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Abstract

Both the voice of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and the voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement have been silenced due to their race and gender, and they only received a voice after their silence was perceived to be problematic. Bertha received a voice as Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the black women after they called out the white supremacy involved in the #MeToo movement. The following research question is discussed: how is the voice of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* similar to the voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement? Through analysing the voices of Bertha and of the black women, it became apparent that the patriarchal society and British imperialism played an important role in silencing Bertha. The concept of intersectionality was involved in silencing the black women. The hypothesis was confirmed.

**Key words:** silence, voice, #MeToo, Bertha, *Jane Eyre*, Antoinette, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, race, gender.

## Table of contents

Introduction .....	3
Chapter 1: The voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement.....	7
Chapter 2: The voice of Bertha Mason in <i>Jane Eyre</i> .....	12
Chapter 3: The voice of Antoinette Cosway in <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> .....	17
Chapter 4: Bertha's voice compared to the voices of #MeToo's coloured women .....	22
Bibliography.....	31

Comparing the #MeToo movement voices to Bertha Mason's voice: about having and not having one

### Introduction

Both Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) tell the story of Bertha Mason and Antoinette Cosway, a Jamaican woman of creole heritage. *Jane Eyre* paints the character of Bertha Mason off as a madwoman, a woman who is barbaric and inhuman. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, on the other hand, tells the story of Antoinette before her marriage to Mr. Rochester and her consequent imprisonment in Thornfield Hall. The voice of Bertha Mason therefore differs in both of these novels. Former research on the portrayal of the voice of Bertha looks through the lens of both postcolonial criticism and feminist criticism, and focusses on the racial injustices and gender inequality that can be perceived in the depiction of Bertha in *Jane Eyre* and on Antoinette's life story before meeting Mr. Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The research of Mzeil for instance analyses the voice and the silence in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* from a feminist perspective, arguing that Victorian women were silenced and connecting this to the portrayal of Bertha Mason.<sup>1</sup> Kamel's research compares *Jane Eyre* to Bertha Mason and looks at both characters from a postcolonial and feminist perspective, explaining why Bertha is silenced whilst Jane is loved by Mr. Rochester.<sup>2</sup> Adding to the previous research, the voice of Bertha will be compared to the voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement, thus showing that abuse and racism continue to oppress both fictional and real voices.

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmad Mzeil, "Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea, the Silence and the Voice," *Journal of Islamic and Human Advanced Research* 3, no. 5 (2013): 29-41, [637-2711-1-PB.pdf \(d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net\)](https://doi.org/10.1080/20717920.2013.837111).

<sup>2</sup> Rose Kamel, "'Before I Was Set Free': The Creole Wife in 'Jane Eyre' and 'Wide Sargasso Sea'," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 25, no. 1 (1995): 1-22, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30225421>.

In connecting the voice of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* to the voice of Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is important to note the times in which the novels were written. *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847, during which time Jamaica was part of the large British Empire and women did not have the political and social right to own their voice. Because of this, Brontë could put Bertha in the position of an inferior wife, as it was not customary for women to be heard in marriage. *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published a century later, in 1966. During this time it became much more common for women to speak up and the former British colonies, such as Jamaica, had gained independence.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Rhys, as opposed to Brontë, was able to describe the story of Antoinette's marriage to Mr. Rochester as abusive, as it became accepted for women to be equal to their husband. Furthermore, the study of feminist criticism emerged during the 1970s, as women were allowed to enter higher education.<sup>4</sup> As an effect, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Rhys's reasons for writing the novel were widely analysed by the different waves of feminist critics. An example of such a critic is Abel, who analysed the character of Bertha through the lens of both psychoanalysis and feminist criticism.<sup>5</sup>

Like Bertha Mason is silenced by Mr. Rochester because of her creole heritage and female gender, many of the sexually abused black women were ignored during the #MeToo movement and were thus not given a voice. Tarana Burke, a black woman, started the #MeToo movement in 2006 to raise attention for women who were sexually assaulted, but when the movement really started to take off in 2017, coloured women were ignored whilst Alyssa Milano, a white woman, received the credits for starting the #MeToo movement.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> Jiang Qian, "A Comparative Study of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* from a Feminist Perspective," *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research (ASSEHR)* 237 (2018): 422-423, <https://download.atlantispress.com/article/25899146.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> "Feminist Philosophy," Noëlle McAfee, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed April 17, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-philosophy/>.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Abel, "Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys," *Contemporary Literature* 20, no. 2 (1979): 155-177, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1207964>.

