themselves to the reality of their own and the mother's autonomy. The mother, in Winnicott's view, holds, gratifies, contains, mirrors, and frustrates the infant with a view to facilitate the child's separate sense of self and capacity for basic relatedness. Winnicott emphasises that the mother cannot be 'perfect' and gratify the child's every wish because this will hamper the child from seeing the mother and themself as a separate person and will remain stuck in a hall of mirrors. A mother who is 'not good enough,' who unconsciously or consciously rejects, abandons or is absent, makes the child call on its immature ego to regulate itself producing a 'false self.' This is somebody who seeks to please others and consequently struggles with feeling authentic. I argue that in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Antionette's portrayal can be understood via the lens of Kleinian and Winnicottian developmental theory. She is portrayed as suffering life-long psychic harm as a result of her upbringing by a narcissistic mother who is 'not good enough': she struggles to feel authentic, is unable to form loving relationships, resorts to masochism in her marriage to Rochester, and ultimately resorts to paranoid-schizoid behaviour as a means of self-protection.

In the years that followed decolonisation across the globe – broadly from the 1950s onward – non-European women and scholars began to challenge the 'universal' claims of Western feminism and the homogeneity of women upon which this was premised. This has resulted in significant challenges, too, to the ways that patriarchy, trauma, and patriarchal trauma, have been theorised. Postcolonial feminism expands the literary and historical bases of postcolonial studies to cover a wide range of topics, including women's activism in the (so-called) Third World. It dispels the notion that Third World women and cultures are homogeneous and stresses that traditions in the Third World both develop across time and respond to a multiplicity of internal as well as internal interests.

At the heart of postcolonial feminist criticism is the issue of representation. Postcolonial feminism seeks peaceful solutions for marginalised women in postcolonial countries and aims at amelioration in the lives of women of postcolonial origin. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", argues that when even the most well-meaning Western women speak for non-western women, they displace them, replacing

their voices with their own. Indian feminist Chandra Talapade Mohanty, one of the first to question the efficacy of Western feminism for "third world" women, states that, "such theories which are authored in the West and therefore bear the authority of the West, perpetuate the self/other divide whereby discourses of developing nations are considered politically immature" (qtd. Pinkie Mekgwe, 14). Such claims evidence a global trend by women from formerly colonised nations, and the diaspora. Since the 1970s, in particular, African feminists, through activism and in writing, have fought for their autonomous voice *as* African women. Acclaimed African novelist and critic Ama Ata Aidoo, for example, is quoted at the start of Clenora Hudson-Weems ground-breaking book *Africana Feminism* (1993): "Feminism. You know how we feel about that embarrassing Western philosophy? The destroyer of homes. Imported mainly from America to ruin nice African women" (qtd. Hudson-Weems 11). Such claims provide an important frame for my discussion of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) in my final chapter.

The differences between the African feminist movement (sometimes referred to as African or Africana womanism) and Western-oriented feminist discourses lie in how African feminism is complicated and particularized within the context of intersecting multiple oppressions in which black women are oppressed in terms of both race and gender. Filomina Chioma Steady, in *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, sums things up this way:

> Regardless of one's position, the implications of the feminist movement for the black woman are complex … . Several factors set the black woman apart as having a different order of priorities. She is oppressed not simply because of her sex but ostensibly because of her race and, for the majority, essentially because of their class. Women belong to different socio-economic groups and do not represent a universal category. Because the majority of black women are poor, there is likely to be some alienation from the middle-class aspect of the women's movement which perceives feminism as an attack on men rather than on a system which thrives on inequality. (23-24)

Steady's book was published in 1981, two years after Emecheta published *The Joys of Motherhood*, and her above comment, like Aidoo's, is reflective of the attitudes of African women writers and theorists at the time. Nigerian academic and writer Chikwenye Okolio Ogunyemi argues for the need for

> a philosophy that celebrates Black roots, the ideals of Black life, while giving a balanced presentation of Black womandom. It concerns itself as much with the Black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates Blacks. (95).

Achieving such a 'balanced presentation' can be difficult. Black women in the African feminism movement have the dilemma of having to choose which oppression to resist and counter first: racism or "the Black sexual power tussle." According to Louise O'Brien, "The difficulty of addressing both race and gender oppression simultaneously is centred in the location of feminist discourse in Western culture, a culture which is also inescapably imperial, carrying and using the images, institutions and language of colonial oppression" (95). Most African women writers attempt to fuse an anti-colonial with an indigenous feminist discourse as a more courageous path in an African context as it allows them to borrow some concepts and vocabulary from an intellectual culture from which they are also trying to disassociate themselves from. At the same time, they feel compelled to modify their admiration for some aspects of the particular African culture(s) they are claiming validity for, particularly in relation to questions of gender oppression.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak posits that postcoloniality and decolonisation should be inseparable because of their historically-existing conjunction in the formerly colonised world. This signals that the ending of the explicitly colonial period in the occupation of colonised countries has not resulted in their freedom from the effects of colonising forces. Postcolonial feminism expands the literary and historical bases of postcolonial studies to cover a wide range of topics including women's activism in the Third World. It dispels the notion that Third World women and cultures are homogeneous and, in fact, stresses that traditions in the Third World both develop across time and respond to multiplicity of internal as well as external interests. Where Homi Bhabha emphasises the presence of the 'other' in the West and argues that the construction of the West cannot be disassociated from or understood without colonisers' relation with others, Spivak follows a deconstructive Derridean framework and addresses issues of women in India and the Third World. Spivak insists on the relevance of issues of feminism and the Third World to important Western debates from which they are routinely excluded. In response to Spivak's question in her 1988 essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', John Beverly talks of two senses of subalternity. Schutte quotes Beverly who states:

> In one sense, the subaltern could mean the most marginal of people, or those whose political project is to oppose hegemonic power. In another sense, subalternity means precisely that which cannot be represented in discourse insofar as the rules of representation functioning in discourse necessarily exclude it. (171)

At the heart of postcolonial feminist criticism is the issue of representation. Postcolonial feminism seeks peaceful solutions for marginalized women in postcolonial countries (or the Third World). Postcolonial feminism is aimed at amelioration in the lives of women of postcolonial origin. Spivak makes it the duty of postcolonial feminists to represent, without appropriating, the long-silenced voices of the subaltern women. When Western women speak for their 'brown sisters' they risk displacing them, replacing their voices with their own, according to Elleke Boehmer in *Stories of Women* (2006). Women from former colonies seek emancipation through education, struggle and hard work; however, men from former colonies frequently recolonise the bodies and minds of their women in the name of preserving their cultural values, lost or dismissed during colonisation. Ironically, their women are supposed to carry the burden of cultural values, even at the cost of their independence and autonomy.

It has been argued that complementarity of male and female roles existed in precolonial African societies and colonisation marked the downfall of the African woman's power and self-sovereignty as African men sought to assert their manhood, in the face of colonial racism, by asserting their dominance over African women. Others disagree and insist that many traditional African cultures, pre-colonisation, were patriarchal and paternalistic, at least to some degree. Anne McClintock is of the opinion that denouncing all feminisms as Western/imperialist erases from the memory the long histories of women's resistance to local patriarchies. She says, "Many women's mutinies around the world predated Western feminism or occurred without any contact with Western feminists" (qtd. Mekgwe 21). Mary Modupe Kolawole adds that "it is a matter of letting African women define themselves as they wish, so we can stop the dogmatic imposition of 'isms' and get on with the practical aspects of the struggle to empower African women and stop oppression and gender inequality" (93). As this suggests, the attempt to globalise African women's experiences and ignore specific cultural factors and local histories is at the heart of African women's concerns about Western feminism.

A key area of debate and concern is in relation to notions of motherhood. Emma Gross asserts that,

> early [Western] feminist writings on mothers and mothering, although often thoughtful, were intensely gloomy and painfully critical of women's choices. White feminists, for example, reflected a sense of loss, of betrayal by their mothers, whom they viewed as complicit in their own oppression. In contrast, women of color were more likely to respect their mothers' struggles while they were keenly aware of the price their mothers had paid to survive. (269)

An enormous amount has been written about motherhood – often very negatively – by Western feminists, and I won't traverse this literature here.[7] It must be noted, however, that negative evaluations of motherhood peaked in the period of second-wave feminism, which is also the period in which Emecheta writes. (The title of Jeffner Allen's 1983 essay says it all: "Motherhood: The Annihilation of Women."). The attitude of many African women to motherhood, however, is often quite different. African feminism often concedes that motherhood can at times operate in an oppressive manner but has tried to show other meanings to motherhood that may empower women, contra Western feminist claims. Motherhood comes with powers, privileges, and entitlements in many African cultures, even in the act of giving birth. According to Abosede Priscilla Ipadeola, for example, "much honour, freedom, strength, and agency characterize motherhood in most parts of Africa" (99). She continues,

> Motherhood symbolizes care, nurture, and discipline. Mothers in Africa have performed the role of care for centuries. Motherhood in this sense precludes the problems associated with essentializing the subject of the woman, or 'African woman' because it is founded on experience rather than biology. Motherhood does not signify weakness, fragility, and cluelessness in many cultures in Africa. Hence, even while women and men are not on the same plane in some African cultures, the elevation on which mothers stand is mostly associated with strength, compassion, discipline, care, and agency. (99-100)

In a similar way, Oyěwùmí, Oyèrónkẹ́ argues that "the different construction of motherhood [in many precolonial African cultures] demonstrates the seismic epistemic shift in thinking

[7] See for example: Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners* (1974) and *The Jest of God* (1966), Doris Lessing, *Children of Violence* series (1952 – 1969) and *The Fifth Child* (1988), Toni Morrison, *Tar Baby* (1981), Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (1963).

occasioned by European colonization and policies, the establishment of notions of individualism, Christianization, Islamization of the culture and globalization" (7).

In the African context it is common practice for the girl child to be encouraged, from the earliest stages of their predestined life, to look forward to marriage, wifehood and motherhood and it is upon this premise that their success is measured. In many African societies the value of women is based on their capability and capacity to bear children for their husbands. According to Falola, "Reproduction is the key to the continuity of kinship and community, and women as childbearers, carry its burden and glory" (qtd. Ogunrotimi and Owoeye 98); Ngcobo states that "in Africa they preserve a special place of honour for motherhood" (qtd. Ogunrotimi and Owoeye 98). However, as Emecheta's novel makes abundantly clear, this can cause enormous pain for women who are unable to bear children. Consider these comments by Remi Akujobi:

> Motherhood is so critical in most traditional societies in Africa that there is no worse misfortune for a woman than being childless. A barren woman is seen as incomplete, she is what Mbiti calls the 'dead end of human life, not only for genealogical level but also for herself' (144). […] Molara Ogundipe-Leslie suggests that the first task [for African women] is the demystification of certain male stereotypes of the African woman as goddess or as Supreme Mother, self-sacrificing and suffering willingly and silently. She says women should not completely embrace the image of the fertile mother of the nation, an image that African male writers have helped in disseminating. It is generally agreed that 'Mother Africa' may have been declared free, but mothers of Africa remained manifestly oppressed. (3)

In my discussion of *The Joys of Motherhood* I consider the ways that Emecheta – educated in the West during the rise of second-wave feminism, ultimately earning a PhD in Sociology in 1991 – moves uncomfortably between different 'African' conceptions of motherhood – and relatedly, womanhood. I argue that she shifts ambiguously between a 'Western feminist' position that exposes patriarchal abuse and resultant female trauma in traditional (Nigerian) Igbo culture and an 'African womanist' stance that endorses aspects of traditional Igbo gendered roles prior to colonisation. I argue, further, that her portrayals in the novel are unambiguously critical of the traumatic impacts of colonisation on Nigerian men and women.

In the past few decades, there have been numerous calls for a new *decolonised* trauma theory. European Trauma theory, as advocated by Freud and those whose later work drew on (if also

contested) his, is deemed inadequate to properly account for (post) colonial experiences and texts. Irene Visser asserts that "a response to trauma from a respectful cognition of culturally specific spiritual and religious perspectives, analogous to the recognition of historical, national, and ethnic diversification, is necessary for a postcolonial theory of trauma to be truly decolonized" (qtd. Martínez-Falquina 835). Applying Western psychiatric, psychological and psychoanalytical models to analyse the historical trauma of colonised peoples is now widely recognised as inadequate. Post-traumatic stress disorder has been denounced as a diagnosis for (post)colonised people by Pat Braken, for example, because of how it was brought to the developing world without any great thought given to vastly different cultural and social contexts and its lack of historical and political particularity. This Eurocentric, individualistic approach of late twentieth-century trauma studies has been increasingly challenged, as here, in the words of Stef Craps and Gert Buelens: "by ignoring or marginalizing non-Western traumatic events and histories and non-Western theoretical work, trauma studies may actually assist in the perpetuation of Eurocentric views and structures that maintain or widen the gap between the West and the rest of the world" (2). The shift we are seeing is towards ways of "theorizing colonization in terms of the infliction of a collective trauma and reconceptualizing postcolonialism as a post-traumatic cultural formation" (Craps and Buelens 2). They argue, much as with earlier arguments about Western feminism, that it is not possible to unproblematically export Western theoretical diagnostic models to account for the enduring, collective trauma of colonial racism, violence and violation. Such ideas will inform my discussion of Emecheta's novel.

Chapter 3: "For life, as it were": Patriarchal Trauma in *Washington Square*

Henry James published *Washington Square* in 1880. The novel reflects an interest in the psyche, which is not surprising, given James's familiarity with the work of his brother William. However, the discipline or practice of functional psychology, of which William James is retrospectively acknowledged to be a founder, was still in the inchoate stages of becoming a science. The publication of *Washington Square* preceded the publishing of Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer's influential *Studies on Hysteria* by fifteen years and the development of trauma theory by many decades. Nonetheless, I will argue that Darwin's theories of evolutionary development by 'natural selection' strengthened the bedrock of patriarchal trauma in the nineteenth century and that this is reflected in *Washington Square*. *Washington Square* is set in New York, America, in the early Victorian era (1840s). According to Kari Nixon, the chronological gap between the time of the setting and the time of the writing enables James to examine the earlier "cultural milieu from the much-later scientific and social context of the novel's 1880 publication" (232). She continues, "this particular novel is a prime example of the necessity of meaningfully tying literature to its contemporary scientific contexts and, perhaps more importantly, of contextualizing that science within the culture that crafted it" (232). It is precisely such contextualisation that I will attempt in this chapter, by discussing how James uses contemporary scientific notions to frame his portrayal of events set almost half a century earlier.

Washington Square portrays the life of women in the patriarchal home of a tyrannical, self-absorbed physician, Doctor Austin Sloper. Sloper has lost his first-born child, a son, at the age of three, "in spite of," the narrator asserts, everything … *the father's science* could invent to save him" (6; my emphasis). His wife dies while giving birth to their second child, a daughter, Catherine. Catherine grows up in a household where she is unfavoured and unconsciously blamed for her mother's death. Sloper regards Catherine a disappointment because of her female "imperfect sex" (6); we are told that her "sex . . . rendered the poor child . . . an inadequate substitute for [the] lamented firstborn" (6). She develops into a seemingly unremarkable young woman whose marriage prospects are closely guarded by her father. Indeed, early in the novel, the narrator – focalising Dr Sloper's perspective – notes that she was "without a trace of her mother's beauty. She was not ugly; she had simply a plain,

dull, gentle countenance" (10). Her father is sorely disappointed in her: "He had moments of irritation at having produced a commonplace child, and he even went so far, at times, as to take a certain satisfaction in the thought that his wife had not lived to find her out" (11). We learn that she has a taste for expensive clothing and that her father inwardly "grimaces" because she is "both ugly and overdressed" (14). She is educated by Sloper's widowed (and conniving) sister, Mrs Penniman, who comes to live in the household when Catherine is ten.

She initially has an inner life that is portrayed as meagre and only sufficient to make her negotiate the passage from childhood to womanhood. Sloper treats himself to entertainment at her expense, which at the same time reveals the type of innocence she possesses. When Morris Townsend, who is a young man and a marriage prospect for Catherine, comes calling, Sloper does not like him. His scientific curiosity and suspicions are stirred by the fact that Townsend has spent his means in questionable ways, and he expects Catherine to agree with this opinion. He also makes it clear that he finds it impossible for a man to love his unattractive daughter. When she refuses to accept his view that Morris is merely after her money and remains faithful to her feelings for him (encouraged by her aunt, Mrs Penniman), even after he betrays her trust, Sloper is furious. He tries to use his patriarchal, parental and scientific authority to sway her thinking, without success.

As a medical man, and a scientist, Sloper appears to accept and endorse Darwinist assumptions about the inferiority of women. (Of course, at the time in which the novel is set, Darwin had not yet published *On the Origins of the Species*, but I argue that the influence of this work and the ideas that inform it, and his later *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), are abundantly evident in *Washington Square*, which was written after their publication). Darwinism placed men on a higher level on the evolutionary ladder, while women occupied the lower level close to children and uncivilised savages. In Chapter XIX of *Origins*, for example, Darwin famously wrote, "Man is more courageous, pugnacious and energetic than woman, and has a more inventive genius. His brain is absolutely larger.... The [human] female … ultimately assumes certain distinctive characters, and in the formation of her skull, is said to be intermediate between the child and the man." Such thinking was part of the bedrock of patriarchalism in the Victorian era as it supported female confinement to the home to fulfil their fundamental role of reproduction and raising morally upright children. I will argue that one consequence of the adoption of these ideas was 'patriarchal trauma': that is, female trauma resulting from patriarchal abuse in Victorian times, bolstered by Darwinian notions of European, human male supremacy over not only all other species and races, but

women, too. Of course – as I have discussed in my key concepts chapter – trauma, as it is theorised today, in a line drawn directly from the work of Freud, was not known, theorised or diagnosed at the time James wrote *Washington Square*. Nonetheless, I argue that trauma was regularly experienced by women in many Victorian homes and manifested in a variety of symptoms that went undiagnosed, often attributed to the vague condition of female hysteria," due to the limited knowledge of trauma then.

Henry James viewed fictional writing as a house whose walls are pierced by a series of apertures, with a figure (the writer) standing at each observing the outside world. What the writer sees (always a partial view of the world), and hence writes, he argues, reflects the "consciousness of the artist" and hence, also "his 'moral' reference."[8] Some of James's literary apertures were scientific, which reflected the intellectual architecture of his era, and influenced his writing. His familial circles and intellectual acquaintances were populated by figures who were central to the emerging sciences of biology, psychology, anthropology and even eugenics. These were acquaintances he knew directly or were known through his brother William, such as John Fiske, Herbert Spenser and members of the Darwin family, including Charles.[9] In his autobiography, James writes of a memorable time in London in the "springtime of '69" in which he met a number of "distinguished persons" including Darwin:

> I had a Sunday afternoon hour with Mrs. Lewes at North Bank . . . and then the opportunity of dining with Mr Ruskins at Denmark Hill, an impression of uneffaced intensity and followed by a like – and yet so unlike – evening of hospitality

[8] In the Preface to *Portrait of a Lady*, James writes: "The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million – a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will. These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater sameness of report than we find. They are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life. But they have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other. He and his neighbours are watching the same show, but one seeing more where the other sees less, one seeing black where the other sees white, one seeing big where the other sees small, one seeing coarse where the other sees fine. And so on, and so on; there is fortunately no saying on what, for the particular pair of eyes, the window may NOT open; 'fortunately' by reason, precisely, of this incalculability of range. The spreading field, the human scene, is the "choice of subject"; the pierced aperture, either broad or balconied or slit-like and low-browed, is the 'literary form'; but they are, singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher– without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. Tell me what the artist is, and I will tell you of what he has BEEN conscious. Thereby I shall express to you at once his boundless freedom and his 'moral' reference" (capitalisation original).

[9] Ignas K. Skurpskelis writes of "the importance of Darwinian evolution in the development of some of [William] James's most distinctive views, both theoretical and moral" pp.745. See also, Eugene Taylor, pp. 7-34 and Lucas McGranahan, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior*, U Chicago P, 1989.

> from William Morris in the medieval mise-en-scene of Queen Square. This had been preceded by a luncheon with Charles Darwin, beautifully benignant, sublimely simple, at Down; a memory to which I find attached our incidental wondrous walk. (515)

Henry James held common intellectual property with Charles Darwin and his circle of critics and adherents.[10] His work was influenced by popular science, especially Darwinian projections and was informed by the language and methods of evolutionary biology, ethnology, and other nascent human sciences of the era. He often created (male) characters that positioned themselves as diagnosticians of human variety, whether of class, nationality, or gender, and regarded this self-assumed position as proof of their own evolutionary preferability. They use this rationale of superiority to judge those around them as inferior and to respond to any challenges to their authority as an affront to nature and reason.

Dr Sloper is one such character and Darwinian science is an aperture on his actions and opinions in *Washington Square*. Sloper regards himself and his opinions highly as a man in an honourable profession who combines "the realm of the practical" with "the light of science" (8). His "idea of the beauty of reason," which he identifies with the roles of "observer" and "philosopher" (9), makes him treat the goings on in his household as a kind of experiment in human sexual selection. He evaluates others, including his own daughter, using 'scientific systems' such as physiognomy and sexology. These 'scientific systems' were used to rank individuals on the evolutionary ladder in Darwinism of the day and saw reason and logic as the benchmark of evolutionary superiority. Sloper prides these superior qualities in himself but finds them wanting in others around him, especially women. This puts his daughter, his sisters and their opinions at the bottom of the ladder in the hierarchy of gender in ways that accord with Darwin's thinking. An experimental approach to emotional issues is applied to both his family and social circles, which causes psychic strain to Catherine. Sloper approaches emotional matters scientifically and fails because he assumes a methodologically determined connection between symptoms and pathology, between 'extracted' character and the nature of identity. His methods treat surfaces profoundly and his geometric approach places the value of gender, race, and cranial capacity in an equation that, he believes, solves the riddle of identity and destiny. He mistakenly sees Catherine as a simple and transparent creature who is like a two-dimensional graph with no concealed depths. This forces his

[10] See, for example, chapters 4, 5 and 6 in Bert Bender, *The Descent of Love,* 1996; and also *Evolution and "the Sex Problem,"* 2004.

daughter to seek refuge within, in an interiority detailed by the narrator and so known to the reader, where she is safe from her father's torturous scientific gaze. This constant gaze clearly terrorizes Catherine, as her father performs experiments on her heart and mind as a means of controlling her.

Sloper uses 'popular science' theories, such as physiognomy, on his own family in *Washington Square*. The dramatic fulcrum in the novel hinges on the short circuit by which Sloper converts anthropometric odds into categorical judgements regarding the intellect and morality of specific individuals. His method lies in his prided status of "being something of a physiognomist" (39). This 'science,' with its emphasis on comparative measurement of human form and facial features, was essentially a statistical and empirical one, but its efforts to measure such things as intelligence, criminality and even the evolutionary status of particular individuals soon hardened into a classificatory system. During the mid-1800s, a German physiologist named Wilhelm Wundt used scientific research methods to investigate human reaction times to various stimuli. He outlined many major connections between the science of physiology and the study of human thought in his book *Principles of Physiological Psychology* (*Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie*, 1873-74). He founded the world's first psychology laboratory in 1879, and this marked the official start of psychology as a separate and distinct scientific discipline (indeed, he was the first person ever to call himself a psychologist).[11] Wundt perceived psychology as the study of human consciousness and he sought to apply experimental methods to studying internal mental processes, believing that all physical events, like facial expressions or bodily gestures, have mental counterparts, and vice versa, concluding that one can 'read' interior mental states, and associated morality, from external physical expressions. Sloper uses this method to 'size' Catherine's suitor Morris Townsend and after a brief meeting is persuaded that Morris is an unsuitable match for his daughter. He blandly tells him, "You belong to the wrong category" (89), and later tells Morris' sister, "I am helped by a habit I have of dividing people into classes, into types. I may easily be mistaken about your brother as an individual, but his type is written on his whole person" (105). By fixing Morris' "category" he forms an entire chain of assumptions about his class, temperament, and moral character. His scientific methods and categories do not factor in emotions such as love, however, and this leads to mental anguish and heartbreak for his daughter.

[11] Neil Carlson, et al., *Psychology: The Science of Behaviour*, 18. The other key 'founder' of psychology as a discipline is argued to be none other than William James.

Sloper's attitudes towards his daughter reflect the prejudices of men towards women ostensibly justified by evolutionary theory. Very early on, readers are informed that "his private opinion of the more complicated sex was not exalted" (8). This renders Catherine, "to the Doctor's sense, an inadequate substitute for his lamented first-born, of whom he had promised himself to make an admirable man" (5). The assumptions Sloper holds with respect to his daughter – *as* a woman – had been absorbed into 'scientific' beliefs in the decade preceding the publication of *Washington Square*. An entire array of imputed characteristics from cranial capacity to cellular design provided by evolutionists found women to resemble earlier, less 'developed' incarnations of homo sapiens. Intellectual historian Cynthia Eagle Russett writes, on the model of womanhood constructed by Victorian science, that "child and savage neatly counterpointed each other. Woman, however, played a role in both: in ontogeny she represented eternal adolescence, in phylogeny she recalled the ancestry of the race" (54). She continues, commenting on the reflection of such ideas in the work of leading thinkers at the time:

> French anthropologist Paul Topinard [wrote]: 'The outlines of the adult female cranium are intermediate between those of the child and the adult man … the brain weight and cranial capacity are less.' Rudolf Wagner believed that the brain of woman as a whole was always in a more or less infantile condition; Emil Huschke, that woman was only a child in growth, her brain, like her body, remaining true to the infantile type. […] Psychologically, too, women remain a child, weak-willed, impulsive, perceptive, markedly imitative rather than original, timid, and dependent. (54)

Catherine's character, viewed through Sloper's aperture, reflects evolutionary arrest and imputed naturalness in its backwardness, reflecting the era's main measure of individual evolution. This was assessed through consideration of the distance travelled from the 'natural state' of savagery to civilisation. Catherine does not present herself as a finished product of cultural work and her attempt at fashion underscores her incompetence at showing elegance. She is placed on par with the racial primitives through her inclination to wear showy clothes and her religious enthusiasm. Her physical robustness and vitality (often commented on by the narrator) are more evidence of her atavism and show an anterior type of woman who is closer to the natural state and deviates from the desirable feminine delicacy and sexual dysmorphism of the Victorian. Her father, who initially hoped she would prove to be clever, is frustrated and disappointed by her inability to engage in the artifices and mannerisms that

are the mark of the cultured ingénue of her age and class. Sloper concludes that she also shares, with children and savages, a deficit in "powers of generalizing and abstracting" (20). He extrapolates the intellectual level he observes in his female patients and applies it to Catherine as if to attest to this imputed deficit. The narrator imbues Catherine with characteristics of a seemingly imitative nature which was posited by Darwin as typical of women and "of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilisation" (qtd. above), and shows Catherine's tendency to copy, rather than create independently, which is repeatedly shown in the activity of sewing by patterns.

In many passages, via free indirect discourse, readers are made privy to Sloper's thoughts about his daughter. An invidious comparison is made between his daughter's mental capacities and his own, as he regards himself as superior to women in general. A Darwinian undercurrent is evident when he declares to Morris' sister that his daughter will need to marry someone whose "function" will be that of "a protector and care-taker of my child, who is singularly ill-adapted to take care of herself" (77). This implies that he has consigned her to a state of evolutionary probation alongside adolescents, atavists and the racially primitive and views her as in need of scientific supervision. Sloper treats Catherine as a biological inferior, his captive patient who needs his "stock of unexpended authority" (10). His dominating behaviour fits the definition of authority in a clinic or prison: a relationship between the empowered subject and the object of notation. Sloper "makes notes of everything and regularly consults those notes" (34-35), an activity that is more than just innocent scientific information gathering in relation to his daughter, but also a method of compulsion and control. This weighs heavily on Catherine, who has been mentally conditioned to oblige her father by conforming to his demands. She is reluctant to mislead her father as she asks Morris, "Don't you think it would be deception" (127), when he encourages her to go to Europe to pretend she will forget her lover. Catherine holds a subordinate position under Sloper's discipline and is required to demonstrate subservience to her father's will, which in turn confirms his idea that she is by nature simple and docile and therefore requires tutelage, control and management.

Doctor Sloper uses his (male) parental authority to maintain power over those in his charge who depend on his protection. The narrator informs us that "her father's words had such an authority for her that her very thoughts were capable of obeying him" (102). Sloper plays the part of a doctor whose attitude of emotional reserve pays dividends of authority and prestige. This allows him to retain his power over Catherine mentally by being emotionally and

mentally inaccessible. Catherine sees superiority even in his mistakes and is reported as thinking, "there was something superior even in his injustice, and absolute in his mistakes" (84). Merle Williams notes that "Irony is the dominant modality of both the narrator and Dr Sloper" (101). This results in a comic tone at times, but it is surely mistaken to suggest, as Richard Poirier does, that *Washington Square* is "a comic novel" (180). Often, Sloper addresses Catherine ironically because he believes her to be incapable of detecting this. This may invite the 'more-knowing' reader's humorous response, but more often suggests the father's cruelty at the expense of his daughter. At the start of the novel, for example, Catherine thinks, after being slighted by her father, but also acknowledged by him for wearing a striking dress, "she had to cut her pleasure out of the piece [his words], as it were. There were portions left over, light remnants and snippets of irony, which she never knew what to do with" (22). There is little to laugh at here.

As a result of her father's constant slurs and innuendo, as well as his direct affronts, she begins to doubt her own feelings for Morris Townsend. When Sloper calls her a "cruel child" for not dropping Morris (104), she begins to believe that her heart is perverted in its love for Morris and that for her "to do what she was doing [feeling love for Morris] a girl must indeed be bad" (108). The light of science fails to function as a liberatory force in Sloper's area of influence; instead, it is the projected ray that strategically illuminates the prison-cell of a familial panopticon. Instead of receiving love from her father, Catherine is shown the shape of the shadow she is to inhabit by her father's gaze. This deprivation of parental love is mentally damaging and abusive to Catherine as she is a dependent whose life is shaped by how he treats her. She is traumatised by her father's behaviour and attitudes which reveal, according to Williams, "the pressure of a reductive logic that substitutes intellectualised duties for care" (Williams 107). When he believes Catherine has disregarded his demands to break off things with Morris, Sloper calls her "ungrateful" (104) and "heartless" (108), which torments her emotionally, and he demands she does as he demands. She makes a conscious and calculated effort to please her father in response and readers are encouraged to see the development of a challenging interior, despite her exterior performance of transparency and sincerity. However, we are told of the great cost of this for Catherine as she sets her will against her father's, which torments her soul. Moreover, unfortunately, her father is ultimately proven correct: Morris has no interest in Catherine, only in her money.

Inheritance is a major source of trauma in *Washington Square* and is used as a tool for control. Sloper holds real psychological power over whether his women – Catherine and her

aunt, his sister – have a home and uses inheritance as bait to see how far his daughter is willing to hold off in the battle of wills being fought over Morris. Of course, Catherine has an independent inheritance from her mother, but this, ironically, makes her the subject of both the unscrupulous attention of Morris and of patriarchal surveillance. As Lauren Berlant notes,

> … had her mother not left her the money, she never would have been humiliated by the attentions of Morris Townsend. Money itself lends no ideological relief or power to the woman who inherits it; female allegiance to male authority remains undisrupted in Catherine's character. It is this structure of female fealty that is made available to scrutiny, if to nothing else, by the narrative of *Washington Square*. (445)

The power of patriarchal control was a concern of Darwinian ideology in terms of inheritance and eugenics. This Darwinian aperture is that of the traditional courtship plot in terms of sexual selection where superior traits were supposedly preserved and maximized in subsequent generations by policing female sexuality and determining who married whom. That Sloper is convinced that Catherine is ill-adapted to the task of self-determination or partner choice speaks to the debate over adaptation, evolution, and survival of the (fittest) human organism. Sloper does not see Catherine as capable of selecting a suitable mate; such a task can only be entrusted to a superior and more knowledgeable authority such as himself. He sees himself as having the capability to discriminate categories of prospective suitors and believes that Catherine "has not emancipated herself morally quite so far . . . as to choose a husband" (65) without him. She does not, in Sloper's mind, have the intelligence to choose wisely, and her eugenic fate lies in his hands. His personal eugenic anxieties are projected on Catherine as in his eyes she is the genetic equal of neither his lamented wife nor her son, even though her body is a mausoleum of his genetic aspirations. She is living proof of genetic failure – a weak, unfit offspring – and he is desperate for one last hope of improving the eugenic losses he associates with her by choosing a 'fitter' mate. Darwin argued that there was some, if limited, possibility to extend the talents of genetic inferiors such as women which explains Sloper's directive to Mrs Penniman to make his daughter "a clever woman" (15) via education. She replies, "My dear Austin, do you think it is better to be clever than to be good?" The doctor answers her, "Good for what? You are good for nothing if you are not clever" (15), making very clear the importance he places on intellect over morality. When he takes her abroad, to get her away from Morris, Sloper says, "I have done a mighty good thing for [Morris] in taking you abroad; your value is twice as great, with all the knowledge and taste that you have acquired. … [N]ow you have seen everything, and appreciated everything,

and you will be a most entertaining companion" (181-2). When Catherine proceeds to disagree with her father about Morris, Sloper uses the threat of inheritance to make her feel vulnerable.

Washington Square was written during the time when clear distinctions were being made between 'empiric' and 'scientific' study. Scientific doctors insisted on their authority by emphasizing the underlying laws that govern the progress of diseases and their cure. Sloper presents as a scientific practitioner who believes his analytic ability is evidence of his superior intellect and professionalism. How he treats others is premised on his reasoned general laws, known only to him as a professional, that are a defence of his own authority. The defence is necessitated by the crisis in Sloper's personal history as well as by the medicine of Sloper's day. The narrator puts this bluntly: "For a man whose trade was to keep people alive he had certainly done poorly in his own family" (5). However, while a doctor like Sloper might fail in the treatment of particular cases, through theory and generalisation he can claim success in the aggregate: he had "passed his life in estimating people and in nineteen cases out of twenty he was right" (71). This activity of 'estimation' is not limited to medical evaluation; Sloper prizes his ability to sum up and categorise people in terms of moral, educational, and social rank, too. Ironically, the narrator alerts us to his failure in such endeavours – and close to home – early on: he has failed to effectively 'estimate' the severity of both his son's and his wife's conditions. The implication is that he might, equally, fail to accurately 'estimate' his remaining child.

The familiar Victorian trope of the 'dead mother' reflects the contradictory Victorian view of women and their influence in society and the home. Barbara Thaden views the literary phenomenon of the 'dead mother' in Victorian novels as a revelation that for most novelists, even for some mother-authors, there was little, if any, recognition of the significance and influence of mothers on children; alive or dead, remembered or forgotten. Mothers, it was assumed, were merely genetic conduits and nurturers with little or no impact on the future successes or failures of their offspring. She states:

> Thus one of the most painful contradictions faced by Victorian mothers was the fact that the society which was idealizing the wife and mother and restricting women's sphere of activity to the home refused to recognize at a very basic level that their work produced any result. (17)

Middle- and upper-class women in the Victorian era were expected to remain in the home, devoted and submissive to their husbands and fathers. If not quite so in actuality, this angelic view of women was commonly portrayed in the literature and art of the era, perhaps no more resolutely reflected than in Coventry Patmore's highly popular poem, "The Angel in the House" (1854), a few lines of which read:

> Man must be pleased; but him to please
> Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
> Of his condoled necessities
> She casts her best, she flings herself …(1585)

This idealised view, according to Sarah Kühl, was the result of social changes happening due to industrialization and urbanisation, and the rise of the middle class.[12]

> What is clear is that [Victorian] society was in upheaval and certain norms and traditions, roles within society, expectations and duties had to be redefined or confirmed. Therefore, creating categories and propagating certain stereotypes was a way of reacting to all of these new developments and also, feminists would argue, a way for men to try and regain control over women, who suddenly challenged their assigned roles and tried to break free of the restrictions that society imposed on them. It certainly is no coincidence that the moment the 'new women' started to demand their independence, the glorification of the housewife, of the angle in the house, took hold of society with unprecedented vigour. (171)

It is in this 'moment' that James published *Washington Square*: at the height of debates about the place and role of the 'ideal' woman. A key question is whether the novel challenges the notion that women should be 'domestic angels' or reinforces it. I submit that it is the latter. James and his circle admired Darwin and subscribed to much of his theorising. Darwin's writings emphasised the need for women to stay in the home where they were protected from diseases that would compromise their ability to bear children, or the health of the children they bore.

Although James gives Catherine a victory in the battle of wills between her and the men in her life, he still confines her to the home and hearth at the end of the book. Catherine remains living in Washington Square, sexually unfulfilled and with no conceivable future of a family

[12] The ideal role of women in the century was extensively debated. The "Woman Question," as it is often referred to, has been widely discussed. See for example Jeanette King, *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction*, 1005, esp. Chapter 1.

to take care of or be loved by. She is preserved in 'virgin Mary' purity, a state of passionless being. Indeed, she reverts to precisely that which her father demanded of her.

Catherine's innocence and naivete are often directly asserted by the narrator in comments such as this, which appears near the beginning of the novel: "She was morally pure and imperturbably good, affectionate, docile, obedient and addicted to speaking the truth…" (10). This creates an impression of an undeveloped, childlike disposition even though she is a young woman. As the novel progresses, the narrator marks each stage of Catherine's expanding consciousness as she experiences 'new' emotions. He provides the reader a privileged view of her emergent interior world where her evolving psychic drama occurs, and her secret emotions and thoughts reveal the growth of an imaginative woman. However, at the conclusion of the novel, it appears that she will not live as that promising woman; the narrative cuts short her opportunities and growth. As Mona Simpson asserts of the novel, "If Americans want a tragedy with a happy ending, Henry James delivers something more like a comedy with a haunting close" (n.p.)

Catherine's initial innocence makes her a promising candidate for psychological growth. She is largely uninitiated in the realm of emotions and knows not what to expect of, or how to deal with the new feelings that arise in her. The first significant act in her emotional development is an external ideal that awakens her inner self when she meets Morris Townsend. She moves outside herself to love Morris, but her love becomes a private possession concealed and hoarded while she quietly assesses it. She grows towards maturity by practising disguise so as not to antagonise her father. Once candid, she becomes introverted, even secretive. When her cousin first asks her what she thinks of Townsend she answers indirectly, "Oh nothing particular" (21), which marks the first act of concealment in her entire life. The second instance is when her father asks her if she has enjoyed herself at the party where she met Morris, and she evades answering his question by saying, "I am rather tired" (23). The narrator draws attention to the significance of this moment by saying, "For the second time in her life she made an indirect answer" (23); and the beginning of a period of dissimulation is certainly a significant date. This signals the origin of Catherine's private life. By turning inward, she opens up a sphere of mental activity where she has autonomy, and which provides refuge from the external world. She discovers the beauty and reward of not sharing her inner consciousness with those around her. A lot of 'firsts' follow after. She starts to feel emotions such as anger, for example when she learns that Mrs

Penniman has seen Morris behind her back. For the first time, states the narrator, Catherine "felt angry for the moment" (95) and adds, in order to fix it as another beginning, that "it was almost the first time she had ever felt angry" (95). Even the insensitive Mrs Penniman observes that "the girl had never had just this dark fixedness in her gaze" (97). Catherine's response to her father's request that she move out of his house after they return from Europe is also new: "for the first time . . . there was a spark of anger in her grief" (126). She feels some elation for having spoken to him violently when he insists that Townsend would forsake her. These 'firsts' – to which the narrator draws attention – chart the development of her inner self *and* her concealment of this.

Catherine's powers of introspection and imagination are shown to flourish. She enjoys observing her own internal drama as if it were a fresh marvel: "She watched herself as she would have watched another person and wondered what she would do. It was as if this other person, who was both herself and not herself, had suddenly sprung into being, inspiring her with a natural curiosity as to the performance of untested functions" (83). She exudes dullness on the outside but has a newly developing self on the inside which is hidden from – or unnoticed by – the self-centred people around her. She wonders about and imagines possible existences within as she pursues her idealised love with Morris. In her rhapsodic imagination she creates beautiful figments, and casts him as "a young knight in a poem" (32). The imaginary ideal she constructs becomes the main focus in her life as she becomes giddy in love. When her fantasies are rudely destroyed by her discovery of the truth about the human condition – her father's cruelty and Morris' deceit – she nonetheless has an enriched consciousness when she arrives at the wholeness of truth. At this point, she has gathered and processed all the necessary information to realise the truth of Morris' intentions. According to James W. Gargano, James "conceives of imagination as a constructive force" and through the figure of Catherine suggests that

> …the consciousness must take in and assimilate clues that, by some indefinable process, establish a relationship among themselves. Then, at the 'right' moment, a look, word, or gesture will spontaneously cause the fusion preparing the subconscious to come to the surface and proclaim itself. (359)

The 'right' moment might be construed as what is now commonly called an epiphany: Catherine's epiphany amounts to the realisation that Morris is going to leave her: "A sudden fear had come over her: it was like the solid conjunction of a dozen disembodied doubts, and

her imagination, at a single bound, had traversed an enormous distance" (162). She realises that her idealism was wasted on a hollow, loveless predator, but also values what survives her suffering and acknowledges that the love affair made a great change in her life. Of this, Gargano writes, "the change, precipitated by the confluence of hope, conflict and trauma, leaves her with an inner self that helps her to bear her demonic knowledge with a measure of grace" (360). In short, she experiences psychological evolution, of the kind theorised by William James.