<sup>6</sup> Angela Onwuachi-Willig, "What About #UsToo?: The Invisibility of Race in the #MeToo Movement," *Yale Law Journal Forum* 128, no. 105 (2018): 106, [https://scholarship.law.yale.edu/faculty\\_scholarship/331](https://scholarship.law.yale.edu/faculty_scholarship/331).

2017 #MeToo movement started when Milano asked her Twitter followers to “write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet”<sup>7</sup> if they had been sexually abused.<sup>8</sup> Whether intentionally or unintentionally, she did not mention the name of Burke in her tweet, which raised criticism from coloured women.<sup>9</sup> Critics pointed out that Milano’s attempt to raise attention for sexual abuse was widely recognised as an important issue whilst Burke had been promoting the #MeToo movement for more than ten years and did not receive much support, and connected the role of race to this.<sup>10</sup> Other research on the voices of black women during the #MeToo movement focusses on the forms of feminism that have been overlooked in the coverage of the #MeToo movement. Tambe, for instance, discusses the fact that the #MeToo movement is a white women’s movement, even though black women are harassed as well, because white women’s assaults are being centred in the media whilst the pain of black women is being disregarded.<sup>11</sup> It is thus often the case that the voices of white women are heard whilst the voices of black women are silenced.

Through analysing the voice of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and in *Wide Sargasso Sea* with the use of feminist and postcolonial criticism, the voice of Bertha will be connected and compared to the voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement. This leads to following the research question: how is the voice of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* similar to the voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement? It is important to focus on this because female abuse and racism are of all times, and this research underscores this. This is for instance shown by the fact that the #MeToo movement started during the twenty-first century whilst *Jane Eyre* was written during the nineteenth century and it took another century for Bertha to get a voice, as *Wide Sargasso Sea* was written during the

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<sup>7</sup> Milano, Alyssa. Twitter Post. Oktober 15, 2017, 10:21 PM.

<sup>8</sup> Onwuachi-Willig, “What About #UsToo?,” 106.

<sup>9</sup> Onwuachi-Willig, “What About #UsToo?,” 106.

<sup>10</sup> Onwuachi-Willig, “What About #UsToo?,” 106.

<sup>11</sup> Ashwini Tambe, “Reckoning with the Silences of #MeToo,” *Feminist Studies* 44, no. 1 (2018): 199, [http://www.feministstudies.org/pdf/40-49/44-1-10-News\\_And\\_Views\\_\(Tambe\).pdf](http://www.feministstudies.org/pdf/40-49/44-1-10-News_And_Views_(Tambe).pdf).

twentieth century. It is also shown by the fact that Rhys, a white creole woman, felt the need to give Bertha, a fellow creole woman, a voice, inspiring other women to also raise their voices. It is important to connect the attempts of women gaining their voices, whether it is in literature or in reality, as literature often mirrors the issues and emotions of the society of its time, and because it shows that throughout history males keep being treated superior compared to females. Furthermore, there has not been much research into the similarities between the voice of Bertha Mason and the voices of black women during the #MeToo movement. Feminist critics have analysed the voice of Bertha Mason in the historical and social context of the novels. Qian for instance has analysed Bertha in both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* through looking at patriarchy and colonialism.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Geetha looks at Bertha's recovered identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea* through using the context of Jamaica.<sup>13</sup> They have not yet put her voice in the context of the twenty-first century though.

This leads to the following hypothesis: the voice of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is similar to the voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement. Bertha Mason's voice was only heard in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as she was silenced in *Jane Eyre*, and this very likely happened because of her being a Jamaican woman with creole heritage. Her voice thus came a century after her initial appearance in *Jane Eyre*. Likewise, mostly white women were heard in a movement that a black woman started, so many of the black women are silenced whilst most of the white women are not. Female abuse and racism have existed for centuries, but Bertha Mason and the black women part of the #MeToo movement were only given a voice after abuse and racism were recognised to be a problem. This problem continues to evolve rapidly in the twenty-first century, as new perspectives come to light and older perspectives are discarded quickly through (social) media, as

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<sup>12</sup> Qian, "A Comparative Study of Bertha Mason," 420-423.