Some of this is told to the reader, but much is also shown. James skilfully makes use of free indirect discourse, as in this sentence: "Doctor Sloper would have liked to be proud of his daughter; but there was nothing to be proud of in poor Catherine" (11). Although given in the third person, this is not an objective observation provided by the narrator. The comment clearly carries the tenor of the doctor's voice. Alexandra Denisa writes of James that he "subverted the prejudgement of the omniscient author in favour of … narration which is centred on the characters' point of view" (149). This is only partially true because while we gain many insights from "the characters' point of view", we are also provided with many ironic observations on the part of the often-condescending narrator, and some of these are directed at Catherine. There has been extensive debate about James's attitudes towards women and his portrayal of them, including the frequently noted fact that many of his novels feature women protagonists. It is not my place to evaluate this critical literature here, but Donatella Izzo offers an excellent summary of feminist responses to James's writing, on which I will gesture briefly:

> Early feminist criticism of James, starting with Judith Fetterley's influential *The Resisting Reader* (1978), in reappraising his work from this vantage point …, read it as an honest and sympathetic, but also fatalistic and disillusioned depiction of women's subordination as both iniquitous and inevitable. Thus, the argument goes, James's realistic representation has a consciousness-raising value for women readers, capable of conveying a 'revolutionary message' (Fetterley 1978: 152). […] On different theoretical grounds, the idea of James's works as capable of transcending the ideological limits of patriarchal culture was also upheld by Elizabeth Allen, who moved the woman question from a historicizing, thematic reading to the semiological terrain of the representational processes whereby, in patriarchal culture, women become signs of a male signified that negates them as persons (Allen 1984: 7); and by Priscilla Walton (1992), whose poststructuralist

> feminist reading sees the Jamesian oeuvre as one that allows an unprecedented room for the emergence of the feminine – the feminine being no longer sought in realistic plots or characters but rather formulated, after Lacan and Derrida, in psychoanalytical, philosophical, or linguistic terms, as that pluralizing factor that unsettles the phallogocentric closure of the realist text. […] A second wave of critics, however, has been less lenient with regard to James's reliance on stereotypical plots of women's submission, seeing them as proof that James's novels, far from aesthetically transcending the limitations of his patriarchal culture, fully subscribed to its gender ideology [she points to John Carlos Rowe and Alfred Habegger]. (345)

Izzo also draws attention to the fact that many James novels and stories end with a disappointing outcome for his female characters. Catherine Sloper is a case in point. At the end of the novel, despite the rich self-consciousness we know she possesses, she is alone in the house at Washington Square, a spinster, endlessly sewing, "for life, as it were" (199). The awfulness of her fate is only magnified by our knowledge that she has an abundant and inventive inner self. The questions Izzo asks of James's oeuvre might be asked of *Washington Square*, too:

> How are we to read this record of [female] defeat, renunciation, and death [in the novels] – as the proof of James's realism, society being what it is? As evidence of his desire to outdo his women colleagues at their own sentimental game? As the result of his sadistic tendencies toward an otherwise menacing, because powerful, femininity? As the manifestation of his masochistic identification with women's passive and sacrificial position? As the means of his own bid for authority as an author and a Master? (347)

Gert Beulens and Susan M. Griffin pose the same question with more economy: "Is Catherine to be snickered at? Mildly pitied? Admired? Does she mature towards a (lonely) independence, or is she finally a pathetic character with a dreary existence?" (lvii).

If James is simply portraying 1840s American societal prescriptions of the role of women as self-denying, self-sacrificing, submissive, and chaste, then why do we perceive the ending as unhappy? Shouldn't we accept this as the 'realistic' conclusion and laud him for inviting readers to recognise this as the 'reality' lived by many women at the time? Perhaps he was encouraging his late Victorian readers to challenge the attitudes and practices of antebellum

Manhatten by recognising the ways in which Sloper diminishes his daughter in life, and continues to do so even after his death?

Many feminist theorists are intrigued by the novel's ending especially the last sentence: "Catherine meanwhile in the parlour picking up her morsel of fancy work, had seated herself with it again – for life, as it were" (199). Does this suggest Catherine is destined to do meaningless, if genteel, fancywork "for life"? Or perhaps what is hinted at is that she has substituted her needlework *for* life? Judith Butler writes of this ending, and the famous concluding conditional phrase,

> … then the father does die, and Morris arrives, and he banters and he appears to mean what he says, and he asks about a future, and she shows him the door, *which is her act*. And she takes up her embroidery and assumes her solitude for the time that is left to her. Morris can't understand and asks, well, why didn't she get married all this time, assuming she was waiting for him. And we ask, well, if she wasn't going to marry old Morris, why didn't she make the promise to her father? But she didn't, no she didn't. And everyone thinks they know her; everyone thinks they can predict her. ("Values of Difficulty" 207; my emphasis)

Butler's implication of course, is that we don't know Catherine, we can't predict her. Her interiority eludes readers, just as it eludes the men in her life. All we can do is ponder "her act." She continues:

> As readers we are effectively being asked whether we will judge her, supply her with a motivation, find the language by which to know and capture her, or whether we will affirm what is enigmatic here, what cannot be easily or ever said, what marks the limits of the sayable. And if we cannot join with Morris and the other chatterers to judge her, then perhaps we are asked to understand the limits of judgement and to cease judging, paradoxically, in the name of ethics, to cease judging in a way that assumes we already know in advance what there is to be known. ("Values of Difficulty" 208)

Soon after, however, Butler acknowledges, "The reader is also left, in a sense, exasperated, cursing, staring" (208). Catherine's motives for refusing to promise her father that she would never marry Morris Townsend and then refusing his proposal, finally "show[ing] him the door," leaves the reader wondering what her motive for all this was and James leaves this open to interpretation. Butler argues *Washington Square* provides readers a confrontation

with alterity – the "limits of the sayable" – in how it refuses to explain the motives that drive the heroine to reject Morris and pick up her fancy work. Butler sees her alterity as empowering. Catherine now plays according to her own rules in Washington Square and has a lifetime of personal creativity ahead of her through her embroidery that expresses her will and not that of patriarchal figures in her life. James also leaves the door open to possible societal change: "for life, as it were" (199) may not remain the same; there may be improvements in how women are perceived and understood.

Denis Flannery similarly finds the ambiguous conclusion positive:

> Her final decision to sit down with her 'morsel of fancy work again – for life, as it were' emphasizes, through the simple placement of those words 'fancy' and 'again' – that the production of embellished, imaginatively driven style is a formative, intrinsic part of her being, her will. (15)

I suggest this is mistakenly optimistic. What Catherine sits down with is merely a "morsel" of something dismissed as "fancy work," mere gendered, genteel embellishment, not real work that might be productive or fulfilling. And she sits down "again" to this task, falling back into the prescribed role dictated for her.

To not share such optimistic readings is perhaps evidence of an ahistorical imposition by modern readers tutored in gender politics. On the other hand, we might ask if there is something in the text itself that encourages a sense of disappointment in the novel's end for readers? Are we to blame James for *author*-ising such an ending for Catherine (and so many of his women characters), or does he just offer a realist rendition of real social conditions that blighted the lives of women at the time in which the novel is set, not least the cruelty of controlling fathers like Dr Sloper? Does he thus invite the reader's sympathy for Catherine? Or does he ultimately condone her fate?

I contend that it is the former. More than this, I argue that what James portrays are the devastating effects of patriarchal trauma, despite the fact that it would be many years before trauma was theorised. For all her personal growth and development, carefully shown as the novels progresses, Catherine, at the end, is a silenced victim. Not only is she condemned to compulsive repetition, suggested by her imitative sewing, she displays classic symptoms of what is now understood to characterise psychological trauma: guilt, hopelessness, social

isolation, withdrawal and disconnection.[13] Lauren Berlant perceptively notes of Catherine that "her story is distinguished by her inability to take over her own narrative successfully" (445) – a succinct formation of what Cathy Caruth, and others following her, determine as a characteristic feature of trauma.

Berlant continues:

> *Washington Square* [is] a case study of female colonization by patriarchal culture: it painstakingly represents both the public and private conditions of cultural negation within which even the most privileged female subject knew herself and the world in pre-Civil War America. (Berlant 440)

As Berlant suggests, *Washington Square* addresses the 'female situation' in a world where the male brain was seen as superior and all studies on psychological development had a male focus. James maps the psychical development of a woman via extensive use of free indirect discourse that offers readers insights into Catherine's thoughts and emotions thus showing the reader that she is not the dull, stupid woman he assumes her to be. James experiments with new psychological concepts proposed by his brother, William, such as "Stream of Consciousness [or Thought]" and "Will" (in the battle of wills in which Catherine engages in her relationship with her father and, ultimately, Townsend). In his quest to show a realistic dark side of the bourgeoisie home when masculine authority is exercised and abused, he exposes the patriarchal trauma of women under this authority.

Trauma theory and psychoanalytic theory can be employed to analyse *Washington Square* even though the theories were not yet developed at the time the novel was written and little if anything about psychological injury was understood. Arguably, however, an inchoate view of these theories was developing – particularly in the circles in which Henry James moved – and his portrayal of traumatised interiority in *Washington Square* is suggestive of both the psychological acuity of the novelist and of the new ideas that were forming at the time he wrote. Sloper slowly declines as a bourgeois gentleman and devolves into a coarse blundering father marked by increasing use of brutal language which inflict indelible marks on Catherine's psyche. By focusing on the deliberate denigration that shows the brutality of patriarchy to some young women, James inadvertently exposed the abuse of, and consequent traumatic effects for women who were believed to be safe in the Victorian home but in truth

[13] Interestingly, the term "sloper" in sewing – at least in the USA – refers to "a generic pattern based on your measurements without any wiggle room, seam allowances or style." [https://www.craftsy.com/post/making-a-sloper/]

were at the mercy of such 'gentlemen.' In Sloper's ironic comments to his daughter there is always a taint of cruelty. Sloper's sadistic impulses coupled with his pride and cynicism reach their height in the scene in the Alps where Catherine feels overwhelmed by atavistic evil in the figure of her father. The ugly side of parental authority is shown as grasping and wicked when it can bend or break an innocent and beautiful, but brave spirit in the name of expediency and conformity as Sloper tries to manipulate his daughter's life and happiness. He violates her soul at an unconscious level by belittling her and denying her independent experiences so that she remains innocent and open to his manipulations, which is typical behaviour of an abuser. He achieves this mentally rather than physically by isolating her and exploiting her innocence to scare her and coerce her with inheritance and danger of being taken advantage of. Sloper deflowers his daughter spiritually and maims her spirit.

Henry James at this point was probably unaware of the full meaning of the father daughter imbroglio that he was to confront a couple of decades later in Freudian psychoanalysis, but incestuous fears lurk in the tenor of the story. Sloper tries to make it impossible for his young daughter to leave Washington Square, ever – "for life, as it were." He sees a parody of his wife he has lost in her image and thus, as with so many sadists, his thwarted sexuality is hooked up at an unconscious level to aberrant and vicarious satisfactions. Patric Mullahy asserts that "Sadism represents a fusion of the erotic instincts and the destructive instincts directed outwards, in which the destructiveness has the character of aggressiveness" (1140). Instead of taking a mistress to assuage his 'erotic instincts' he takes his cruelty and irony out on Catherine. *Washington Square* may reflect elements of what Freud would later theorise in his Oedipus and Electra complexes in the portrayal of a sublimated sexual desire between children and their parents. Sloper translates his basic libidinous insecurity into the certainty of intellectual dominance and always desires to be on top and in control as he spars with his daughter. He seems to despise his daughter but deeply resents her falling in love with another man, which he reveals in his endless stream of cruel remarks.

Fancywork embroideries are shown as a healing art in the novel *Washington Square*. The female psychoanalyst Melanie Klein stated that: "the work of art itself stands for the mother's body, destroyed repeatedly in fantasy but restored or 'repaired' in the act of creation" (qtd. Thaden 17). Catherine is depicted turning to her knitting and sewing in stressful situations like when Morris deserts her. She relates the brokenness that she feels within to her creativity and sews objects that mirror her inner thoughts like sewing a handkerchief to mirror the tears she cries, and a purse to mirror how Morris viewed her like a purse full of money. The objects

she creates are symbolic representations of the emotions she feels within but cannot talk to anyone about. This creative action then functions as a soothing activity that is therapeutic to Catherine, mirroring the pre-psychoanalytic theory stage in psychology where the 'talking cure' was not available to allow a patient to work through their emotions. Catherine is left to self-soothe and represent her sorrows on the surface of fabric to express her deepest repressed emotions that she cannot share with anyone around her. In the Victorian time in which *Washington Square* is set, female self-expression was not viewed as important outside the home and embroidery was a creative outlet for women which was sometimes also an expression of 'unspeakable' trauma through "fancy work". The process of needlework was like a process of restoration of what had been broken through making something new and recovering lost or damaged parts of self. One sees a calming effect of doing fancy work which functions as a therapeutic activity to shut out that which is causing pain for Catherine. The feel of her fabric and thread is a tangible replacement of a mother's reassuring touch she does not have.

Catherine displays what Freud would later describe as melancholia after the loss of her lover. She excessively mourns the loss of the object of her desire when Morris jilts her. She is filled with romantic love when Morris comes into her life and imagines him as her knight who will recite poetry to her and take her away from the oppressive paternal home. When her dreams are abruptly ended, she suffers immensely. She is for a moment delirious with grief and trauma as she lies on the couch and talks to herself like a hysterical person. The narrator describes her grief: "Nevertheless, she felt a wound… she was smothered and stunned; she buried her head in the cushions sobbing and talking to herself" (164). However, this temporary moment of insanity passes, and she pulls herself together. The 'unspeakable' personal grief over what has been lost, the unchangeable and irretrievable, is what Freud would later refer to as (unhealthy or pathological) melancholia, in opposition to (healthy or normal) mourning, in his famous essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) published several decades after *Washington Square*. In this, Freud writes,

> It is well worth notice that, although mourning involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life, it never occurs to us to regard it as a pathological condition and refer to it as medical treatment. We rely on it being overcome after a certain lapse of time, and we look upon any interference with it as useless or even harmful. The distinguishing mental features of melancholia, are a profoundly painful sense of dejection, a cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of capacity to love,

> inhibition of all activity...a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (248)

Catherine buries herself in that grief of losing 'ideal love' in a way that goes beyond mourning and becomes melancholia. She punishes herself for not seeing through Morris' deception and seems to blame love for her blindness. Where psychoanalytic theory brought hope of healing and wholeness to continue with life, James offers no hope of overcoming past traumatic events but rather doom in the form of loneliness and grief after loss.

When she finally realises that the relationship is over, Catherine represses her true feelings and thoughts about Morris and how he has broken her heart and does not share this with her aunt or her father. However, this progresses to melancholia when she uses this loss to completely deny herself of love in her future. Her ego, because of the humiliation and suffering caused when she opens her heart to Morris, dictates that she may never love. This is a form of self-mutilation or punishment because she denies herself the natural feeling of being loved. She closes off chances of experiencing sexual love and having a family which is a woman's natural right. She turns down good suitors like John Ludlow and buries herself 'alive' in the house she grew up in, "for life".

Washington Square portrays female trauma within an early-Victorian bourgeois patriarchal home from a late-Victorian, male perspective inflected by nascent psychological theories that would later be articulated in the work of Freud. In contrast, the novel discussed in my next chapter, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea,* while also retrospective and set at almost exactly the same time in history, albeit far from Europe or America, was written in the 1960s. It offers a female perspective that is sceptical of male – especially early-Freudian – accounts of the female 'psyche' and trauma, yet also deeply indebted to them. Set in the British colony of Jamaica some years after the emancipation of slaves in 1834, the novel similarly explores abusive Victorian paternalism, but this is complicated by sexualised racism and, most importantly for my purposes, explores the psychic wounds inflicted not only by men on their daughters, but also by women. It focuses on white Creole women suffering from social as well as mental influences that manifest as symptoms of hysteria and focuses closely on the mother-daughter dyad.

Chapter 4: "And not like us either": Crises of Female Identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Jean Rhys is known for her "narratives that record the lives of the disenfranchised and interrogate the conditions of subjectivity" (1), according to Anne B. Simpson. *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published almost three decades after her other novels and serves as a 'prequel' to Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* and reconstructs the life of Rochester's 'mad' Creole wife, Bertha or Antoinette as she is called in *Wide Sargasso Sea.* According to Simpson, in the novel Rhys summons "a vision of the psychic terrain as a wild and frightening place whose borders are uncertain and where time stood still" (2). This arguably emanates from the author's own experiences growing up in Dominica in the 1890s, where she felt marginalised on many counts due to her white Creole status and having been brought up in a late-Victorian culture which was shaped by patriarchal values. According to biographers, Rhys was the product of a depressed father and was alienated from a punitive, unavailable mother. Victoria Burrows comments on how Rhys' society – white, Creole plantation owners in the Caribbean after emancipation – "appeared transfixed…, suspended between the world of their lost prestige and power and the beckoning anxiety of never again belonging" (25). This may explain her ambivalent (post)colonial state of mind and the psychological complications of her predicament of 'inbetweenness' as neither fully 'British' nor Dominican black.[14] Helen Carr describes Rhys as "a colonial in terms of her history, even though she could be considered a postcolonialist in her attitude to the Empire and her employment of many postcolonialist strategies" (12). Helen Tiffin, employing phrases from *Wide Sargasso Sea*, writes of "[t]he White Creole" that she is

> a double outsider condemned to self-consciousness, homelessness, a sense of inescapable difference and even deformity in the two societies by whose judgments she always condemns herself. She is 'white nigger' to the Europeans and 'white cockroach' to the Blacks. (qtd. Mary Lou Emery 13).

Carr argues Rhys' personal identity was influential in the creation of her protagonist, Antoinette Cosway. She says: "as a Creole Jean Rhys was culturally mixed, marginal to the

[14] According to James Wood, "by the time of Rhys's childhood fewer than a hundred Dominicans were white, out of a population of nearly twenty-nine thousand" (n.p.).

metropolitan world, hybrid, always a foreigner even in her native land… she wrote of those who belonged to an 'inbetween' world" (23). It is within this post-emancipation Dominican context that Rhys sets her novel and exposes both familial trauma and the (white Creole) historical trauma of the period. Indeed, Victoria Burrows dubs *Wide Sargasso Sea* a "mother-daughter trauma narrative encrypted within the outer framework of the white creole historical trauma" (27). The psychohistorical dislocation that accompanied the dismantling of the British Empire in the Caribbean left white Creoles feeling abandoned by their imperial motherland. It is into this physical and emotional setting that the protagonist, Antoinette, beckons the reader into in Part One of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. There is a lingering melancholia evident in the first part of the book as Antoinette speaks, in retrospective first-person, of dispossession, loss, abandonment, and racial hatred.

Rhys wrote in her *Black Exercise Book*, according to Anne. B. Simpson, of her commitment "to finding a way to give sadness a voice, to let it speak without compromise" (6) in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.[15] The novel enunciates to the reader the sadness of two women white Creole women, a mother and daughter, who are entrapped by the society in which they live, eventually leading to their demise. In this chapter I will explore the various ways that subalternity, feminism and madness are given a voice through the lives of the novel's women. I will argue that despite Rhys' sometimes strong critiques of Freudian psychoanalysis, Freud's theories, and psychoanalytic trauma theory more generally, can be effectively employed to analyse and understand the suffering experienced by characters, their irrational actions, and the tragic concluding suicide of the protagonist. Freudian psychoanalysis can be supplemented by later, more progressive psychoanalytic theories, with an inclusive feminist focus, to further this analysis. Commenting on the enduring impact of both childhood trauma and psychoanalytic theories on the writer, Leah Rosenberg states:

> In the 'Black Exercise Book', Rhys centers her account of her childhood on two experiences: being criticized and beaten primarily by her nurse and her mother, and being seduced into a sadomasochistic relationship with Mr. Howard. Rhys revises these scenes repeatedly, each time changing significant aspects in order to shape her identity as a white creole woman through an identification or comparison of her position as a beaten child and sexual slave with Afro-Caribbeans' historical

[15] Rhys's *Black Exercise Book* is an unpublished manuscript. It is a writer's journal that explores her childhood in Dominica, comments on English classism and imperialism, and contains some scenes from her novels *Good Morning Midnight* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

> experiences of floggings and sexual coercion under slavery. In juxtaposing these revised and repeated scenes, the 'Black Exercise Book' illustrates the process through which Rhys fashions her own identity and that of the white Creole woman, the central figure of her 'West Indian' work. These accounts of beating and seduction embody a dual critique of English domesticity's definition of womanhood and psychoanalysis's theories of seduction and masochism by constructing strong parallels between key texts of these discourses; Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Freud's 'A Child is Being Beaten' and *Dora*. (5)

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean clearly impacts the Cosway women – Antoinette and her mother Annette – and contributes to their mental deterioration. In this way issues of imperial racism are imbricated with those of psychic disintegration resultant of patriarchal trauma in complex ways, as Rosenberg suggests. The white Creole community to which the Cosways belong is a society dominated by male colonisers. They are estranged from their British-resident counterparts, who have a strong social and political influence on the Caribbean society, because of the wealth they have accrued and taken back to England from the plantations and slavery. This influence includes social expectations dictated by Victorian social mores of the time. These mandate a woman's place in the home as reflected in the poet Coventry Patmore's collection of poems about married bliss, *The Angel in the House* (mentioned in my previous chapter,) which was hailed by John Ruskin as depicting the ideal Victorian woman. In this period in history, European women in the Caribbean were on the periphery of the political spectrum, and even though they were considered elite and upper class, they had no voice in the political affairs of the island. This marginalisation also extended to the laws of inheritance: a woman could not inherit her husband's/father's estate, which went to the eldest son. As a result, women were socially and financially dependent on the men in their lives. Annette and Antoinette fall victim to this patriarchal society as they seek to find security in marriages to Englishmen. Annette loses her son and eventually her sanity in her helplessness and Antoinette loses not only her sanity in the quest for protection, but also her identity, freedom and, ultimately, her life.