<sup>13</sup> B. J. Geetha, "The Retrieval of Relegated Identity of Bertha Mason in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *The Criterion An International Journal in English* 4, no. 2 (2013): 1-7, <http://www.the-criterion.com/V4/n2/Geetha.pdf>.

everyone is able to voice their opinions regarding sexual abuse and racism at all times. Rhys's attempt of giving Bertha a voice in *Wide Sargasso Sea* was progressive for its time therefore, but might not be so anymore. Nevertheless, the fictional voice of Bertha and the real voices of coloured women are similar because both voices are first silenced and then heard, showing that racism and female abuse continue to exist both silently and audibly.

### Chapter 1: The voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement

The #MeToo movement is mainly a white women's movement, even though the movement was based on the activism of a black woman, Burke, who started using the "me too" phrase to express solidarity with sexual abuse victims in 2006. The voices of coloured women were barely heard during the #MeToo movement because of their race, the historical context surrounding black women, and because of the media.

The #MeToo movement has been tremendously successful in effectively revealing the extent to which women are sexually abused in the workplace and exposing the men who participate in abusive behaviour. Nevertheless, sexually abused black women are rarely heard during the movement because of their race. When Milano first started raising attention for #MeToo in 2017, years after Burke initially coined the phrase, she angered the black community. They felt their race was again the cause of erasure, as a white woman was heard and received much attention whilst a black woman was not heard with the same content.<sup>14</sup> The black community pointed out that white feminists, such as Milano, are able to gain massive support from society, whereas black people are not able to gain as much support during the time we live in today, which can only be because of their race.<sup>15</sup> Research of Célestine and Martin-Breteau for instance shows that racism continues to be a structural

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<sup>14</sup> Onwuachi-Willig, "What About #UsToo?," 106.

<sup>15</sup> Onwuachi-Willig, "What About #UsToo?," 106.

phenomenon, which is enforced within social systems.<sup>16</sup> This means that as of today many people still hold on to racist views, whether consciously or subconsciously, and thus do not wish to support black women in their endeavour to call out sexual predators. The black community does point this out. Bogado, for example, stated: “#MeToo was started by Tarana Burke. Stop erasing black women.”<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Garza tweeted: “#MeToo. Thank you @TaranaBurke for bringing us this gift of #MeToo almost 10 years ago. Still powerful today.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, black women are more likely to face sexual abuse that is purely targeted at them because of their race than white women are, and therefore it is important for their voices to be heard in a movement such as #MeToo. Jones, a black comedian and actress, describes her experience with sexual abuse as: “Ok I have been called Apes, sent pics of their asses, even got a pic with semen on my face. I'm tryin to figure out what human means. I'm out.”<sup>19</sup> Onwuachi-Willig argues that because of the racial element involved in the sexual abuse that black women face, it is hard for white women to understand it and link it to their own experiences. They might perceive it to be solely racial harassment.<sup>20</sup> This means that many of the black women are not understood by most white women, and therefore their experiences are seen as invalid and as a result they are being erased from the #MeToo movement. So even though black women do face sexual abuse, their voices are not heard because of their race.

Throughout history, black women have been silenced, as they are perceived to be inferior because of their race and because of their gender. They were for instance silenced when it was legal for white men to rape black women when they were enslaved, when their

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<sup>16</sup> Audrey Célestine and Nicolas Martin-Breteau, ““Stop killing us”: Mobilizing against structural racism in the United States from Black Lives Matter to the Movement for Black Lives,” in *Obama's Fractured Legacy: The Politics and Policies of an Embattled Presidency*, ed. François Vergniolle de Chantal (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 300, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv182jrx6.15>.

<sup>17</sup> Bogado, Aura. Twitter Post. Oktober 16, 2017, 6:58 PM.

<sup>18</sup> Garza, Alicia. Twitter Post. Oktober 16, 2017, 5:38 PM.

<sup>19</sup> Jones, Leslie. Twitter Post. July 18, 2016, 9:45 PM.