Complicating the impacts of imperial patriarchy are issues of racial identification. The post-emancipation setting in the West Indies provides a context within which Antionette suffers rejection in her search for racial identity, belonging and self. This is captured in several key, early scenes in the novel when Antoinette remembers fighting with her only friend, Tia, who is black. Antoinette's racial ambivalence causes her to not fully identify with

her whiteness as she does not see herself as superior to her black friend. However, swimming together at the river, Tia taunts Antoinette and steals her clothes and pennies. Resorting to the racist language used by her mother and other Creole plantation owners, Antoinette calls Tia a "cheating nigger" (9). Tia responds by calling her a "white nigger" who is "poor like a beggar," and by saying "old time white people nothing but white nigger now" (9). Not long after (chronologically) the Cosway family home, Coulibri, is set on fire by rioting former slaves. Antoinette recalls running from the flames: "I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her" (27). This fantasy is cruelly dashed, however, when Tia throws a stone at her:

> When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking glass. (27-28)

Tia is both Antoinette's mirror and her (negative) reflection; the blood and tears of the two girls bonds and separates them simultaneously. Antoinette's desire to identify with Tia and her family is impossible because of their skin colour is different: "Tia is the mirror that throws the stone of painful recognition: a reflection of Antoinette's racial difference, what she is and has always been, a colonial exile" (Forrester 33). Antoinette stands in cultural ambivalence by being fixed in a historically inflected moribund of whiteness that is itself trapped between two disdainful cultures at a crucial moment of imperial dismantling.

Antoinette is stuck in a liminal space, plagued by being in a state of not belonging. Not only is she marginalised as a woman through English laws and patriarchal attitudes, but her race is also a factor that contributes to this liminality. She suffers not only because she is a woman but also because she is a woman torn between two cultures: British and West Indian. She cannot identify with either culture because she was never a slave; however, although white, she is still considered a Caribbean woman, an outside, and therefore shunned by born-at-home Britons. Christophine comments on Antoinette's complex identity when she tries to describe it to Rochester even though he does not understand. She says, "Antoinette is not béké [a derogatory name for a white person in Patois] like you, but she is béké, and not like us either" (122). Although Antoinette refuses to classify herself, Rochester takes it upon himself to contain and categorize her literally and figuratively. He renames her Bertha and

Antoinette becomes trapped in a character and fate that is not her own.[16] Antoinette rebels against barriers and expectations and embodies the idea that women – and races – cannot be simply classified. In the end she rejects the barrier between 'insane' and 'sane,' too, which leads to her imprisonment and eventually death.

A series of failures by men to protect their women (as Victorian men were supposed to do) in *Wide Sargasso Sea* results in irreparable mental and physical harm to the Cosway mother and daughter. Countering the idealisation of the Victorian home – its female moral centre protected and guarded by the patriarch – Rhys explores the dark side of domesticity. Annette is first married to a womanising drunk who fathers children out of wedlock and humiliates as well as neglects her while he is alive in a manner that is tantamount to physical abuse. When Mr Cosway dies, he leaves her with two children and a ruined sugar plantation. Annette is thus introduced at the beginning of the novel as having no male protection and facing poverty. In a desperate act to find protection and financial safety she marries an English man, Mr Mason, who loves her, but fails to protect her because of his ego and racist view of the locals. Despite warnings from Annette, Mr Mason fails to provide a safe home for his new wife and her children by displaying arrogant behaviour towards the natives which stirs their anger. Antoinette notes that he was "so sure of himself, so without a doubt English" (19). He tries to maintain English habits and English ways of living: "We ate English food now, beef and mutton, pies and puddings" (19). He does not understand the colonial Caribbean culture or even try to do so. Mason ignorantly sees it in the simple, racialised terms created through the binary terms of the symbolic order. He ignores Annette's pleas to leave Coloubri, and the island, as she senses the growing intensity of the negative emotions of the emancipated slaves towards her family because of his arrogant displays of superiority. He considers slaves as subhuman work animals, and says of them, wrongly, "they are children – they wouldn't hurt a fly" (19). Soon after he makes this comment Coulibri is set alight and Antoinette's brother Pierre is badly injured and ultimately dies. Mason's insensitivity and rejection of his wife's insight into the severity of the situation costs Annette and her children a safe home and results in the death of her son. Her already fragile mental health disintegrates completely. Abandoned by her husband, she is put into the care of a black couple and violently rejects her daughter who is subsequently enrolled in a convent school for Creole girls.

[16] Trapped in Thornfield under the 'care' of Grace, Antionette/Bertha thinks, "Her name ought't to be Grace…. Names matter" (147). This underscores her earlier resistance to Rochester's changing of her name.

Thus, Antoinette is forced to seek refuge outside a traditional home and nuclear family. Her vulnerability lies in her lack of a paternal roof, and she has a history of being let down by her biological parents. Her stepbrother, Mr Mason's son, uses her as a pawn in a marriage arrangement with a 'second son' (so without an inheritance) needing to marry a wealthy woman: Rochester. (Although he remains unnamed in the novel, he is commonly referred to by critics as 'Rochester' – the name of Bertha Mason's husband in *Jane Eyre*.) Ultimately surrendering her agency to her husband places Antoinette into confinement and danger. She is taken back to England and ends up trapped in a patriarchal home, which leads to madness and imprisonment.

Weak abusive patriarchs who have the potential to make life in a traditional home hazardous or impossible to thrive in are exposed in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This is a counter view to Ruskinian ideal of domesticity and suggestive of the terror experienced by many Victorian women. Greg Forter, introduced in my second chapter, suggests that patriarchal trauma is usually woven into the fabric of a society like the Victorian one, and Antoinette's life is a testament to this as she suffers trauma that is cumulative within the rigid confines of societal expectations that frame her life, and this gradually destroys her. This is not punctual trauma, resultant of a singular destructive event. Building and layering over time, from her childhood right through to adulthood, strong patriarchal pressures make her an object to be used and moved at will by men. Antoinette is extremely vulnerable at the hands of patriarchy because her circumstances are characterised by social and economic powerlessness. She ends up inheriting plenty of money from Mason but, because of the influence of English Law in the West Indies, she cannot access it as a woman. Authority over it is given to her husband who imprisons her and tries to erase any trace of her identity as a control measure.

A poignant effect of patriarchal trauma in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is 'madness' in the mother-daughter dyad. Rhys uses the descent into madness of Annette and Antoinette to disqualify an inaccurate assumption made historically, the idea that hysteria is a female disease linked to biological dispositions, and shows the social and familial environment as a major catalyst.[17] This is a key feature of her 'writing back' to *Jane Eyre* in which the 'fact' of Bertha's inherited madness appears to justify her treatment at the hands of Rochester. This renders her an impediment to his and Jane's fulfilment, unproblematically sacrificable in a plot driven by

[17] Many books and essays have been written on this topic. Ground-breaking works that trace this history include: Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture* (1985), Phyllis Chesler's *Women and* Madness (1972) and Jane Ussher's *The Madness of Women* (2011).

their attainment of 'happily-ever-after' – in which Jane settles comfortably into her role as a domestic angel at the end. Rhys appears to agree with Freud and Breuer's original trauma theory that identified trauma as a cause for hysteria,[18] by laying out the traumatic circumstances that trigger Annette and Antoinette's madness. However, she disagrees with his later sexuality theory that dismissed female trauma as 'fantasies,' by portraying women who are driven to insanity by the environment they inhabit.

In their struggle to survive the loss of a husband-provider, impending poverty, a tense psychohistorical environment, rejection, and entrapment, the Cosway women crumble psychically because of trauma that is shown, again and again, to be rooted in patriarchy. The Cosway family is introduced living in a quagmire of heavy dependence on (former) slave labour, an evaporated source of wealth, distrust and hatred from their black neighbours and declining social status. Contrary to historical theories proclaiming a biological disposition to madness in women, Rhys's novel painstakingly reveals that social and environmental pressures are the main factors that lead to hysteria, as we witness both mother and daughter succumb to the Victorian 'female malady' in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Losing her son is the culminating trauma for Annette who gets no psychiatric support – indeed this would not have been available at the time in which the novel is set. She possibly sees no value in Antoinette, who is healthy, but is female and of no use to her mother's social standing. Pierre, on the other hand, was her male heir and anticipated future protection in a patriarchal society, even though he was sickly. Antoinette expresses this sentiment of her (lack of) value to Annette when she states: "[Annette] pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her" (5). The causes of Annette's trauma are social, not biological.

Laura S. Brown, in an account of female trauma theory and treatment, argues that sustained, insidious trauma, such as sexual harassment or racial discrimination can "lead to known posttraumatic forms of distress such as nightmares, flashbacks, numbing, and avoidance":

> [This] stems from the continuous nature of exposure to the reminder of threat. The sub-threshold events are insidiously traumatic; they do not directly affect life or limb, but they are constant reminders of the precariousness of one's safety in contexts where one's group is the target of bias. ("Feminist Paradigms" 466)

[18] See Freud and Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) and my discussion in Chapter One.

Such thinking can usefully be employed in an analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea* which exposes the many – sometimes direct and physical, sometimes insidious, psychosocial-environmental stressors that impact Annette and Antoinette's mental health. The men around them accuse the women of (inherited) biological frailty. Daniel Cosway, Antoinette's half- brother, claims, for example, that she inherited 'bad blood' from her mother (just as Rochester says about Bertha in *Jane Eyre*): "There is madness in the family… your wife's brother an idiot from birth" (71-73). Rhys's careful portrayal of circumstantial stressors challenges such an idea.

More progressive feminist accounts of traumas such as betrayal trauma are also relevant to an examination of the portrayal of female madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Jennifer Freyd describes betrayal trauma as "the effects of the violation of human bonds and the effects of loss of important human connections" (qtd. Brown, "Feminist Paradigms" 466). The acts of emotional neglect and rejection are not usually life-threatening and do not immediately evoke fear or helplessness, but trauma emerges when a person understands relationship loss as a betrayal or violation. Antoinette's relationship with her mother, especially after Pierre's death, can be understood in these terms. She is cruelly and coldly rejected by Annette, a self-absorbed woman, only interested in her eroding social status as a former slave owner, and her own pressing need for male protection. Antoinette never sees herself whole in her mother's eye and turns to Christophine, a black house servant, for nurture.

Christophine was a wedding present from old Mr Cosway to Annette. A former slave, she is nonetheless also an outsider on the island, as she comes from Martinique, and remains staunchly loyal to Annette and Antoinette. This raises the ire of other servants, but she has some respect from them due to her knowledge of *obeah* magic. It is Christophine who seeks to defend Antoinette from Rochester's cruelty and his attempts to label her as insane. She encourages Antoinette to leave Rochester, saying, "A man don't treat you good, pick up your skirt and walk out" (83), and encourages her to fight for herself, citing her own circumstances as an example. Although she has three children, they are two different fathers, all of whom she has refused to marry. She tells Antoinette, "I keep my money. I don't give it to no worthless man" (83). It is Christophine who comforts the very agitated Antoinette, with gentle words and song, after Rochester, soon after their marriage, sleeps with another servant, Amelie, and insists on calling her Bertha. Nonetheless Rochester and Antoinette fight viciously about this betrayal and she threatens him with a broken bottle before eventually biting him in the arm (recalling Bertha's biting of Mason in *Jane Eyre*). It is also

Christophine who has a lengthy altercation with Rochester – in defence of Antoinette – at the end of Part Two.

For all this, Christophine remains resolutely 'other' to both Antoinette and the reader. While we gain first-person insights into their thoughts and feelings from Rochester and even Grace Poole, there is no such access to Christophine's interiority, or motivations. Indeed, some of her behaviour towards Antoinette is questionable, and possibly malevolent. (What, exactly, was her relationship with Mr Cosway? Why does Christophine not come to say goodnight to Antoinette the night Coloubri is set on fire? Why does she give Antoinette the *obeah* drug for Rochester?)[19] Although much about Christophine remains beyond the reader's purview, what is clear is that she fails as a substitute mother for Antoinette because of their different racial identities: black and white Creole respectively.

Antoinette's compounding rejections and relational losses are forms of interpersonal trauma. Brown points out how betrayal trauma survivors normally use post-traumatic coping strategies such as the numbing of emotions and other forms of cognitive dissociation to persist in or sustain a valued relationship (465). Antoinette tries to connect with her mother until the end, despite continuous rejection, and is distraught when she witnesses her being abused by her carers. But she is continually rebuffed. Antoinette stores the pain of this rejection and abandonment in her subconscious, but it resurfaces in adulthood when she is rejected again in a similar way by Rochester. She even loses memory of this rejection as evidenced by her fragmented remembering, which is a sign of what Freyd describes as "motivated forgetting" (203), as discussed in my second chapter. In her final moments, as she leaps to her death from the roof of Rochester's English mansion, she calls out to Tia and believes she is going to be with her and Christophine, forgetting the betrayal she suffered when Tia took part in the burning of Coulibri and threw a stone at her.

Freudian psychoanalytic theory seeks to explain irrational behaviour caused by unconscious drives. Rhys, to a point, offers portrayals that appear to support Freud's and Breuer's initial theorising of trauma in *Studies on Hysteria,* but this does not extend to Freud's later conclusion that hysteria was caused by female sexual fantasies. It seems likely that Rhys was quite deliberate in her challenge to aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis. Patricia Moran, quoting from Rhys's *Black Exercise Book*, claims that, "she deliberately positioned her narrative against that of 'an unnamed "gent"'– almost certainly Freud – whose book on

[19] On the significance of Christophine in the novel see: Keith A. Russell II, "Now Every Word She Said Was Echoed."

psychoanalysis she had leafed through in a bookstore in Paris" (91). Rhys acknowledged that trauma could cause hysteria but disagreed with Freud's assertion that "abnormal" fantasised sexual encounters were the cause. It is widely known that Rhys was sexually abused by a (much) older man – "Mr Howard" – when she was twelve. According to Coral A. Howells, in adulthood Rhys sought to understand the effects of this 'seduction' and turned to Freud. Of this she wrote in her *Black Exercise Book*, "I wanted a book on Psychoanalysis. I found one and this is the sense of what I read: 'Women of this type [traumatised/hysterical] will invariably say that they were seduced when young by an elderly man. They will relate a detailed story which in every way is entirely fictitious'" (qtd. in Howells 17). Rhys records her response to the 'gent's claim and his "laying down the law about the female attitude & reactions to sex," and then writes: "No honey I thought it is not fictitious in every case by no means and anyhow how do you know?" (qtd. in Howells 17). Indeed, the late Victorian man and powerful doctor, Freud, was not telling *her* story correctly.

Anne B. Simpson's asserts that "Rhys apparently found Freud irrelevant" (7) and John J. Su offers this, quoting from Simpson:

> Freudian conceptions of psychology were notoriously based on male models, and the idea that human development might be understood in the light of the Oedipal drama was highly influential to European artists in the 1920s and 1930s. Rhys, in contrast, demonstrated a consistent preoccupation with mother-daughter dynamics from her first novel, *Quartet* (1928), to her fifth and last, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), and experiences produced by such relationships did not correspond well with Freudian conceptions. The 'masculinist rendition of the trauma suffered by modern individuals' portrayed by Freud and modernists influenced by him tended to occlude what Simpson calls the 'more primitive experiences of alienation' that precede Oedipal tensions and arise from a child's all-consuming need to incorporate its mother. (208)

For her part, Simpson draws on traditions of psychoanalysis that deviate from Freud, including the object-relations theories of Melanie Klein, Joan Riviere, and D. W. Winnicott, to focus on the portrayal, by Rhys, of the relationship between her protagonists and their mothers. I will return to this below.

The above comments point to the ways in which *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be seen to challenge Freud's authoritative blanket diagnosis of female madness and his sexist conclusion that hysteria was an expression of women's sexual fantasies. Freud's work on hysterical women in

the late nineteenth century insists that the victim recovers from the traumatic memory only when they can integrate distressing experiences into an organised, detailed, verbal account, with historical content oriented in time. In the case history of Dora, Freud argued that the 'talking cure' of psychoanalysis enabled the hysteric to repeat, to recognise and to work through the traumatic event by organising memories of it into a linear account. Petra Bueskens argues that:

> Freud lost the support of feminists when he stopped treating memories of trauma as real and stopped believing the surface of what his female patients said, searching instead for imagined fantasies, wishes and desires embedded in their symptoms. This signified his abandonment of the seduction theory and a start of contention with feminists by denying the veracity of women's claims of sexual abuse. (7)

Rhys does not 'work through' traumatic events in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as Freud recommends, but instead develops complex ways of representing trauma and its aftermath. The fractured narrative employed by Rhys shows the permeable boundaries of Antionette's unconscious and the interaction of conscious and unconscious ideas in her stream of consciousness (which is ostensibly what we are reading for much of the novel). Her sudden shifts of focalization, offering insights into the minds of other characters, affect the reading process and reinforce the instability of Antoinette's mind. McClure Smooth states that:

> It is by now a critical commonplace that Rhys emphasizes the interaction of the conscious and unconscious processes in the act of narration of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Because the central narrator, Antoinette, is an inveterate dreamer whose narrative is structured by a series of foreboding dreams, the text inevitably assumes a double structure of sorts – a manifest and latent content if you will. The effective representation of a troubled psyche within which dreams alter the structure of the real and the real colonizes the imagination is thus facilitated by a textual structure also divided against itself. (117).

Via these narrative strategies, Rhys arguably seeks to portray the way in which traumatic events impinge upon the working of the memory and the ways in which traumatic memories, in turn, impinge upon the lives of those afflicted by them. This is explored, particularly, through the representation of the interpersonal aspects of individuals in different relationships in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The most significant relationships, as I have suggested, are the mother and daughter relationship between Annette and Antoinette, the surrogate-maternal, interracial

relationship between Antoinette and Christophine and the marital relationship between Antoinette and Rochester.

Given Rhys's fascination with the mother-child dynamic, something explored in all her fiction, and her feminist views in response to Freud's original theorising, it is unsurprising that object relations psychoanalytic theory, which builds on, challenges and extends Freudian thinking, offers a fruitful lens to analyse her work, particularly *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Melanie Klein's work is particularly relevant in traversing the landscape of Rhys' fiction because her theorising demonstrates ways in which a damaged mother-daughter relationship characteristically serves as the source of subsequent maladjustments in adult life. As J. Kathryn Cook argues with respect to the novel:

> the lack of positive parental involvement is most notable in the absence of mirroring that Annette ultimately does not or cannot offer her daughter, which precipitates considerable obstacles for the protagonist's formation of self, as well as grave consequences for her subsequent relationships. (247)

Klein's stress on the importance of the pre-Oedipal mother-child dyad and focus on fundamental, often preverbal states of awareness can be used to discuss Rhys's characterisation of Antoinette (and Annette). Antoinette's 'infant stages,' – those that capture the pre-Oedipal stages of her life – are not explicitly detailed within *Wide Sargasso Sea* but, as Cook points out, "The unreturned love of the emotionally absent mother, as well as her daughter's desire for her love … is apparent throughout the text, as are a multitude of relevant themes that illustrate the problem of unsuccessful [mother-daughter] mirroring" (249-250). Such a Kleinian-inspired approach has been taken by several recent critics of Rhys's work. In these accounts, Antoinette's developmental journey suggests an abject state of enthrallment to a lost good mother figure or 'mother imago'. In consequence, her objects are unequivocally either 'good' or 'bad' and ambivalence is unthinkable either towards others or herself.

I am not suggesting that Rhys was familiar with the work of Klein and Erikson, of course. Sophocles was not familiar with Freud's work when he wrote *Oedipus Rex*, but the validity of his portrayal of (commonly) observable father-son dynamics means his play could function as a model for Freud's theorising two and a half millennia later. In the same way, Rhys did not have to read Klein or Erikson to portray the effects of damaging psychosocial relationships in

the figure of Antoinette. Furthermore, whether or not Rhys was a 'feminist'– much debated[20] – does not preclude a feminist reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* or its representation of the effects of what I have termed patriarchal trauma. It seems fair to assert that the novel reflects the more progressive opinions regarding women and female sexuality that were circulating at the time it was written. Indeed, its publication in 1966 coincides with the rise of second-wave feminism and the circulation of books like Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963) and a growing interest in female 'madness.' Setting her novel at the start of the Victorian era (and the beginning of the rise of the British colonial one), at a time in which first wave feminism was in its infancy, enabled her to look back on the kinds of patriarchal assumptions that characterised (colonial) constructions of gender at the time, from the vantage point of the increasingly activist feminist, and postcolonial, 1960s. It also enabled her to scrutinise and find deficient Freud's (late-Victorian) assumptions about female sexuality and 'hysteria.'

A Kleinian, object relations approach that emphasises the impact early childhood relationships with 'objects' (people or experiences related to people) have on adult lives, offers productive ways of considering the portrayal of Antoinette's life. Klein followed Freud insofar as she was interested in how relationships with others affect a person's behaviour. But she rejected Freud's early emphasis on sexual trauma as the etiology of neurosis and his later emphasis on internal unconscious biological drives and desires (especially sexual) as the determinant of (pathological) behaviour. Her emphasis, instead, is on external relationships with objects and how a child's experiences of these are internalised and affect their adult behaviour and relationships. According to Stephen Frosh, "Post Freudian psychoanalysis was centred on relational thinking which viewed early social interactions as paramount to development of psychic structures" (116). Juliet Mitchell reminds us that "Freud made the act of repression critical for the formation of that aspect of psychic life which psychoanalysts could decipher; it was the particular defence which constructed the unconscious whose manifestations could be understood in the distortions of neurosis. But Klein … paid attention to the ego's earlier mechanisms of defence" (21). Importantly, too for my purposes, Klein

[20] Helen Carr writes of Jean Rhys: "'feminist academics have by no means welcomed her work unequivocally…there was a considerable uncertainty about whether Jean Rhys could be called a feminist writer. Many agreed with Helen McNeil that 'she was feminine rather than feminist. Her novels might depict patriarchal oppression, but feminists as … felt her heroines connived too much in their own unhappiness" (11). However more recently, because of more nuanced feminist theories that have emerged, critics like Ann Cunningham see her writing as a critique of patriarchal femininity in the way "her protagonists are unwilling or unable to abide by the socially prescribed codes of feminine respectability' (37). Cunningham sees this as a form of "nondirect activism" (374) in their refusal to act in conformity with white feminine 'respectability.'

also stressed the importance of the child's relationship with their *mother* (or a part of their mother, like her breast; or on a mother figure and the nurture provided by them, like a bottle), in this way countering Freud's stress on the significance of the father (and the phallus).

Arguably, Rhys carefully details Antoinette's upbringing to suggest the ways in which this shapes how she relates and thinks and feels about objects/others in adulthood. The home and the parenting that Antoinette receives while growing up influences the behaviour she displays later in life. Klein's object relation theory can shed light on the extent to which Antoinette is traumatised by the rejection she receives from her mother, detailed in Part One of the novel. Rhys depicts a distant, unloving mother who does not nurture her daughter during her most important developmental years. As have discussed, in her narrative about her childhood, Antoinette describes several occasions when she reaches out to her mother and is rejected.

Klein's theorisation of the "good breast" and "bad breast" can aptly be employed to describe the juxtaposition of Antoinette's two mothers in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Annette represents the bad breast that is cold, unloving and does not nurture the child and reach out warmly to her daughter. Christophine represents the good breast that is nurturing, supportive and (apparently) loves Antoinette unconditionally, no matter how much negative projection she shows towards her. Antoinette is drawn to a man who is like her biological mother in his narcissistic personality. She is drawn to him because he displays the behaviour she became accustomed to when growing up.

Another way in which Antoinette might be read in terms of object relations theory is via the notion of splitting.[21] Antoinette never fully reaches the depressive state of ambivalence as she does not see love and hate in <u>one</u> mother, which forces her into a 'paranoid-schizoid position' most of her life. She is denied the security of integration which normally happens at the infant stage because her good and bad mothers remain separate.[22] This is the argument of

[21] Splitting in object relations theory is: 'the mental separation of objects into "good" and "bad" parts and the subsequent repression of the "bad," or anxiety-provoking, aspects' according to Lucy Etherington. Infants experience splitting when their primary caregiver (mother) is 'good' in meeting the infant's needs and it is satisfied and 'bad' when they are hungry. When the child cannot keep these two contradictory thoughts and feelings in their mind at the same time, they keep the conflicting feelings apart and focus on just one of them. This means that the infant deals with immense anxiety arising from hunger and frustration and splits in its unconscious the mother's breast into the 'good' breast that feeds and nourishes it and the 'bad' Breast that withholds nourishment and care. ?? Are you quoting someone here? I can't make sense of the quote marks.

[22] See Stephen Frosh, pp. 155-60

Anne Simpson who claims that because, for Antoinette, "the good mother is nowhere in sight, and she has no grounding for movement towards an empathetically depressive stance that would allow for ambivalence towards a mother which could be both bad and good, and would respond to a child's reparative gestures in a healing way" (120). She uses splitting as a coping mechanism and overuses it, which, according to Stephen Frosh, is a characteristic of psychosis (151), and Antoinette ends up in a dissociated state. This impacts her relationship with Rochester. Like a child, her immature ego wants to please him, even though he is the source of her pain, and she goes back to him even after his (blatant) infidelity with Amelie. She has a mental breakdown as she tries unsuccessfully to handle splits of rejection from her husband, compounding the remembered rejection of her mother. Even though she is temporarily healed by her other ('good') mother, Christophine, with sedation using traditional herbs, she seeks reunion with Rochester as soon as she comes to. The 'life drives' theorised by Klein talks may explain her irrational desire to be with her idealised object of security (Rochester).

This said, Antoinette can also be read as the victim of father and son Oedipal conflicts, understood in classical Freudian terms.[23] She is subjugated by a family culture where men dominate, and unhealthy father complex patterns are played out with her as a pawn. Rochester's father is a patriarchal figure who lays down and supports the rule of law such as Rochester's older brother inheriting everything (also a key driver of the plot in *Jane Eyre*). Indeed, in her famous reading of the novel, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts that, "Rhys makes it clear that he [Rochester] is a victim of the patriarchal inheritance law of entailment" ("Three Women's Texts" 251). In turn Rochester searches for wealth through marriage. Antoinette ends up being a financial victim of patrilineal law as she becomes Rochester's meal ticket: he marries her solely to gain her wealth. This, in addition to her loneliness and psychic trauma, makes her vulnerable in the same way as her mother, portrayed in Part One.

We learn that Rochester wrote to his father, soon after marrying Antionette. His letter is never sent but remains central in the second part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, narrated from his perspective, as evidence of his manipulative actions and his desire to please his father:

> I have not bought her. She has bought me or so she thinks… Dear Father. The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition… I have a

[23] Oedipal Complex Theory as defined in my Key Concepts Chapter.

> modest competence now. I will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother the son you love… None of the furtive shabby manoeuvres of a younger son. (49)

His expectations are that his (white) wife, although Creole, will be like a 'proper' English woman and understand the English rule of law and cultural practices that have been ingrained in him. He believes he is superior because he is 'pure' English, but the cultural differences between him and his wife creates anxiety for him, and he is increasingly repulsed by these and her, especially her ('unwomanly') sexual desire. According to Spivak, Rhys's reader learns that he is a 'victim' and is even encouraged to understand and sympathise with him, not least because he narrates the second part of the book. We are, she suggests, invited to see his perspective, however racist and sexist, and to understand the ways in which the "alien" Antoinette unnerves him. Passages like the following may endorse such a reading, but may equally invite readers to recognise his ingrained xenophobia:

> She never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either. And when did I begin to note all this about my wife Antoinette? … Or did I notice it before and refuse to admit what I saw? (46)

Rather than inviting reader sympathy, however, the representation of Rochester's innermost thoughts and actions encourage readers to recognise not only his narcissistic self-absorbed nature, but also his understanding of what is, or is not, culturally, and nationally 'pure.' Because she remains an "alien" to him, he fears betrayal and becomes incapable of trusting her. Betrayal is common in Rochester's competitive, English social class: he has been betrayed by his father and brother who abandon him even though they are a family in compliance with the symbolic order.

Part Two of the novel makes clear that Rochester is fearful that he cannot control the 'otherness' in Antoinette as he would be able to control an English woman. The father complex is a powerful force in Rochester's life, but interestingly, nothing is mentioned about his mother. Rochester's Oedipal complex stems from relational conflicts of his own that, in the terms of a Freudian psychoanalytic reading, originate in childhood between the boy child's inner self and (the figure of) the father. Spivak observes:

> If in the case of Antoinette and her identity, Rhys utilizes the thematics of Narcissus, in the case of Rochester and his patrimony, she touches on the thematics of Oedipus. In this she has her finger on our 'historical moment.' If, in the nineteenth century,

> subject-constitution is represented as childbearing and soul making, in the twentieth century psychoanalysis allows the West to plot the itinerary of the subject from Narcissus [the "imaginary"] to Oedipus [the "symbolic"]. This subject, however, is the normative male subject. In Rhys' reinscription of these themes, divided between the female and the male protagonist, feminism and a critique of imperialism become complicit. ("Three Women's Texts" 251)

In short, according to Spivak, the portrayal of Rochester's attitudes towards Antoinette not only critique the sexism but also the racism of the (male) British subject. The repression of negative feelings towards his father is carried on into adulthood resulting in a needy ego that preys on vulnerable women; the fear of the racialised cultural other is used to excuse this predatory behaviour. Rochester initially exploits Antoinette sexually, then denies her, fearing the 'otherness' he perceives in her sexuality. While he is attracted to her 'wildness' and deeply desires to possess it, for a Victorian man in a society that views female lust as depravity, such feelings are forbidden and must be controlled. One means of control is in his assertion of his right to (re)name Antoinette as Bertha, to which she protests, during a night of sexual abandon, saying, "not Bertha tonight" (106). His response to her desire to own her sexuality and claim her identity is chilling: "Of course, on this night of all nights you must be Bertha" (106). After this, he sleeps with the servant Amelie who shows him a willingness to be exactly what he wants her to be – unlike Antoinette/Bertha.He describes Amelie's face as "meaningless" (109), believing that she is much more pliable and easier to control in her non-European *natural* sexual openness: "she was so gay, so natural…" (109). This is much more playful and less threatening to him; she is a "natural" savage over whom he is in control due to the unambiguous power dynamic of (white) master and (black) servant.

The portrayal of Rochester and Antoinette's abusive relationship reveals the psychically destructive effects of power expressed as race and gender dominance. Antoinette deeply craves an intimacy that Rochester is incapable of giving because it would need him to be vulnerable, something that is viewed as a weakness and unacceptable in British imperial mentality. It would also require his to accept as equal that/those which are "alien." He decides that he will not have her, but she will not have anyone else either: "Made for loving? Yes, but she'll have no lover, for I don't want her, and she'll see no other" (131). Rochester's rejection of her foreignness – her otherness in all senses – leaves Antoinette rejected by both sides of her cultural inheritance.

Antoinette's behaviour becomes increasingly erratic as Rochester becomes more repulsed by her and she acts foolishly in her desperation by asking Christophine to make an *obeah* potion to get Rochester to love her. When Rochester finds out what she has done, he is further repulsed by her because *obeah* is completely demonized and foreign. This adds fuel to his conception that she has gone completely mad and wants to poison him. It permits him to rationalise all his uncertainties and misgivings and rids him of his anxiety, but also allows him to reach a resolution about Antoinette as incomprehensible, mad, and murderous like her mother. He decides that she can be taken from her home, lose her identity and be locked up in the attic of his English home with no consequence, as even the law is on his side.

Antoinette's entrapment culminates in 'madness' as Rochester uses her 'otherness' against her and imprisons her to stifle her identity as a West Indian white Creole woman. Her sexuality both fascinates and repulses him and may be emblematic of what Elaine Showalter called the 'wild zone', an area of female experience that is not and cannot be inscribed in patriarchal language.[24] As he leaves for England, Rochester laments that "she belonged to the magic and the loveliness [of the West Indies]. She had left me thirsty, and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it" (136-7). But he is unwilling to risk any part of his financial or emotional patrimony to quench his thirst and his cruelty reveals the shallowness of his desire. He interprets racial differences in moral and sexual terms as contamination and miscegenation and sees Antoinette's sexuality as a threat and possible racial contamination. In contrast to Antoinette's narrative, he sees her displacement within a historical context in terms of changes in class and economic power. He chooses to believe the gossip about his wife and distances himself from her. Rochester cuts her ties with a culturally significant place where she has support and confines her to the cold walls of Thornfield Hall where a guardian keeps her under lock and key. In England, in his attic, with no fresh air and sunlight, she becomes known as the mad woman who eventually sets fire to Rochester's ancestral home. Antoinette is treated as a creature and stripped of her name, money and property.

The forced move to England also costs Antionette her 'good' – or "good enough" – mother, Christophine. When Annette is abused by the black people entrusted with her care, Antoinette projects on Christophine what she wants to really say to her mother's abusers: "You shut up devil, damned black devil from Hell" (104). This behaviour can be seen as driven by the

[24] For a reading of the novel in these terms, see Missy Dehn Kubitschek, "Charting the Empty Spaces of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*."

abuse she has suffered. Judith Herman explains that "the abused child is even more vulnerable than the adult victim, for she must compensate for the failures of adult care and protection with the only means at her disposal, an immature system of psychological defenses" (qtd. Moran 101). Unlike Annette, Christophine does not reject or abandon Antoinette. She provides her with love and devotion as a child but also tries to advise her not to mess with *obeah* when her marriage is in trouble. However, eventually, against her better judgement, Christophine gives in to Antoinette's desperate emotional pleas. She might be understood as a figure for what Donald Winnicott, a student of Klein, referred to as a "good enough mother." This is a mother (or caregiver) that is not "perfect"; one who does not meet every demand their child makes but ensures their general wellbeing and happiness while allowing the child to experience tolerable frustrations on the path to independent identity. Christophine evidences this kind of mothering when she tries to get Antoinette to leave Rochester believing her life is at risk. She is there for her and protects her, but also slowly withdraws from her life so that she can make her own decisions when she goes away to live in her own cottage. According to Anne Simpson, who reads the relationship between Antoinette and Christophine in terms of object relations theory, Christophine's cottage becomes what Winnicott calls a "holding environment," A place where she counsels Antoinette and encourages her to develop the inner strength needed to leave Rochester. She is what Simpson calls "the incarnation of a feeding other, she gives Antoinette replenishing milk; as a sympathising source of comfort, she urges Antoinette to cry when her heart is being broken" (115).

As Richard Keller et al. explain in their introduction to *Unconscious Dominions*, "With its focus on processes of identification, repression, and splitting and projection, psychoanalysis presents a rich account of the formations and deformations of subjectivity under conditions of intimacy, authority, and the play of power and violence" (22). This "rich account" is particularly resonant when analysing *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the "formations and deformations of subjectivity" of its protagonist. From a feminist psychoanalyst perspective, for example, it is abundantly clear that Antoinette is never done with the *mother imago* as she grows into adulthood.[25] Unconsciously, like her mother, she lashes out racist slurs to those she loves, like when she calls Tia a "cheating nigger" (9) and Christophine a "damned black devil from hell" (104), which indicates an unconscious superiority that lurks in her psyche and spills out when under pressure. Her marriage to Rochester, an Englishman, again signals

[25] See *mother imago* as defined in my second chapter.

the subconscious view of English superiority that existed in the white Creole society, epitomised by Annette. Victoria Burrows' analysis of white Creole attitudes towards the English offers insights Antoinette's decision to marry Rochester:

> There is resentment of the English and the wealth they possess which white Creole Jamaicans no longer share as well as the English attitudes of superiority towards them, yet these feelings of acrimony exist alongside a simultaneous longing to be English. It is to imperial whiteness that white Creole ideological loyalty lies: but they are white but not quite. (29)

Antoinette often vocalises her hatred of the English and England, but she goes ahead and marries an Englishman. The opinions that her mother articulated when she was a child have unconsciously shaped her views on race and security and she irrationally chooses this path when she is under pressure.

Simpson sees Antoinette as "seeking her mother in her husband, looking to find a warmth that was withheld from her, which is met with the same coldness with which her mother responded" (120). Even when his self-centred narcissism starts to become evident in the marriage, she is still desperate to maintain the illusion of marital bliss. As a survivor of childhood abuse and trauma she shows signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the difficulty she has in forming intimate relationships and does not sense the danger represented by the marriage. Moran attributes this to desperation for nurturance, which makes her unable to establish safe boundaries. She states:

> Her tendency to denigrate herself and to idealize those to whom she becomes attached further clouds her judgment. Her empathic attunement to the wishes of others and her automatic, often unconscious habits of obedience also makes her vulnerable to anyone in a position of power or authority. (111)

What Simpson and Moran argue, then, is that the (maternal) object relation Antoinette experiences in childhood determines her attraction to objects that are misogynistic and narcissistic in nature.

The same narcissistic behaviour that mentally wounded Antoinette in childhood becomes her daily experience in matrimony, but nonetheless she stays with Rochester indicating the extent of her psychic damage. He emotionally wounds her by calling her Bertha, denies her any empathy, and when she says she wishes to die because she is so happy, he callously says,

"Die then! Die!" (98). After Antoinette expresses her wish to die, Rochester remarks that he "watched her die many times. In my way not in hers" (92). Here, Rochester plays with several meanings of "die" – to stop living, and to have an orgasm (according to a long-standing literary metaphor). Even in her "death," Rochester insists on maintaining control, so she may only "die" in "his way – sexually – not, as she seems to wish, with the end of her life. His ability to cause Antoinette's "death" through sex also implies Rochester's use of sexual violence and domination. His ability to make her "die" on his terms emphasizes his absolute domination, and her lack of agency over not just her body, but her life and death generally. He physically wounds her in what he calls "loving" (68). Christophine sees the physical scars and says to Rochester, "I undress Antoinette so she can sleep cool and easy; its then I see you very rough with her eh?" (118).

Antoinette seems to surrender to his rough sex and mind games. No matter what she does, she cannot make him love her and he breaks her heart by sleeping with Amelie while she listens. He establishes his position of authority over his wife through his pervasive sadism practised on a traumatised woman who suffers a disabling and dehumanising sense of shame. Rhys makes this unequal balance of power evident when Antoinette tells Rochester fragmented parts of her childhood, in a kind of perverse patient-therapist roleplay. But Rochester's sadism makes him an unfit therapist for the masochistic Antoinette. Leon Wurmser argues that masochist behaviour is "set up to undo, yet also to perpetuate, the traumas that have brought about a searing sense of unlovability – myriad vain efforts to restore love and acceptance" (qtd. Moran 194). Masochist submission is viewed as a symptom of psychic trauma that Emmanuel Ghent identifies as "a deep longing for surrender, a yearning to be known, recognized, 'penetrated"' (qtd. Moran 116). Ghent traces masochistic phenomena to "deprivation, traumata and developmental interferences suffered in the early preoedipal years" (qtd. Moran 116). This happens when as an infant the child develops "a falsely compliant self" but they take into adulthood "a continual longing to surrender with the false hope of a 'new beginning'" (qtd. Moran 116).

In short, there is a connection between the repudiating Annette and the brutalising Rochester because Antoinette's early childhood traumas predispose her to masochist submission. Moran argues that masochist submission is shown in Antoinette's marriage as a complex response to the psychic trauma that she suffered and witnessed in her childhood. She subconsciously submits to Rochester in her yearning to be recognised as a worthy wife.

Abused children are said to be drawn to similar abusive relationship dynamics in their adulthood according to Moran. She states that "The abused child grows up into someone who searches for a relationship in which they can be dependent because they are haunted by the fear of abandonment and will continue to find attractive those powerful authority figures who seem to offer the promise of a special caretaking relationship" (Moran 102). Interestingly, Moran is not simply interested in traumatised, masochistic characters, like Antoinette, in Rhys's (and Virginia Woolf's) fiction but argues that Rhys "embod[ies] masochism and trauma within literary form itself." Her "masochistic aesthetic," she argues, "deploys repetition, suspends and disavows climax, blurs reality and fantasy, and enacts patterns of reversal – an aesthetic that, in dramatizing and exaggerating the relations of submission and dominance, sets up an oppositional site within power hierarchies" (128). She further argues:

> What Woolf's and Rhys's texts show is that female modernism takes up female subjectivity at precisely the point that Freud abandoned it, and that women modernists' retrieval and reworking of traumatic stories not only provides motivation for their artistry but enriches considerably our currently impoverished understanding of the uses of and competing claims involved in traumatic memory. (17)

While I concur with much that Moran has to say, I would argue that the trauma portrayed and aestheticised by Rhys needs to be understood not only in terms of modernist/female politics but also in relation to patriarchal imperialism. In other words, as I have already suggested above, the novel explores intersections of racialized and gendered trauma.