<sup>20</sup> Onwuachi-Willig, “What About #UsToo?,” 113-114.

children were taken away from them without their permission, when they were not hired because of their race, when Trayvon Martin was shot because of his skin colour in 2012, and now they are again not heard in the #MeToo movement. As Burke puts it: “What history has shown us time and again is that if marginalized voices—those of people of color, queer people, disabled people, poor people—aren’t centered in our movements then they tend to become no more than a footnote.”<sup>21</sup> Crenshaw created the concept of intersectionality to explain this phenomenon.<sup>22</sup> Both gender and race discrimination exist, which means that a white woman can get discriminated because of her female gender and a black man can get discriminated because of his race. A black woman however can get discriminated both because of her gender and race. The concept of intersectionality entails that there are multiple dimensions to the discriminations that black women face, as they face both gender and race discrimination.<sup>23</sup> Gender and race discrimination therefore intersect in the experiences that black women have with discrimination, and therefore these types of discrimination should not be looked at separately, because then you cannot fully capture the extent to which black women are discriminated.<sup>24</sup> This explains why many black women are silenced in the #MeToo movement, even though the movement is about sexual abuse in the workplace, and black women do have experiences with this. Before #MeToo it was unusual for white women to be heard when they addressed the issue of sexual abuse, because of gender discrimination. The #MeToo movement breaks through the norm of male superiority and female silence, but black women face both race and gender discrimination and these intersect with each other. When Milano started to use #MeToo and the movement started to take off, it became mainly

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<sup>21</sup> Tarana Burke, “#MeToo was started for black and brown women and girls. They’re still being ignored,” *The Washington Post*, November 10, 2017, [#MeToo was started for black and brown women and girls. They’re still being ignored. - The Washington Post](#).

<sup>22</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1244, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039>.

<sup>23</sup> Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1244.

<sup>24</sup> Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1244.

a white women's movement, as most white women who experienced sexual assault do not have experience with race discrimination. Adding to this, Onwuachi-Willig argues that courts need to implement an intersectional standard rather than the male-biased standard they employ now, so as to give black women a voice in reporting sexual assault to the police.<sup>25</sup> This way, both the male-biased standard will disappear and black women will have the same chances as white women in court. Crenshaw furthermore argues that because of intersectionality black women feel twice the amount of vulnerability when talking about their sexual assault.<sup>26</sup> As a woman they are seen as having brought the rape on themselves, and because of their skin colour they do not want to be connected to the long history of black men raping other women.<sup>27</sup> Black women are therefore not heard in the #MeToo movement because throughout history there has not been attention for the intersectionality of race and gender discrimination.

Many coloured women were not heard during the #MeToo movement because the media did not cover their stories, whereas the stories of sexually abused white women were given attention. White women also supported other white women when they came out with their stories of sexual abuse, but they did not offer the same support when a black woman told her story of harassment. This can be illustrated by the problems both a black and a white actress faced with Twitter. When McGowan, a white woman, tweeted the cell phone number of the person who sexually abused her, she was suspended from Twitter for breaching its policies.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, many white women started to boycott Twitter to express solidarity with McGowan. However, when Jones, a black actress, was sexually harassed on Twitter because of both her gender and race, no boycott was brought to life.<sup>29</sup> So even though both

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<sup>25</sup> Onwuachi-Willig, "What About #UsToo?," 109.

<sup>26</sup> Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1274-1275.

<sup>27</sup> Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1274-1275.

<sup>28</sup> Onwuachi-Willig, "What About #UsToo?," 111-112.

<sup>29</sup> Onwuachi-Willig, "What About #UsToo?," 111-112.

actresses faced issues with sexual assault on the platform, only McGowan was supported. This angered a group of black women, who started to call out the double standard that many white women have. DuVernay for instance tweeted: “Calling white women allies to recognize conflict of #WomenBoycottTwitter for women of color who haven't received support on similar issues.”<sup>30</sup> Bryant also turned to Twitter to express her anger: “Intersectionality = when you really want to support #WomenBoycottTwitter but you're conflicted bec Black women never get the same support.”<sup>31</sup> As she rightly pointed out, black women are not supported by white women in the media because of intersectionality. Many white women do not understand the race element involved in the sexual harassment of black women, and thus do not feel the need to support them. As a result, black women are silenced in the media. Moreover, Tambe argues that if black women are sexually abused by black men, they are often pressured not to go public with their story.<sup>32</sup> Black men have a long history of being unjustly lynched because of a false allegation of sexually assaulting a white woman, as opposed to white men who abuse women.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, this means that the media is unable to cover the stories of some black women who have been sexually assaulted, because they are unwilling to reveal them due to their historic trauma. Because the aims of the #MeToo movement include publicly shaming the abuser and criminalising the act of sexual abuse, it is important for black women to also speak up. However, it might be that some black women do not want to join the #MeToo movement because of this history, as it could be painful that black men, who could have been the fathers or brothers of the black women, were unjustly murdered because of false allegations of a white woman during the slavery period. It could thus hurt that the word of the accuser is taken more seriously than the word of the alleged abuser.<sup>34</sup> This also explains