Cathy Caruth contends that "history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas, both personally and collectively" (qtd. Burrows 30). Characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are presented as implicated in this way, with white Creoles, white imperialists, and black (former) slaves sharing interwoven histories which cannot be read separately. Antoinette's early years are set in a historical period when slavery had just been abolished and, according to Victoria Burrows, "the white minority experiences sensations of shock and disorientation as a massive and smouldering black population is released into an awareness of its power" (28). This new balance of power is unnerving to the small population of former white slave owners to which Antoinette belongs, racially and culturally. The depth of her identity crisis is revealed when she confesses, "a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've

heard English women call us white niggers. … I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why I was ever born" (76-77). As a woman, white Creole, daughter of a former slave-owner, and imperialist she is conflicted and alienated. She has an elite white Creole family and a surrogate black mother in Christophine as well as a black childhood friend, Tia, who is like a sister to her, and she marries Rochester who represents 'pure' white Englishness. These people are all depicted as playing an integral part in her identity formation as she tries to figure out where she fits.

It seems clear that Antoinette's 'inbetweenness' is distressing to her and another contributory factor to her 'madness.' She experiences what Burrows describes as the "cultural ambivalence of being fixed in a historically inflected moribund whiteness that is itself trapped between two disdainful cultures at a crucial moment of imperial dismantling" (28). In this way, Rhys presents emphatically racialised historical trauma as a social and environmental factor that contributes to Antoinette's destabilisation, making her vulnerable to charges of 'madness.' H. Adlai Murdoch asserts:

> The complex depths of the creole figure in Caribbean literature and culture continue to demand further exploration, inflected as they are by the long presence and pervasive traces of colonialism in the region and its attendant corollaries of hierarchical social separation and ethnocultural difference inflected by perceptions of race. Thus, the shifting and structurally unstable inscription of the creole figure echoes, in a key way, critical ambiguities of political structure and social position that shaped the colonial encounter in the region in a number of ways. The suspect beginnings of the term 'creole' as embodying colonialism's repulsion for the fearfully unnameable and unplaceable hybrid monstrosity, the undesired product of colonial *métissage*, ultimately overdetermined the ostensibly separate races of white and black, even as the boundaries and practices that presumably separated them were increasingly and unalterably blurred. (146-47)

Antoinette is white, not black, but not quite white enough either. Colonial discourse judges such liminal characters disparagingly, as this 1910 entry for 'Creole' in the *Encyclopeadia Britannica* affirms: "The difference in type between the white Creoles and the European races from whom they have sprung, a difference often considerable, is due principally to changed environment – especially to the tropical or semi-tropical climate of the lands they inhabit" (qtd. Murdoch 165, fn. 1). According to this logic, Europeans/English are psychologically

negatively affected by the tropics (hence the term 'gone tropo') – an idea very evident in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and many other colonial texts. They are contaminated by (racial and cultural) 'otherness' – just as Rochester believes Antoinette is.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Antoinette's personal development is mapped in her history and relies on interconnected discourses. Her language, in her sections of narration, is that of island's 'white folk' but Rhys portrays this language inadequate to capture Antoinette's experiences by interpolating the insights of the island blacks in Christophine's words (as recalled by Antionette and Rochester). Set against both are the words of Rochester, coldly and rationally English, in the section her narrates. The battle between these languages is encapsulated in Rochester's renaming of Antoinette as first name? Gregg suggests: "In renaming Antoinette Bertha, the husband does not succeed in changing her, but in splitting her identity. This split subjectivity becomes the fate that she must confront" (98). She continues, "The identity of the husband is constituted by the history and narrative of Europe and is dependent upon the 'breaking up' of Antoinette, the Creole woman" (103).

All this said, however, it is striking that the voices of the (former) slaves are absent in this book. Christophine's words are reported or recalled by the white narrators to suggest the liminality of Antoinette, doubly mothered by a white woman and a black one. While Antoinette, Rochester and even Grace Pool are given narratorial authority at various points in the novel, no such courtesy is extended to Christophine. Indeed she, and all the other black characters (including Tia and Amelie) are voiced by white characters. This has been noted by many scholars. Spivak famously asserts, for example, that Christophine is "tangential to a narrative written in the interest of the white Creole protagonist" ("Three Women's Texts" 253). Some argue that the text's major gesture towards the African heritage of the (former slaves) is in the negative effects of *obeah* magic.[26] Mardorossian summarises such critical objections in this way:

> According to the influential Caribbean critic Brathwaite, Rhys's 'socio-cultural background and orientation' makes it impossible for her to grasp the experience of the primarily black and poor West Indian people (*Contradictory Omens* 35). Moira Ferguson similarly argues that 'the text favors Jean Rhys's class – the former white

[26] According to Brathwaite, "obeah was associated in the [white] Jamaican/European mind with superstition, witchcraft, and poison ... [whereas] in African/Caribbean folk practice, where religion had not been externalized and institutionalized as in Europe, the obeah-man [sic] was doctor, philosopher, and priest" (*Folk Culture* 12).

> planter class' and 'does not allow the implied victors [Christophine] ... to be articulated as victors' (115). Mary Lou Emery and Veronica Gregg also object to Rhys's representation of black and mulatto people and see her insight into the workings of ideologies as limited to dismantling Rochester's, i.e. the British colonialist's discursive constructions of his female Other (Antoinette). Rhys is thus perceived as unaware of the operations of imperial history when it comes to her black and colored Others and guilty of 'the usurpation of race/blackness in the service of gender' (Gregg 46). Aparajita Sagar's interpretation is similar to Gregg's; Sagar recognizes in the novel an anti-linear narrative (that resists conventional history and epistemology) but also, however, 'a corrected and singleminded Caribbean history' that compromises the first project in its racism towards the black and colored characters (159). Judith Gardiner and Theresa O'Connor identify a racist ideology in Rhys's writing (Gardiner 48; O'Connor 36), and Caroline Rody agrees that the text's evocation of racial history (or lack thereof) might be read as complicit with colonialist discourse (307). (1088, fn.31)

In short, as Mardorossian writes, "Contemporary critics tend to agree with Spivak's reading that *Wide Sargasso Sea* provides us with a sympathetic representation of white Creole alienation at the expense of the black Creole perspective" (1072).[27] Others, however, defend Rhys on various grounds: she was 'of her time'; she was working through her own white Creole trauma; she was simply reflecting the blindness of white Creoles to the presence of the Black others, association with whom rendered them not quite British enough. Benita Parry, for example, argues that the female source of counter discourse in the text is not Antoinette, but Christophine ("Problems" 38). Mardorossian asserts that "Wide Sargasso Sea recasts the black Creoles' silence in response to the legacy of colonialism as a strategy of power rather than as a reflection of weakness, and challenges in so doing the Western habit of associating speech with power" (1081).

Whatever 'side' one takes on this critical debate, one fact is certain: Rhys is a white writer. It would still be some time before African women writers began to pen their own responses to the compounded trauma of racial *and* patriarchal oppression. One such writer is Buchi Emecheta, the subject of my next chapter. Like Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Buchi

[27] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts." Braithwaite states, "Creole describes a situation where the society concerned is caught up 'in some kind of colonial arrangement' with a metropolitan European power, on the one hand, and a plantation arrangement on the other; and where the society is multiracial, but organized for the benefit of a minority of European origin" (*Contradictory Omens* xv)

Emecheta writes back to the British empire in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). To Rhys the British Empire is the 'Mother country' that abandons white Creoles after emancipation in the West Indies in 1834, leaving them financially ruined and defenceless against the former enslaved people of the island. For Emecheta the British Empire is a colonial superpower that leaves an indelible mark on the African continent, and she writes to expose the trauma and loss it caused to black African people, especially women. Both women write to expose what Nicole Willey calls "the oppressive relationships that are sanctioned by myths and customs" (156) of traditional patriarchy. They also both take a sociological feminist stance in exposing the social factors that cause suffering for women. While Rhys's novel is open to analysis by the feminist trauma theories expounded by Klein, more modern versions of trauma, wider-ranging theories of trauma that take account of colonial trauma alongside gendered trauma, are appropriate to a discussion of Emecheta's novel as I suggest in my next chapter.

Chapter 5: "Doubly Subaltern": Gender and Race Oppression in *The Joys of Motherhood*

Set in colonial Nigeria, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* provides an intimate view of Igbo women's experiences, with a particular focus on motherhood. It serves as a challenge to the hegemony of African male authors and the representation of African women in literature, at the time of writing (1979). In the two decades after Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the vast bulk of Nigerian literature written in English was by (elite) men. This writing is notable for its challenges to colonial rule but shows little interest in the role or experiences of women. Emecheta's manner of writing is distinct from 'canonized' postcolonial African writing, such as that penned by Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in the way she challenges patriarchy, and her voice stands in sharp contrast to the male-dominated realm of African literature that characterised the 1960s and 1970s. Unlike this writing, Emecheta's is firmly woman-focused. She writes about female experience and questions Nigerian societal assumptions and practices that are hostile to women and results in what I have called "patriarchal trauma" at an individual, communal and transgenerational level. At the same time, however, she portrays the ways that indigenous Nigerians (especially Igbo people) experienced trauma as the result of almost a century of colonisation by the British. This chapter will focus on a variety of psychoanalytic trauma theories that combine African feminist/womanist insights and a decolonized postcolonial lens to examine the suffering of women African women as Emecheta portrays this. Her focus on the effects of a patriarchal system on African women in a colonial context, moves beyond the focus of Jean Rhys, as discussed in my previous chapter.

While Western feminism's fundamental principles emphasise equality and justice for all women through elimination of systems of inequality and injustice in all aspects of women's lives and celebrate female achievements and struggles –all of which are important to Emecheta – her African perspective also voices a black woman's experiences with racism and discrimination. Emecheta has often expressed her reluctance to be simply placed under the label of 'feminist,' as here:

> I write about the little happenings of everyday life. Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be

> called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small 'f.' (qtd. Uwakweh 395)

Comments such as this make clear she does not identify as a feminist in a Western sense of the term. She is possibly drawn to African feminism (or as it is sometimes called, African womanism) because of how it weighs which traditional institutions are agreeable and positive for women, and which disadvantage women so severely that they should be abolished. This accords with the position of many African feminists/womanists who, according to Susan Arndt, believe that "criticism of African societies inherent in the criticism of African gender relationships weakens Africa's position with respect to the West, as well as African resistance to western cultural imperialism" (32). The complexities of labelling Emecheta as an 'African feminist' are highlighted by Katherine Frank who points out that the profoundly individualistic philosophy of (Western) feminism and the communalistic nature of many African cultures are contradictory (qtd. Andrade 92). Carol Boyce Davies sees the African feminist/womanist theoretical framework as a 'balancing act,' claiming that,

> African feminist critics must take what is of value from both mainstream feminist criticism and African literary criticism, keeping in mind that both are offshoots from traditional European literary criticism and in some cases its adversaries. The result then is not reduction but refinement geared specifically to deal with the concrete and literary realities of African women's lives. (qtd. Sougou 26)

Emecheta's personal experiences as an African woman who was raised and lived in Nigeria, as well as her intimate awareness of the (often hidden) feelings that black women have in this traditionally patriarchal society, are both apparent in *The Joys of Motherhood.*

Emecheta's writing, according to Omar Sougou, is amenable to discussion in the terms of the feminist scholar Hélène Cixous and her reworking of Derridean theory. Sougou argues that her writing is an example of 'feminine' writing:

> Cixous sees 'feminine' texts as texts that 'work on difference, [...] strive in the direction of difference, struggle to undermine the dominant phallocentric logic, split open the closure of binary opposition and revel in open-ended textuality.' In some respects Emecheta's fiction works in the same way; it disturbs and undermines the dominant discourse, also present in African literature, and seeks to undo the closure of binary opposition. (6-7)

Despite Emecheta's reservations about Western feminist theory and its efficacy in an African context, in this chapter I will argue that a variety of neo-Freudian psychoanalytic theories, inflected by feminist thought, provide valuable resources for the analysis of behaviours and relationships as they are portrayed in *The Joys of Motherhood*. This is not to suggest that Emecheta deliberately writes with such theories in mind. Nonetheless, as one who lived in England from the age of eighteen, earned a B.Sc in Sociology from the University of London in 1972 and later a PhD from the same university (1991), it is fair to assume that she would have been aware of, even very familiar with, the second-wave feminist thought that so influenced British academia in the late 1960s, 70s and 80s. She is bound to have drawn from her sociological knowledge which, according to Sylvia Walby, was "subject to a 'wave' of feminism from the 1970s onwards [as] … [f]eminist ideas in civil society were systematised" (3). She is also very likely to have been similarly familiar with Freudian psychoanalytic theory and post-Freudian feminist psychoanalytic thought such as that discussed in my previous chapter.

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of sociology, and its ability to draw upon and synthesise perspectives, new ideas or concepts, it has integrated and combined the insights of both feminism and psychoanalysis. Stevi Jackson states that feminist analysis was at the forefront in the investigation of women's subordination in sociology at the time in which Emecheta studied ("Feminist Sociology" n.p.). This was also a time in which traditional Freudian ideas were challenged and expanded in multiple ways in the disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis. This suggests the strong possibility that when Emecheta wrote *The Joys of Motherhood*, this confluence of second-wave feminist and revised psychoanalytic and psychological ideas were at the back of her mind, just as pressing demands for racial equality are likely to have been, following the trend of global decolonisation in the 1960s and 1970s, and the American Civil Rights movement at the same time.

Emecheta's concerns in *The Joys of Motherhood*, however, are not only with the direct and/or insidious psychological effects of patriarchy on women. As an African woman – one who is likely to have experienced considerable racial discrimination in England at the time she wrote the novel, not to mention colonial racism in her formative years (she was born in 1944, sixteen years before Nigeria gained independence) – she is equally concerned with the effects of racism, and the legacy of colonisation, on non-European colonised persons. According to some scholars, for African postcolonial women writers, this has resulted in what Kirsten Holst Petersen refers to as the 'African dilemma': deciding which oppression to tackle first or

prioritise: traditional patriarchal oppression or colonial racial oppression ("First Things First" 253). Furthermore, if she critiques the first, she is open to the charge of betraying her indigenous culture, especially if she implies that European colonisation brought emancipatory benefits to African women.

In what follows, I will discuss the multitudinous forms of trauma that the protagonist, Nnu Ego, suffers that are cumulative in nature. Together, these function to maintain a code of silence for Nnu Ego and the other women in her life. Emecheta militantly fights to expose this while simultaneously trying to preserve the *ugwu* – dignity or mana – of Igbo traditional (patriarchal) culture. She achieves this quest, I argue, by taking a Spivakian approach that seeks to give the subaltern a voice, without simply speaking *for* or *of* them, in her desire to map a way forward for African women. A variety of trauma theories, especially those developed in the decades prior to the publication of the novel, can facilitate an exploration of the female psychic terrain of *The Joys of Motherhood*.

The picture of a woman in distress is a preamble to the melancholia that lingers in *The Joy of Motherhood.* The shock of finding her first born, infant son Ngozi dead on his sleeping mat triggers temporary insanity as Nnu Ego races to the Carter bridge (in Lagos) to end it all and settle matters with her chi whom she blames for this unimaginable tragedy.[28] Losing her only child takes her back to the feelings of helplessness she had when faced with 'barrenness' in her first marriage. This punctual event is deeply traumatic; giving birth to Ngozi was like a rite of passage into womanhood for Nnu Ego and in her mind this is what gave her value in her society, one that equates womanhood with motherhood – a notion she has internalised. Emecheta gives a harrowing description of a young woman's mental torture, of one who has lost sense of her surroundings as she runs wildly down the streets of Lagos, struggling to come to terms with the reality that she has a dead baby at home and breasts still oozing milk, which confirms her motherhood status although she is now childless again. She views this loss as punishment by her chi for the sins of her father and irrationally thinks that having a face-to-face meeting with the malevolent spirit is the only way for her to find closure: "best to end it all this way, the only good way" (2).

[28] In Nigerian Igbo culture, each person is believed to have a chi – a personal life force or guiding spirit. Chinua Achebe explains it this way: "In a general way we may visualize a person's chi as his other identity in spiritland [the realm of dead ancestors] – his spirit being complementing his terrestrial *human being*; for nothing can stand alone, there must always be another thing standing beside it" (Chi in Igbo Cosmology").

These suicidal thoughts are a sign that Ngozi's loss is life-altering to Nnu Ego and has mentally pushed her to a breaking point where she can only cope with the trauma – and, as I will discuss, multiple, cumulative traumas – via disassociation. Felix Torres defines Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as "a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, or rape or who have been threatened with death, sexual violence or serious injury" ("What is PTSD?"). Nnu Ego's past included physical abuse and sexual violence, at the hands of her husband, related to her apparent barrenness. Ngozi's birth provided some healing, but this comes to an abrupt end with his death and triggers the post-traumatic eruption of past conversations and cumulative, transgenerational trauma, especially in relation to her chi. Her chi is believed to be the spirit of a slave woman brutally murdered, indeed buried alive, by her father and half-brother. The following passage, given in free indirect discourse, offers readers insight into Nnu Ego's distressed thinking about her chi:

> …so the slave woman was making sure that Nnu Ego's own life was nothing but a catalogue of disasters. Well now she was going to her, … to talk it over with her not on this earth but in the land of the dead. (3-4)

Her baby's death has caused a heightened physiological and psychological desire in Nnu Ego to meet face-to-face with a spirit that she believes is the source of her misery. As Emecheta moves backwards in time from this opening scene we are given details about Nnu Ego's past and are made aware of a series of other traumatic events that had preceded the suicidal desperation with which the novel opens. It becomes clear that cumulative trauma has brought her to this moment. Understanding this helps the reader to understand why a twenty-five-year-old woman believes she has run out of options and sees suicide as the only way out. This heart-wrenching opening scene foreshadows the melancholia that pervades in a novel ironically titled *The Joys of Motherhood* and sets the stage for Emecheta's inquisition into the institution of motherhood in a patriarchal society, compounded by the effects of colonisation.

Emecheta provides an explanation of Nnu Ego's situation through an exposition of cumulative patriarchal trauma that lies in the history of her family in the village of Ibuza. The setting in Ibuza provides a traditional context that shows life as it was before colonialism and the life of the protagonist's parents, which has a bearing on her trauma and actions in the first chapter of the novel. What appears to be a 'quintessential' place and time in Ibgo society on the surface, on closer inspection, is also a place of patriarchal oppression, female repression,

physical and mental abuse and murder of women at the hands of men. Emecheta walks the fine line of portraying and celebrating important Igbo traditions in Ibuza, while simultaneously challenging its sexist practices by detailing the experiences of the women who live there. In these retrospective chapters we are introduced to Ona, Nnu Ego's mother. She is an empowered woman who is shown as 'free spirited' and able to have any man she wants because she has beauty and status as a daughter of a chief. Chiefly men like Agbadi (who fathers Nnu Ego) are attracted to her, and she can handle such advances. Ona comes and goes as she pleases in the village. However, Emecheta's descriptions of Ona are framed in terms of her relationships with the men in her life and they have a strong hold on her. As free as she may appear, there are invisible chains of patriarchy that influence her life. She is forced to be someone's mistress because her father demands that she conceive a son for him, with a lover, before she marries, to carry on his legacy because he does not have a son of his own. She is in love with Agbadi but cannot marry him without risking being disowned and disinherited from her family. She is caught between the egos of two men – her father and her lover – who determine her destiny. She is sexually abused by Agbadi when she comes to nurse him after an injury, and he takes her violently.

> "The heartless bitch," he thought, "I will teach her." … Then the anger came to him again as he remembered how many times this young woman had teased and demeaned him sexually. He felt like jumping on her, clawing at her, hurting her. … He was still weak, but not weak enough to ignore his desire. He worked on her, breaking down all her resistance. Grunting like an excited animal with a helpless prey, he left her abruptly, still unsatisfied, and rolled painfully to the other side of the goatskin. Having hurt her on purpose for the benefit of his people sleeping in the courtyard, he had had his satisfaction. (16)

The narrator tells us "She struggled fiercely like a trapped animal" during this encounter (16), which is evidence of her reluctance to be intimate. He forces the matter, and eventually she gives in to his overpowering demands. Nnu Ego is the product of their coupling. Ona dies in a subsequent childbirth without having married whilst living outside tradition with Agbadi because she never manages to shake off the stronghold of patriarchy that later thwarts her daughter's life. Ona's predicament forces her to become isolated from her family and she dies a subaltern on the periphery of marriage, looking in. Ironically, although Nnu Ego fights all her life to stay within the confines of tradition and patriarchal expectations she similarly dies

alone, also marginalised, and insane, which suggests the inescapable suffering of African women under oppressive patriarchal laws.