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<sup>30</sup> DuVernay, Ava. Twitter Post. Oktober 13, 2017, 8:00 AM.

<sup>31</sup> Bryant, Kimberly. Twitter Post. Oktober 13, 2017, 6:23 AM.

<sup>32</sup> Tambe, “Reckoning with the Silences,” 199-200.

<sup>33</sup> Tambe, “Reckoning with the Silences,” 200.

<sup>34</sup> Tambe, “Reckoning with the Silences,” 200.

why black men pressure their victims not to go public. Coloured women are thus not heard because the media is not able to cover their stories of sexual abuse, as black women either feel pressured to not share their stories, or they do not want to.

The voices of many coloured women were not heard during the #MeToo movement, even though the movement was originally founded by black woman Burke. Their race plays a role in this, because many white women do not understand the race element involved in the sexual assault of black women, and therefore feel they cannot support them. The intersectionality involved in the sexual abuse of black women thus causes many of their voices to go unheard. Moreover, throughout history black women have been silenced, because both their gender and race are perceived to be inferior. Most media therefore do not cover the stories of coloured women, and if their stories are told through the media, many white women do not offer the same support as they do when a fellow white woman breaks the silence. As a result, a lot of the voices of black women are left unheard.

### Chapter 2: The voice of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*

The reader of *Jane Eyre* only knows Bertha Mason as the madwoman in the attic, the woman who is insane and thus has to be locked away. Bertha Mason is locked up in Thornfield Hall because she is both a creole and a woman, and this is the reason for her consequent loss of voice in *Jane Eyre*.

Bertha Mason is half-creole and half-English, having a creole mother and a white English father, and this heritage caused her loss of voice in the novel *Jane Eyre*. *Jane Eyre* was written in the context of the still-growing British Empire, which made the English believe that they had the right to act superiorly over other races. Contemporary Sir Charles Adderly was for instance quoted by Arnold in 1865, saying that: “The old Anglo-Saxon race are the best breed in the world...The absence of a too enervating climate, too unclouded skies, and a



differences between his English mind and nature and Bertha's creole mind and nature. Because he does not want to get to know Bertha's creole heritage, he simply starts to perceive her as mad. Bertha being of creole heritage thus influenced Mr. Rochester in deciding to hide his creole wife away from Victorian society, and thus causing her to completely lose her voice.

Furthermore, there is a lot of focus on the physiognomy of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, which suggests that her physical features caused her supposed madness and consequent loss of voice. During the Victorian era, the study of physiognomy was commonly used to discern between madness and sanity, as it was believed that one's appearance could be connected to one's mental state.<sup>41</sup> Physiognomy is perceived to be a pseudoscience rather than an academically solid science this day, but it was very much taken seriously during the Victorian era. Books such as Morison's *The Physiognomy of Mental Diseases* (1840) and Wells' *New Physiognomy* (1871) were widely read and thus contributed effectively to this.<sup>42</sup> Brontë knew about the study of physiognomy, which can be concluded from her directly referring to the physiognomy of several characters in her novel *Jane Eyre*. When Jane for example describes Mr. Rochester, she says: "His shape, now divested of cloak, I perceived harmonised in squareness with his physiognomy"<sup>43</sup> and when Lady Ingram speaks of Jane, she states: "I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class,"<sup>44</sup> thus linking Jane's looks to her behaviour. Brontë also uses the physiognomy of Bertha to explain her supposed insanity and subsequent loss of voice. Bertha's creole features are all referred to as if Bertha is a monster-like being, with descriptions such as: "it was a discoloured face—it was a savage

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<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth J. Donaldson, "The Corpus of the Madwoman: Toward a Feminist Disability Studies Theory of Embodiment and Mental Illness," *NWSA Journal*, 14, no. 3 (2002): 103-104, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4316926>.

<sup>42</sup> Donaldson, "The Corpus of the Madwoman," 104-105.

<sup>43</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 120.

<sup>44</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 177.

face,”<sup>45</sup> “fearful and ghastly”<sup>46</sup> and “the lips were swelled and dark.”<sup>47</sup> As a consequence of this, the reader of *Jane Eyre* is more liable to accept Mr. Rochester’s explanation of why Bertha is locked away, namely because she is insane. Brontë thus effectively plants a seed in the reader’s mind using the study of physiognomy: because Bertha has a daunting appearance, she must be mad.

Because madness is supposed to run in the Mason family, not only Bertha’s physiognomy is described in *Jane Eyre*. Donaldson points out that the physiognomy of Richard Mason, Bertha Mason’s brother, is touched upon as well.<sup>48</sup> Jane for instance says: “I liked his physiognomy even less than before: it struck me as being at the same time unsettled and inanimate”<sup>49</sup> when describing him. By also describing Bertha’s brother in a negative way, Brontë creates sympathy in the reader for Mr. Rochester, which results in the reader being unconcerned about Bertha losing her voice whilst being locked up.

Similarly, Mr. Rochester also has much power over Bertha because of her female gender. The novel *Jane Eyre* is set in Victorian England, and during that time women were inferior to men, as they lived in a patriarchal society.<sup>50</sup> Mr. Rochester can thus legally control Bertha Mason’s life completely, as described by Jones as: “in law a husband and wife are one person, and the husband is that person.”<sup>51</sup> Moreover, according to Donaldson, women have repeatedly been wrongly diagnosed with madness or mental illness because of their gender.<sup>52</sup> This could be explained by the fact that women were supposed to be subordinate to men, and when they were to become too powerful and let their voices be heard too much, it would be wiser to hide them away. This can be illustrated by Mr. Rochester needing money and for that

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<sup>45</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 287.

<sup>46</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 287.

<sup>47</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 287.

<sup>48</sup> Donaldson, “The Corpus of the Madwoman,” 104.

<sup>49</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 191.

<sup>50</sup> Qian, “Comparative Study Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*,” 420.

<sup>51</sup> Wendy Jones, “Feminism, Fiction, and Contract Theory: Trollope’s *He Knew He Was Right*,” *Criticism* 36, no. 3 (1994): 402, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23116639>.

<sup>52</sup> Donaldson, “The Corpus of the Madwoman,” 101.

reason marrying Bertha Mason. Mr. Rochester is not to inherit any of the property of his father, and is sent to Jamaica in order to marry Bertha Mason, who was entitled to inherit 30,000 pounds. As Mr. Rochester explains it: “I must be provided for by a wealthy marriage.”<sup>53</sup> Although not being in love with Bertha, Mr. Rochester did decide to marry her, knowing that upon marrying Bertha Mason, he would be able to continue his own life, all the while having gained a massive amount of money. Using the patriarchal system, Mr. Rochester decides to hide Bertha away with the excuse of her insaneness. Ironically, he uses Bertha’s mother’s madness as evidence that Bertha must be insane as well: “Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard!”<sup>54</sup> Bertha’s mother went insane at the hands of her husband, Mr. Mason, which is touched upon in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* and shown in *Jane Eyre* with this statement. As women were inferior to men during the nineteenth century, it was simple to assign the diagnosis of insanity to them if they did not fit in the box of perfect wife. Showalter argues that madness was primarily a female condition during the Victorian era, and that accusing women of insanity was a means to try and control their minds.<sup>55</sup> Mr. Rochester thus effectively uses the patriarchal system and the accepted ideas about the female gender when using Bertha’s mother’s madness as a confirmation for Bertha’s madness.

Both Bertha Mason’s creole heritage and female gender therefore took away her voice in the novel *Jane Eyre* by Brontë. Mr. Rochester believes he is superior compared to Bertha because of her gender and creole background. He does not understand Bertha’s otherness and thinks these creole features evidence of Bertha’s madness. Moreover, Bertha’s physiognomy is used to paint Bertha off as mad in *Jane Eyre*, as they install in the reader of the novel a liability to more easily accept the explanation that Bertha must be insane. Lastly, because it was customary for women to be assigned madness when not being the perfect wife, Mr

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<sup>53</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 308.

<sup>54</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 295.