Intricately interwoven into the individual trauma of Ona, is the story of suffering of other women that exist in traditional Ibuza, due not only to overt repression and murder but a variety of cultural practices. Polygamy appears to be portrayed as an acceptable practice or type of marriage that has some benefits for women. Agbadi's wives, for example, show sisterhood and support each other even though there may be some disagreements between them. Nnu Ego is raised by her father's wives when her mother dies, showing a nurturing spirit amongst the women. It is these women that love her and nurse her when her first husband physically and mentally abuses her. Later in the book, we learn that when Nnu Ego's second husband, Nnaife, inherits his dead brother's wives, the brother's first wife, Adankwo, chooses to stay in Ibuza to get support from her co-wives in raising her small child rather than go to Lagos to live with Nnaife. The role of first wife is shown as a prestigious position that comes with privileges such as the right to settle disputes between the younger wives and dispensing food and duties in the husband's compound.

However, Emecheta as an African womanist, also focuses on the plight of women within such marriages and exposes the underbelly of polygamy that only a woman would know. She shows jealousy and shame as stressors in polygamous marriages. Ona, in her empowerment to take on a lover, unintentionally hurts other women as she passionately enjoys sex with their husband, Agbadi, all night in the courtyard while they listen, pretending to be asleep. Unrealistic patriarchal expectations require women in a polygamous marriage to put their husband's sexual desires before their own. Agbadi's first wife, Agunwa, dies of shame after she fails to deal with the repressed feelings of sexual desire that give her a stroke after listening to her husband making love to another woman while she attempts to maintain her dignity. This tragedy is further exacerbated at her funeral. The other women of Agbadi's family are further traumatised as they watch helplessly while the men bury a slave girl alive in Agunwa's grave so that she can serve the first wife in the afterlife. Women look away while Agbadi's son beats this slave girl senseless when she tries to resist and in her final words she vows to return as a legitimate daughter. This traumatic end to a life is a barbaric act committed by the men, but it is implied that the effects ripple out to other women, not least Nnu Ego. The villagers widely believe that the murdered slave girl becomes Agbadi's daughter's (Nnu Ego's) chi, which spiritually binds them forever. Nnu Ego believes this too and grows up with the belief that her life is blighted by the vengeful spirit of the murdered

woman killed by her half-brother on her father's instructions. Her chi, then, is emblematic of the socially-condoned (transgenerational) patriarchal violence that controls her destiny. The extent to which she has internalised the "law of the father" is evident in her wholesale acceptance of the idea that this chi is responsible for her initial barrenness and the death of her first child, when she eventually does have a baby.

Emecheta walks a fine line in *The Joys of Motherhood* by highlighting the often traumatic reality of experiences that women endure in African Igbo society without demeaning the culture and so betraying her heritage. She does this by showing some of the potential benefits of polygamous marriage in Ibuza *before* European contact, including communality and a sisterhood of women working together. Women have the freedom to raise their families within their husband's compound, in a rural setting where food is naturally sourced and shared.[29] Each wife has a separate hut that allows them privacy with their children and the husband (when he chooses her company). Gender roles are also clearly defined with women raising and nurturing the children while men work in the fields and hunt to provide food for their families. Emecheta depicts a powerful black womandom, a sisterhood undergirded by the sharing of chores and childrearing, before colonisation.

Katherine Fishburn suggests that a balanced reading of Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* shows that:

> for every attack she makes on traditional culture, she makes a counter-attack in which the values of the traditional culture can be shown as positive. … Yes she does often challenge patriarchal notions of Igbo culture that hurt women, but she also questions, just as ardently, the imported sexism of colonialism. (qtd. Willey 155)

She does not portray all women in polygamy as victims in the way a Western feminist reading may interpret sharing a husband, and in this way appears to endorse Chilla Bulbeck's assertion that a "good example of Eurocentrism is Western heterosexual feminists' unthinking condemnation of polygamy (as though every woman would want a husband all to herself)" (81). Sadia Zulfiqar makes a similar point stating that "In order to maintain its heightened sense of moral superiority, imperialism defined unfamiliar cultural traditions in Africa as immoral and thus uncivilized, and polygamy consequently came to be seen as deeply problematic in Western feminist scholarship" (101).

[29] A 2015 study in Tanzania found that "When comparing households within individual villages, polygynous households often had better access to food and healthier children. Polygynous households also owned more cattle and farmed more land than monogamous households." ("Often Decried")

Emecheta makes clear that traditional gender roles and relationships – like polygamy – may have worked 'well enough' in precolonial, rural Igbo culture, if not perfectly. But they fail miserably in an urban colonial setting. In Lagos, Nnu Ego fails to connect with her husband's new wife, Adaku for reasons that have little to do with sexual jealousy. Instead, it is the demand that they share the meagre resources provided by their husband that causes friction and grief. Polygamy has benefits in Ibuza, but this solid patriarchal structure crumbles under the strain of colonialism and capitalism in Lagos. The African men in Lagos are traumatised and incapacitated as heads of their families. Poorly paid as servants to white people, or labourers working for a pittance, they have lost their dignity along with their ability to provide for their wives and children. This, in turn, leaves the women burdened with their own duties as mothers, wives, nurturers as well as having to work in the capitalist system to supplement what little their husbands earn to provide food and shelter for their families.

In *The Joys of Motherhood,* collective cross-generational trauma is experienced by women in both the settings of precolonial and colonial Nigeria, Ibuza and Lagos respectively, however it is significantly exacerbated in the latter. Gendered, inherited trauma, figured in the novel by her chi, is the root cause for Nnu Ego's own psychological ill-health in Lagos. The chi, the spirit of the murdered slave, functions, then, in much the same way as Avery Gordon's trope of the ghost in her seminal work on psychosocial violence and transgenerational trauma, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008).[30] Psychologist Ibrahim Aref Kira views intra- and inter-familial transmission as instrumental in cross-generational traumatisation. Cross-generational trauma happens in a collective setting and can be historical or social (78). He argues that cross-generational trauma transmits a psychological legacy from one generation to another through connections and continuities that are carried forward into the present and future as a narrative in the unconscious of subsequent generations. This idea is a relatively new one. In fact, one of the first articles to comment on the presence of intergenerational trauma was published in 1966 by Canadian psychiatrist Vivian M. Rakoff, MD (and colleagues) who documented high rates of psychological distress among children of Holocaust survivors ("Children and Families"). Since that time, however, many studies have corroborated these findings and in contexts other than the Holocaust.[31]

[30] See also Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma.*

[31] See for example: Danieli, Yael. *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, Springer, 1998; Bezo, B., & Maggi, S., "Intergenerational Perceptions of Mass Trauma's Impact on Physical Health and Well-Being," *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 2018.

Interestingly, Tarryn Frankish and Jill Bradbury argue that "Women's narratives, often considered secondary to the grand narratives of struggle and conflict … show how, as primary caregivers, they form the pivot for the transmission of secondary traumatisation" ("Telling Stories" 295). They state that it is not only talking and overt parenting practices that are vehicles for the transmission of trauma across generations but silences too: "it is a conspiracy of silence that defines intergenerational trauma, defining this as the marker of transmission of trauma (and traumatic memory) between generations" ("Women's Narratives" 3). This 'cocoon of silence,' where an open disclosure and touching on painful or shaming matters through speech is prohibited, is often passed on. I argue that women in the Igbo society portrayed by Emecheta appear wrapped up in this 'cocoon of silence' that prohibits them from speaking freely about the repression of feelings in response to multiple aspects of patriarchal dominance such as aspects of polygamy, violence against women and the mental burden of womanhood defined *as* motherhood that includes the pressure to be fertile and to produce male sons.

Speaking of specifically *female* intergenerational silence, Frankish states that:

> Silence may be a conditional, agentic choice [by women] rather than always a defensive absence or unconscious denial. Silence reflects upon intergenerational trauma in that it is a silence directed at the next generation and what is impossible to say to this particular group of people. Through navigating talk on relationships and sexuality, and thrusting the temporal movement into the future, mothers enforce a protective and disciplinary relationship with their children. Here, talk is gendered and primarily happens between mothers and their daughters, and grandmothers and granddaughters. This talk is disciplinary. ("Women's Narratives" 9)

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, the 'disciplinary talk' that Nnu Ego, like other Igbo women, is subject to promotes motherhood as *the* quintessential element of being a 'real' woman. It glorifies the importance of and the joys to expect from bearing children, especially sons. What is not spoken about are the demands of men in achieving this or the pain involved in being just one of several wives serving their husband's sexual needs and providing him with sons. While the women in the novel remain largely silent about their pain as women (with the exception of Adaku, to whom I'll return, and several almost 'textbook' feminist assertions by Nnu Ego the reality of which she never addresses in any substantial way), Emecheta allows them to speak, directly or via recourse to their thoughts.

Nnu Ego, it is implied, suffers indirect or secondary trauma as the result of the murder of the slave girl. As I have suggested, this is figured in the novel by her (ghostly) chi. Although she did not witness the killing – in fact she was only born a few months after it occurred – Nnu Ego was regularly told about it when growing up and people in the village stressed to her that the slave woman had returned as her chi. This channel of transgenerational transmission through narrative is common in African communities that share traditions and stories orally as a way of connecting. Kira outlines how this can result in vicarious trauma, which is channelled through attachment enmeshment, projective identification introjection, dependency, co-dependency, interdependency, parenting practices, and acculturation. He states that, "Individuals co-exists in a system or a network of interlocking relationships that transmit the effects of different significant events horizontally and vertically within time and space" (78). Emecheta carefully details how Nu Ego is raised in such a network by women who communicate with an aim to educate, correct, and discipline, in the manner Frankish and Bradbury comment on in the above quotation. They speak of the value of womanhood in terms of fertility, motherhood and wifehood, prioritising the importance of a husband's pleasures and needs. In Ibuza, Nnu Ego is taught to respect her husband and not to speak up to defend herself, something she observes in her father's wives who conduct themselves by repressing their true feelings of fear, jealousy and frustration. These beliefs and this conduct are things she never shakes in her second marriage, despite brief periods of rage in which she articulates her resentment or, more often, simply *thinks* it. What is portrayed, then, is transgenerational transmission of not only normative gendered behaviour and the repression of resistance, but the enduring effects of patriarchal trauma.

In detailing the life of Nnu Ego, Emecheta shines a spotlight on an important aspect of Igbo society that defines femininity in the African (Igbo) context: motherhood. This emphasis is evident in not only in the deeply ironic title of the novel but in the titles of many of the chapters such as "The Mother," "The Mother's Mother," "First Shocks of Motherhood," "A Mother of Clever Children," and "The Canonized Mother." Motherhood is what women are 'disciplined' to want and expected to enjoy. But the enslaving nature of this important role in Igbo culture is implied by the suggestion that Nnu Ego, who desperately wants children, has as her chi a murdered slave.

Nnu Ego inherits a legacy of motherhood that is used by men as a vehicle of control. This is certainly the case with her mother who died in childbirth so there already is a legacy of trauma attached to motherhood in her lineage. On her father's side she also grows up seeing

his misogyny connected with motherhood, as we are told that Agbadi liked to search for difficult women to subdue and domesticate and once they became pregnant, he looked for his next conquest. The narrator states that, "he married a few women in the traditional sense but as he watched each of them sink into domesticity and motherhood he soon was bored and would go further afield" (5). These factors, it is implied, increase her anxiety, subconsciously, about becoming a mother when she enters her first marriage. Most crucially, she knows that it is her role to produce children.

This is not something Emecheta has invented and imposed on her fictional characters. Indeed, according to Remi Akujobi, "It is no … secret that the Nigerian woman considers herself a real woman only when she has proved herself to be fertile and the 'halo of maternity' shines over her" (4). Udeagha Nduka and Nwamah Grace Ozioma emphasis this:

> The most important role of women in the Igbo religious culture is to bear children. Achebe describes the birth of a child 'as a woman's crowning glory' [in *Things Fall Apart*]. They are greatly valued and respected for the biological role of giving childbirth. It has been noted that 'the fundamental purpose of womanhood in the society is motherhood. The birth of a child in Igboland is greeted with a shout of joy to announce the arrival of the newborn. Children bring joy to their parents and relatives' [quoting N. Udeagha]. In fact, one of the chief purposes of marriage in the Igbo traditional religious culture is for the continuity of the family linage. 'This is why marriage in traditional Igbo is highly esteemed especially for procreation of life. Thus, infertility, childlessness and celibacy are always shunned while divorce or polygamy is always considered as a consequence.' [quoting I.K.E Oraegbunam]

It is perhaps no surprise that Nduka and Ozioma refer to Achebe's famous book in the above comment. Emecheta has set herself the task of not only challenging patriarchal assumptions in Igbo society but also the way these have been reinforced in postcolonial writing by Igbo men, like Achebe.

Emecheta's narrator tells us that girls like Nnu Ego became restless with anticipation when they reached puberty, and this is observed by Idayi, her father's friend. Nnu Ego becomes distracted, continually forgetting what her father sent her to do, and Idayi speculates that she is ready for marriage. Nnu Ego's worth to her family and her new husband's family is proved by the ceremonies and rituals that are performed when she marries Amatokwu. The celebration of virginity and the gifts that are sent to her home in acknowledgement of this

'purity' confirm her worth and are evidence of her honouring tradition and family by saving herself for marriage. The day after her wedding night, her new husband sends her father "six full kegs of palm wine to announce that she was found to be an unspoiled virgin" (29).

Gendered socialisation is evident in even the most mundane social exchanges. In Ibuza, when meeting with an older man, girls are expected to greet them by saying, "He who roars like a lion" to which the elder would reply, "My daughter you will grow to rock your children's children" (27). This is a way of socio-psychologically preparing them for their future role as mothers. However, the code of silence – what is *not* said – does not prepare Nnu Ego for the unexpected challenge she faces in her marriage: she cannot become pregnant. The dark side of Igbo marriage when children do not come as easily as anticipated, and how this can inflict serious psychic wounds, is revealed.

As suggested in the above quote, infertility, childlessness and celibacy are always shunned in Igbo culture, as are people who embody these traits are shunned too. Nnu Ego soon faces the agony of being deemed a failure when her body does not produce a child. Importantly, the extent to which she has internalised social assumptions is shown when she chastises herself for her perceived "failure" (33) as a woman. She laments "bringing such shame to her family" (35). Nnu Ego experiences a number of stressors that are related to her failure to conceive. Her husband announces he will take a new wife, saying, "I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who us infertile" (31). This comes after he announces that "My father is desperate [for a grandchild] … I cannot fail my people" (30). This shows that expectations for women to bear children goes beyond the married couple and is a matter that affects the extended family and the wider society. In *The Joys of Motherhood* Nnu Ego is considered a failed woman (65), because lineages are established and continued through childbirth. Patriarchal pressure for a man to have a legacy of children to carry his name, and to be survived by many children of his bloodline, puts enormous pressure on the women to bear children.

Nnu Ego's goals are derailed as she finds herself, in her mind, at the mercy of an uncooperative chi who will not let her have children – the one thing that she is most expected to achieve for her husband. She suffers what Kira calls, in his "Taxonomy of Trauma," "Achievement or self-actualisation trauma." Her body lets her down and prevents her from achieving "a target that is perceived essential to survival or progression which can be traumatic" (74). Unable to conceive, she is made to work for her keep by harvesting yams on her husband's farm. She is ridiculed and loses her sense of security in her marital home,

especially as there is a new wife on the scene. This desperation leads Nnu Ego to behave irrationally when the second wife gives birth to a son. She displays symptoms of trauma that could be understood, in the terms of (European) classic theory, as hysteria. Her first episode of 'madness' occurs when Nnu Ego attempts to breastfeed another woman's child and talks to it, begging it to be her child (an act for which her husband beats her violently). This irrationality could be explained as the irruption of a hidden trauma that has forced its way to the surface. The pressure on Igbo women, through the social expectation that they bear children or suffer the stigma of failure, results in a sense of shame and is subconscious and generationally transmitted. The demand that women meet these expectations is so powerful that failing to do so can result in (non-punctual) trauma. Nnu Ego is depicted as gradually losing her mind as she begs the baby to be hers. She is marginalised and rejected due to her barrenness which leads to deep scars that never quite heal.

The individual physical and mental trauma Nnu Ego suffers in her first marriage haunts her in her second marriage and for the rest of her life. Discarded by her husband, her father arranges a marriage to Nnaife, who lives in the colonial city of Lagos and works as a servant to rich white colonists. This setting enables Emecheta to explore the intersections of gendered and racial oppression. On her arrival in Lagos, Nnaife sexually abuses Nnu Ego for a series of days without much rest, but she endures this treatment because she sees him as potentially rescuing her from her social disgrace. She longs for a child and is willing to overlook Nnaife's imperfections and endure his sexual abuse when she reminds herself that he may give her children. She admits he is no Amatwoku in physical appearance but has the potential to be a father which she is willing to settle for. This is ironic because when she first meets him, she thinks of him in negative terms that equate him with a woman. The implication is that he has been 'feminised' by his treatment by the white colonisers. He is described by the narrator (who is closely aligned with Nnu Ego's perspective at this point in the text) as having "a belly like a pregnant cow"; his hair is long, "like a woman mourning for her husband"; Nnu Ego thinks that "marrying such a jelly of a man would be like living with a middle-aged woman" (42).

The shock of having to accept a man who is a houseboy and washes white women's intimate clothing lingers for a while in Nnu Ego's mind. Ironically it is this flabby 'feminine' man, not the dashing, muscular Amatokwu, who gets her pregnant. However, as discussed, this child, Ngozi, dies soon after birth. The novel begins with a description of her response to this devastating loss, but Emecheta then uses analepsis to inform the reader what had led to this

moment, returning us to Nnu Ego's childhood in the village of Ibuza, her first marriage, and the even more distant past of her parent's relationship. In this way, the novel juxtaposes the traditional, rural and precolonial world with urban, colonised life in Lagos. It also enables Emecheta to provide details about Nnu Ego's earlier life and the experiences that lead to and compound her trauma when her baby dies.

Marylin Doucet and Martin Rovers quote Herman and Weingarten's description of the psychological manifestations consequent on a traumatic experience to be "a range of pathological symptoms that typically include emotional numbing, sadness, shame, anger, aggression, helplessness, depression, panic, and acute symptoms of anxiety" (94). These symptoms describe Nnu Ego's psychological state as she heads to the Carter Bridge in a frantic state, knocking people down on her way, including an elderly beggar. As she numbly walks towards the bridge, she is oblivious to her surroundings and forgets social decorum that dictates what a woman should wear and how she should behave in public. In her dishevelled state, Nnu Ego is at a high level of physiological arousal and is in a "fight-or-flight" response mode. As a crowd gathers, she "wrestles" and "floors a man" and also fights "fiercely and expertly" (62) with men trying to stop her from jumping.

To lose a child is recognised as one of, if not *the*, most traumatic experiences a person can suffer. However, for Nnu Ego this loss is further magnified by the societal equivalence of womanhood and motherhood. Her anguish when she loses her first child shows how these identities are entwined for her. She cries, "But I am not a woman anymore. The child is there dead on the mat'' (65). When she loses the child that told the whole world that she was not barren, she loses her centre and suffers temporary insanity. Her family and friends notice the length of time she takes to mourn for Ngozi, believing this to be unhealthy. Nnu Ego's friend warns her of the dangers of her melancholy and how this would affect more people than just her, which helps Nnu Ego to get back on her feet, although at the cost of burying her immense feelings of loss. The friend says "You know our people, you would not be the only one to suffer; your father would never live it down. All your many sisters would find no husbands, because it would be said that madness runs in the blood" (74). The societal demand, then, is that she represses her pain and trauma, but arguably this comes at the cost of a lingering melancholia that finally ends in psychosis at the novel's end when she realises she has lost her other sons, too, if not literally. They turn their backs on their mother and their culture, to pursue the financial and educational 'benefits' seemingly made possible by colonisation.

Nnu Ego eventually bears more children, and, to her delight, several are sons. However, she experiences no "joy" in motherhood. While she has proved her ability to conform with traditional Igbo expectations of womanhood, there is no compensatory respect or reward in colonial Lagos. Racial discrimination, poverty, and lack of familial support compound the difficulties she faces as a result of her husband's selfish and abusive behaviour. Using a postcolonial womanist lens, Emecheta underscores the limitations of Western feminist theory as it fails to adequately account for the suffering of African women who are forced to fight for survival as the victim of patriarchal and racial abuse. Emecheta focuses on Igbo women who face entrenched and internalised forms of patriarchal bias whose hardships are compounded by colonial denigration of her racial identity.