<sup>55</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 3, [showalter-female-malady.pdf](http://showalter-female-malady.pdf) ([wordpress.com](http://wordpress.com)).

Rochester can lock Bertha away on account of madness without a problem. Bertha Mason's voice is thus effectively taken away by Mr. Rochester because of her female gender and creole background.

### Chapter 3: The voice of Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Antoinette Cosway's life story before meeting Mr. Rochester and her consequent loss of voice as Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* is told in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Antoinette thus has a voice in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which is because of Rhys's role in the writing of the novel as a white creole woman, the contextualisation of Antoinette's creole heritage, and Antoinette narrating her story herself.

Rhys was born out of a Welsh father and a mother who was a third-generation Dominican Creole with Scottish roots, and consequently Rhys was born a white creole. She grew up in Dominica, where a French patois was spoken, before moving to England at the age of sixteen, where she was made fun of because of her accent.<sup>56</sup> Rhys was also pressured to learn to speak English properly. Savory explains that Rhys felt she was not able to belong in either England or in the Caribbean, as she was uncertain to which country she ultimately was a part of.<sup>57</sup> She furthermore had difficulties with her identity, being of creole, Welsh and Scottish blood, and consequently did not know which class she belonged to.<sup>58</sup> Having a difficult relationship with her mother, Rhys also believed that she did not belong anywhere regarding her family.<sup>59</sup> Even though Rhys's novels are not biographical, Rhys mentioned in an interview that: "The feelings are always mine."<sup>60</sup> Her emotions are therefore also reflected

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<sup>56</sup> Elaine Savory, *Jean Rhys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4, [Jean Rhys - Elaine Savory - Google Boeken](#).

<sup>57</sup> Savory, *Jean Rhys*, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Savory, *Jean Rhys*, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Patricia Moran, "'The feelings are always mine': Chronic Shame and Humiliated Rage in Jean Rhys's Fiction," in *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First-Century Approaches*, ed. Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 205, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/10.3366/j.ctt16r0hd3.15>.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Cantwell, "A Conversation with Jean Rhys," in *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys*, ed. Pierette Frickey (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1990), 24.

in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The character of Antoinette for instance often feels like an outsider too, as can for example be seen by her saying: “Watching the red and yellow flowers in the sun thinking of nothing, it was as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself any longer.”<sup>61</sup> Antoinette thus finds refuge from her outsider status in nature.

Moreover, Rhys’s goal in writing *Wide Sargasso Sea* was giving the Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* a voice. According to Moran, Rhys was angry about the inhumane ways humans treated each other, and used this rage creatively in writing the novel.<sup>62</sup> When referring to the writing process herself, Rhys mentioned: “That unfortunate death of a Creole! I’m fighting mad to tell her story.”<sup>63</sup> Because Rhys is a creole woman herself, she felt like she needed to give a fellow creole woman a voice too, which resulted in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Antoinette is given a voice by contextualising her creole heritage in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, because her ‘otherness’ is explained to the reader as being an acceptable culture as well. As opposed to the marginalised Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, Antoinette is at the centre of the pages of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and much attention is given to her creole blood, explaining the difficulties surrounding having a creole heritage. *Wide Sargasso Sea* reflects the issues of the nineteenth century regarding British colonialization. Geetha for instance argues that the creole identity is troublesome because creole people are aware of their being marginalised and because white colonialism took place in Jamaica during the 1830s.<sup>64</sup> These issues are effectively portrayed through contextualising the creole, as can for instance be seen in the opening of the novel: “They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks. The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother.”<sup>65</sup> Because of this opening, the reader is right away aware of the situation Antoinette as a creole girl is in,

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<sup>61</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1966), 12.

<sup>62</sup> Moran, “‘The feelings are always mine’: Chronic Shame and Humiliated Rage in Jean Rhys’s Fiction,” 205.

<sup>63</sup> Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly, *The Letters of Jean Rhys* (New York: Viking, 1984), 157.

<sup>64</sup> Geetha, “The Retrieval of Relegated Identity,” 3.