Nnaife is paid a pittance in his demeaning job as a servant to white people. He doesn't earn enough to feed and clothe his growing family as babies keep arriving (made even worse when he takes on a second wife and she bears children too). Raised in a traditional, rural Igbo village, Nnu Ego, like many of the African women in Lagos, no has no formal education. She has been brought up to cook, grow vegetables and care for children (and men). She has no skills that would allow her to earn a decent wage to support her family, and no land on which to grow crops to feed them. Bartering and sharing, as would have happened in the village, is not possible in the cut-throat capitalist economy of Lagos. All she can do is sell matches in the local market for very little money. Nnu Ego puts all her hope on a traditional system – based on large, interconnected, mutually supportive families, sustained by farming and hunting – that simply doesn't work in an urban colonial setting, and ends up physically and mentally broken. Colonial trauma contributes to Nnu Ego's distress as she suffers what Kira defines as disconnection or interdependence trauma. In Ibuza she had a network of interlocked connections that are emotional, social, and material in nature. If she had remained there, she would have had family members, friends, and even other wives, to help her raise and feed her many children, or to comfort her if she experienced abuse at the hands of her husband. Traditional village life offered a sense of social embeddedness, belonging and meaning in life, and the people who surrounded her provided feelings of safety, security and community, even if the roles of women were prescribed and inferior to those of men. When she moves to Lagos for marriage and a hope to repair the damage of shame and low self-esteem she suffered in her childless first marriage, she is uprooted from these networks. According to Kira, "Events that threaten [a person's] connected network and [their] embeddedness in it can traumatize the individual... as it involves losing the long-standing

relationships and support system" (76). Nnu Ego suffers this trauma when, in Lagos, she experiences victimisation and abuse from her husband, without any compensatory communal support *and*, furthermore, is forced to endure grinding poverty as a black woman, lesser even than a black man, in a city controlled by white men.

Collective cross-generational trauma is evident in metropolitan Lagos where the lasting effects of several generations of British colonial occupation has reduced African people to the status of servants, beggars and 'mimic-men.' The historical trauma of losing land, minerals and status, alongside cultural pride and traditional belief systems, had a lasting, impoverishing and traumatic effect on Nigerians and Emecheta portrays this clearly. The phenomenon of what is referred to as 'postcolonial trauma' is now widely acknowledged and discussed.[32] One of the key concerns of scholars working in this field is, in the words of Sonya Andermahr, "interrogate and move beyond a Eurocentric trauma paradigm" (500).

Postcolonial critics have generally expressed considerable critical resistance to the simple importation of Western trauma theory in relation to colonisation and its aftereffects. This criticism finds fault with the dominant (i.e. Eurocentric) trauma theory's tendency to depoliticise and dehistoricise trauma. It articulates a reluctance to use a theory that uses Euro-American conceptual and historical frameworks that exclusively focus on the event-based model of trauma and does not account for the sustained and long processes of the trauma of colonialism. Irene Visser states that:

> The metaphor of trauma often used in trauma theory is that of a sudden, sharp piercing of a membrane, as, for instance, by a sharp object implanted in the psyche, where it remains in its original form, hidden behind the screen of consciousness, but making itself known through a serious of symptoms. The 'sudden' or unexpected aspect of trauma is not the prolonged, cumulative hurt of long years of repression that constitutes the trauma of colonialism, with its repeated and cumulative stressor events. (251)

Allan Gibbs sees problems in universalising the way trauma is understood and "taking [on] this relatively temporally and geographically local phenomenon of PTSD" (189). When imposed on individuals who have suffered (post)colonial trauma, he sees this as a form of neocolonialism that exports European notions of PTSD. Andermahr argues similarly, quoting

[32] See for example Steph Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*; Sonya Andermahr (ed.) *Decolonizing Trauma Studies*; Jennifer Yusin, "Postcolonial Trauma."

Stef Craps, who calls this ‘psychological universalism’ (qtd. Andermahr 189). Andermaher continues:

> The impact of different cultural traditions on the way trauma is experienced and on the process of healing is rarely acknowledged. Trauma theory for the most part continues to adhere to the traditional, event-based model of trauma, according to which trauma results from a single, extraordinary, catastrophic event, and recovery takes the form of the talking cure. So, in a sense, the situation in the field of cultural trauma research is even more dire than that in the field of psychological trauma research, because recent insights from the latter field—in which there is a growing awareness, at least, of the need to move beyond psychic universalism. (190)

Stef Craps, likewise, notes that in “the field of cultural trauma research,”

> The impact of different cultural traditions on the way trauma is experienced and on the process of healing is rarely acknowledged. Trauma theory for the most part continues to adhere to the traditional, event-based model of trauma, according to which trauma results from a single, extraordinary, catastrophic event, and recovery takes the form of the talking cure. (97)

What Craps urges, as do many others in the field of cultural/(post)colonial trauma, is that the traumatic effects of accumulated stressors, experienced across generations, need to be considered when theorising the effects of European colonisation on non-European cultures.

Such theorising also stresses the need to attend to indigenous cultural traditions, knowledge, systems and ways of perceiving the world including the understanding of spirituality or storytelling tradition. She focuses on the ongoing violence and enduring poverty caused by colonisation and concludes that “it is hard to say one is traumatized by this violence, because it seems the concept of trauma is something that happens suddenly, disrupting normal life” (qtd. Matinez-Falquina 836), yet it is a fact that poverty, like discrimination, is for many people normal life not a disruption of it. Kira makes a similar point. He argues that such accumulated negative experiences and emotions can predispose the individual to poorly respond to lifetime traumas (80). Post-traumatic stress disorder and severe psychosocial impairment are amongst the effects of systemic victimisation that may extend through several generations. These, it is suggested, are transmitted through the social structures that impact a colonised society and remain even after decolonisation.

This said, while social disparities effected by racial discrimination are traumatic to both men and women, women are also often the victims of gendered discrimination which may be 'traditional' but is magnified when racially traumatised men victimise their women in their helplessness. This is the territory Emecheta traverses in *The Joys of Motherhood*, something that was arguably minimised by earlier postcolonial male writers like Achebe whose primary concern was to 'write back' to colonial constructs of Africans (especially African men!).

The women in Emecheta's novel are forced to take on the roles of provider *and* nurturer, like Nnu Ego does, ending up taking on trade, as well as taking care of the home and children, because Nnaife's income is inadequate. Cordelia, the wife of another servant, puts it very simply: "Men are too busy being white men's servants to be men" (100). What she means is that they are no longer able to do what 'traditional' men would have done: provide for their families. Moreover, they are so diminished *as* men, so put down and emasculated, that they resort to spending what little they earn on alcohol or other selfish distractions, and often take their anger and despair out on their wife/wives and children. Kira states:

> The effects of the structure or social violence created by generating deprived social structures or classes are traumatic to the parents and their children. Poverty, biologically induced traumas such as hunger or prolonged malnutrition, inadequate and crowded shelter, inadequate medical care, unemployment, underemployment or employment in temporary jobs without fringe benefits, all of those cause severe consequences. (80)

Nnu Ego has barely enough to keep her going and the neglectful behaviour of Nnaife ensures that she continues to exist in abject poverty, trying to keep a roof over her children's heads and their bellies full. Matters get worse as the family grows and the narrator informs us that "Nnaife and his family moved to a mud house in Onika area where there was no running tap water and no electricity" (211). The pressure of poverty and overcrowding is compounded by polygamy, which works well (enough) in Ibuza but stretches the finances even more when Nnaife takes on his dead brother's wife, Adaku, as tradition demands. This tradition – which is a way of ensuring provision for the widow and the dead man's children and the continuation of his bloodline and name via his male children – is widely practised in Igbo culture (and others around the world). However, in the colonial city, Nnaife is barely able to feed his first wife and their children, let alone a second wife and the new children that soon start arriving. Nnu Ego resents Adaku from the beginning. There is nothing compensatory

about the role of senior wife as there would have been back in the village. And the two wives must share the same cramped single room (and listen to their husband having sex with the other wife), unlike in the village where each would have her own hut and live in this with relative autonomy. In the portrayal of the failure of these traditional Igbo customs in the colonial city, Emecheta shows the traumatic effects of compounding trauma that is at once transgenerational and a consequence of the intersection of patriarchal tradition and colonial racism. *The Joys of Motherhood* thus portrays trauma that is caused by multiple social and environmental causes rather than biological ones, or a single event.

The arrival of Adaku in Lagos is met with mixed feelings by Nnu Ego. Via free indirect discourse, the narrator gives us access to her opposing feelings. Emecheta candidly shows the raw emotions of a woman who is internally conflicted by the knowledge of her duty as a first wife to honour tradition, but nonetheless wants her own life and space (and food and shelter) without sharing it with another woman. She has been through a lot to be Nnaife's wife and has borne him many children and feels threatened due to shortage of resources in this tough socio-economic setting. She is pushed to acting irrationally by breaking protocol as a senior wife when she snaps at Adaku's family member out of jealousy for Adaku's financial success in the market (and later as a prostitute). Adaku's success is mentally torturous to her because she considers her to be inferior to her as a second wife and also because she has no sons.

Importantly, however, Emecheta does not only give us access to the thoughts and feelings of Nnu Ego. We learn what Adaku thinks and feels too. The psychological legacy of silence amongst women is broken by Emecheta as she speaks out against tradition through Adaku who voices progressive opinions. Omar Sougou encapsulates Emecheta's insight as a black feminist African writer and states:

> Emecheta knows the hidden feelings of African Women and she voices them as perhaps no one has done before. Where African women have made a virtue of silent suffering, she exposes the conspiracy, insisting that female complacency and acceptance of male domination, actually do not constitute the quintessence of femininity. (109)

According to Nicole Willey, Adaku differs from Nnu Ego because she "combines her traditional attributes of ambition and industriousness with adaptability that she needs in the colonial context in Lagos" (161). Emecheta promotes a womanist agenda through Adaku who is characterised by her adaptability in the new social setting. An alternative discourse of

liberation is offered through Adaku who is described by Sougou as “Nnu Ego's corporeal Other” (107). She openly expresses different views and attitudes and acts as a foil to Nnu Ego’s silence.

Her actions and speech are perhaps posed as a possible solution for women facing the double jeopardy of colonialism and patriarchy. Adaku is willing to humble herself and be where she knows she is not wanted for the benefit of her children. She uses traditional values to adapt such as using tribal customs to her advantage and knowing her place in Nnaife’s home. Willey sees Adaku as an innovator (161), who eventually chooses to leave the protection of the family home and name to live by her own standards. Her parting words to Nnu Ego makes this clear: “we women set impossible standards for ourselves. That way we make life more intolerable for one another. I cannot live up to your standards, senior wife. So, I have to set my own” (169). This move frees her and her daughters, and her sexuality, even though the price is to become a prostitute. She is also rebellious. She is prepared to fight for her rights through striking and encourages Nnu Ego to join her in a food strike against Nnaife. In the portrayal of these two women, Nnu Ego and Adaku are juxtaposed as psychological doubles with Nnu Ego representing the socially acceptable conventional personality while Adaku as an ‘other’ externalises the free, uninhibited challenging self. Eventually she takes a feminist stand and declares, “My chi be damned!” (188) as she leaves her marital home. In contrast, the tragedy for Nnu Ego is her inability to free herself from her chi – the symbolic ‘ghost’ of haunting gendered abuse.

In the portrayal of Adaku, it is implied that women have the chance to take on new identities and become economically autonomous in the colonial setting, something that was not possible in the traditional village. Adaku adapts to these new opportunities by leaving the traditionally sanctioned ‘protection’ of a polygamous marriage to become a prostitute and start her own market. Adaku takes her chances outside it to gain autonomy of her life and education for her daughters. This ‘solution’ is problematic, however. Adaku’s ‘feminist’ actions run counter to the African womanism Emecheta states she espouses. Adaku firmly rejects Igbo culture in favour of entering the colonial capitalist economy as a single woman who turns her back on her community and the other women in it. Ironically, the ‘commodity’ she exchanges is her female body and there is thus a suggestion that she remains trapped within an economy of patriarchal exchange and exploitation. This ensures she has the ability

to raise her girls and educate them, but at what cost to herself as an Igbo woman? She appears to have rejected her culture and embraced that of the white man.

The ambivalence of Adaku as a model for African women and their need to 'adapt' is echoed elsewhere in the novel. (European) education is shown to have the potential to ameliorate the suffering of women in postcolonial Nigeria and provide the means for African men to leave the country and try their luck elsewhere in the word (as Nnu Ego's eldest son does). Engaging in trade – commodity exchange – offers women a new way of surviving on their own terms which allows self-discovery and a degree of empowerment. Adaku and Mamma Abby's discourse attacks the male-dominated structure of traditional society and is backgrounded to give it an understated presence. Filling the silences of women buried in the text (quite literally in the case of the murdered slave), the hidden feelings of African women are uttered through Adaku. In this way, Emecheta underscores the importance of women's self-realisation which can be stultified by marriage inhibitions and restrictions as evidenced by Nnu Ego's experiences.

However, in so doing Emecheta still fails to deliver a character in Adaku who is fully independent of patriarchy because she still pursues a profession of prostitution that is dependent on male custom, even though it may be her own terms. This fails to completely free her from patriarchal control and she loses social connection as she is ostracised for her choices and exchanges subjugation to an oppressive patriarchal tradition for subjugation to a dominant imperialistic capitalistic system: traditional learning is exchanged for a Western education; marital demands for overtly commodified sex. Adaku may 'escape' from patriarchal control but remains 'socially trapped' as an outcast from her own culture and other Igbo women. This cuts dangerously close to the idea that Europeans and their culture are 'saviours' for downtrodden African women who need to break with tradition and family to be 'free.' Adaku's character points to possible avenues of existence for women outside the Igbo patriarchy but at the cost of embracing colonial life. Nnu Ego proves that her readiness to subordinate herself to satisfy others at whatever cost, obscures a woman's self-identity. But perhaps Adaku is juxtaposed with Nnu Ego to reveal that female 'freedom' in a colonial context requires the abandonment of tradition and culture.

Doubly subaltern, as a woman with limited choices in a colonial setting, Nnu Ego, at the end of the novel, is 'mad.' She begins to walk out of the village (to which she has returned) in a

state of delirium, talking to herself, and she dies alone in this state. The trauma of realising that the traditional cultural beliefs she has held onto – that as a woman with sons she would be cared for in her old age – no longer apply in the colonial setting, is unbearable. Her son leaves Nigeria to follow the (European) American Dream. And her husband is imprisoned by white authorities. She is failed by her blind adherence to tradition in the colonial setting. This forces Nnu Ego to reflect on her life:

> Nnu Ego … allowed herself to wonder where it was she had gone wrong. She had been brought up to believe that children made a woman. She had had children, nine in all, and luckily seven were alive, much more than many women of that period could boast off … [She asked herself how it was possible that] a woman with many children could face a lonely old age, and maybe a miserable death all alone, just like a barren woman? (219)

This late epiphany is what puts Nnu Ego on the road towards a psychotic depression when she comes to the realisation that being a mother is not enough and regrets rejecting the hands of friendship of other women because she was too busy with motherhood. On her death she is described as mad, and we are told that after death her spirit refuses to give other women the children they beg for. Whether she is vengeful, or pragmatic remains for the reader to decide.

Conclusion

It is ironic that hysterical women – famously Dora and Anna O. – were instrumental in the genesis of a psychoanalytic trauma theory that was then used to further establish and justify claims about female predisposition to insanity and repressed sexual fantasies. These (Freudian) theories, bolstered by Darwinian notions about the inferiority of women, appeared to corroborate the centuries-old (male) belief that associated female *bodies* and madness. I have argued that *Washington Square, Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The Joys of Motherhood* show an alternative way to conceptualise the cause of female 'madness': patriarchal trauma. Such trauma is not simply the result of *a* repressed punctual event like rape or sexual abuse (although this may happen), nor is it caused by the weakness of female bodies or an inheritance of mental frailty through the maternal line. Rather, it is the result of systemic, societal subordination of women to men. This is often compounded by class and racial oppression which renders some women doubly or trebly victimised – and traumatised. *Washington Square* portrays the ongoing trauma experienced by Catherine Sloper as a result of her father's (and suitor's) treatment of her. Henry James offers insights into the abusive and sexist thoughts of her (Darwinian) 'scientist' father; he also reveals the interiority of Catherine who is not finally reduced to babbling, rather to silence. At the end of the novel, she is reduced to the genteel imitation of the ideal Victorian 'angel in the house,' trapped in lonely domesticity. Whether James endorses or exposes to scrutiny Catherine's *reduction* remains a moot point. What is clear is that the novel engages with contemporary scientific and nascent psychological theories current at the time of writing, with a particular emphasis on a woman's interiority.

Freudian psychoanalytic theory was increasingly subject to challenge during the twentieth century, particularly from second-wave feminists in the middle years of the century, who rejected the idea that female trauma could be adequately understood as originating in repressed libidinal desire or childhood sexual fantasies that were socially taboo. I argued that Jean Rhys – who explicitly rejected the theorising of 'that gent,' Freud – portrays a vastly different account of female trauma in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The causes of Antoinette's mental anguish have nothing to do with the Oedipus complex or 'penis envy.' Rhys focuses on mother-daughter relationships and the impact of this on later psychological development in ways that are amenable to discussion in terms of Object Relations Theory. She also challenges female biological determinism, or maternal genetic inheritance, as the only cause

of trauma and establishes other social and environmental causes such as racism and racial/cultural identity crisis as legitimate causes. She portrays Antoinette/Bertha as a victim of patriarchal abuse in her relationship with Rochester who, finding her unable to fulfil the role of a Victorian English domestic angel, declares she is mad and locks her up, precipitating her insanity and suicide.

While racial identity is an important concern in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys's interest remains firmly fixed on the complex cultural liminality of her white Creole protagonist who is neither purely British nor Black. In contrast, white women are almost entirely absent in the pages of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, set in colonial Nigeria. Buchi Emecheta brings a decolonised African perspective to bear on her female protagonist, Nnu Ego, who does not fit the European model of trauma victim as theorised by Western scholars, psychologists and psychoanalysts. While Nnu Ego suffers several punctual traumas (eg. violence from her first husband, the death of her baby son), her mental anguish is primarily the result of historical and transgenerational abuse resulting from indigenous patriarchy and colonial racism. The novel evidences a complex attempt to balance the competing concerns of gendered and racial oppression without reliance on an imported Western feminism that might imply the cultural inferiority of indigenous cultural formations. Whether or not Emecheta succeeds in maintaining this balance, what the novel makes abundantly clear is the paucity of Western trauma theories to account for the intersecting abuses that are experienced by non-European women.

These three novels – written across almost a century by authors from very different backgrounds, genders, racial identities and cultural affiliations – reflect the changing attitudes towards and understandings of women's experiences of patriarchal trauma. They offer insights not only into the mental anguish shared by three very different protagonists, in three very different historical and geographical settings, but also on the shifting, adaptive nature of psychoanalytic theory as it has attempted to account for female 'madness.'

I would like to conclude on a more personal note. When I began this thesis, I knew that I had to write about women because the novels that have the most profound impact on me in my life and educational journey featured female protagonists. The womanist in me wanted to make a statement about female empowerment, but surprisingly I was drawn to three novels that screamed female disempowerment. The psychological impact of their voicelessness within societies that categorised them and dictated their position and status resonated with me

in many ways because of my own life experiences as an African-born woman of colour. I wanted to speak for women who have been dealt debilitating mental blows by racial and gendered discrimination that were life-altering but overlooked as a 'woman thing.' In almost every global society, women have higher statistics than men of physical abuse in the form of battery, neglect and financial poverty, but their mental wounds, which are more difficult to diagnose and document, are the ones I wanted to address. Psychoanalysis intrigued me as a tool for diagnosis and treatment, but I found myself unable to identify with many of the ways female trauma had been theorised. I could not see myself in the female figures described by Freud, or even some of those described by Klein. I sought ways to understand female trauma that take account of the intersecting oppressions of gender, race, class as these are experienced individually and collectively. I looked for ways to understand the disempowered protagonists in my chosen novels, all of whom manifested behaviours attesting to the deep wounds, ignored by those around them, they bore. I kept circling back to feminism – or rather a modified womanism – because I realised that beyond colour, geography and time women are connected by the mental scars they bear and should work together to find healing. Despite the decades and oceans that separate them, white, middle-class Victorian Catherine Sloper shares much in common with an African woman like Nnu Ego: both are voiceless in the home because the patriarchs have the final say. I also see common traits between Catherine and Adaku in their strong will and bravery to take the lonely road less travelled when Catherine decides not to marry and live in solitude and Adaku decides to leave the protection of marriage. For both, precarious and lonely autonomy comes at a very high price. Antoinette, though from a different time and race, has in common with Nnu Ego suffering as a woman in a society where colonial politics and racial inequity compound and magnify oppression. Both women try to conform to societal norms and do what is expected of them as women, like Antoinette marrying Rochester and mentally submitting to him and Nnu Ego marrying Nnaife and submitting to him. They both end up losing their mind and identity and tragically dying alone. Both suffer, albeit in different ways, from damaging expectations of mothers and about mothering. Indeed, all three protagonists are maimed as a result of inadequate mothering or absent mothers or transgenerational maternal pain. Antoinette's suffering as a white Creole woman made me realise that trauma affects both sides of the colour divide because even the dominant white side had its hierarchies and victims. These novels suggest that female terrorisation within patriarchy is timeless and borderless, regardless of colour.

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