<sup>65</sup> Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 3.

namely being in-between the black Jamaican population and the white settlers, and not belonging to either of these groups. This way, Rhys contextualises her novel using the twentieth-century development in race classification, as it became more common and accepted to have a biracial background. Interracial marriage was for instance legalised in the United States in 1967, which resulted in many biracial children. By giving attention to this, Rhys thus gives Antoinette a voice. Moreover, Bertha is a victim of British imperialism in *Jane Eyre*. Because of her creole blood as well as her female gender, Mr. Rochester was able to imprison her at Thornfield Hall without any difficulty, and this ultimately led to Antoinette's death. As *Jane Eyre* was written in the context of British imperialism, the treatment of Bertha was not perceived to be abnormal. It was accepted to treat creole people as if they were worth less than European people. *Wide Sargasso Sea* however shows that British imperialism caused unnecessary harm to Antoinette, thus victimising both Antoinette and Bertha. To show that creole people are worthwhile having a voice and should not be put in the corner as the 'Other', Niesen de Abruña believes that Rhys tries to unify the different creole groups through the friendship of white creole Antoinette and black creole Tia.<sup>66</sup> Antoinette and Tia were childhood friends. At the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, when Antoinette was at the roof of burning Thornfield, she looked down and saw Tia again: "It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped to those hard stones. But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there."<sup>67</sup> Antoinette's death was thus caused by British imperialism, as she felt her life was not worthwhile anymore due to her imprisonment, and she was imprisoned because of her creole heritage and female gender. Before she met Mr. Rochester, Antoinette had a good life. She for instance had a friend and she enjoyed her imagination and inner-life. Because she was not seen by Mr. Rochester for the person she was, but was only

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<sup>66</sup> Laura Niesen de Abruña, "TWENTIETH-CENTURY WOMEN WRITERS FROM THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN," *Modern Fiction Studies* 34, no. 1 (1988): 94-95, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26282405>.

<sup>67</sup> Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 152.

registered to be of creole blood and female gender and was therefore worth less, British imperialism was the indirect cause of her death. Nevertheless, Antoinette does still have a voice in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as Rhys effectively uses Antoinette's suicide in unifying white and black creole people. By doing so, Rhys shows that connectedness between different races is stronger than discrimination and feelings of superiority, as even in death Antoinette still feels her friendship with a black creole girl.

Antoinette narrates her story in *Wide Sargasso Sea* herself, which automatically leads to her having a voice. It also shows that creole women are able to own their own story, which is contrastive to what *Jane Eyre* makes the reader believe. As opposed to *Jane Eyre*, in which Mr. Rochester describes Bertha, consequently leading to a negative image of her as well as her loss of voice, Antoinette is able to convey her own feelings and outlook on the world in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This makes her a more sympathetic character to the reader, which causes the reader to much more understand Antoinette's point of view as opposed to the view of Mr. Rochester. When Antoinette is imprisoned at Thornfield for instance, she says: "There is no looking glass here and I don't know what I am like now . . . Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I?"<sup>68</sup> Through this reflection Antoinette is portrayed as human-like, as she feels uncertain and questions the world, as opposed to her beast-like descriptions in *Jane Eyre*. Furthermore, the reader feels as if wrong has been done to Antoinette by locking her up, because the reflection shows that she still has her senses. Having a voice thus shows that it was not her own fault to be locked away, which is contrastive to Bertha's story in *Jane Eyre* that she is captivated due to insaneness. Likewise, Antoinette's reflections on her name being changed to Bertha by Mr. Rochester show that she remains able to own her voice in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and it shows to the reader that she was unwilling for her name to be taken away. Geetha moreover argues that it shows the

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<sup>68</sup> Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 143-144.

controlling treatment and imperialistic ideas of Mr. Rochester towards his wife, as he believes himself worthy of taking away her original identity.<sup>69</sup> When at Thornfield for instance, Antoinette says that: “Names matter, like when he wouldn’t call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking glass.”<sup>70</sup>

Unlike Antoinette, who is able to narrate her own story in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, her mother, Annette, is silenced by her husband, and as an effect goes mad. The story of Annette thus foreshadows the story of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. Annette for instance warned Mr. Masson, her husband, about the conflict between the black and white creoles, and he answers her by saying: “You have lived alone far too long, Annette. You imagine enmity which doesn’t exist. Always one extreme or the other.”<sup>71</sup> His ignorance of the hate of the black creole causes much destruction to Annette, as they for instance burn down her house, and she ultimately ends up in a madhouse and dies there, similarly to Antoinette’s fate at Thornfield Hall.

Because Antoinette still has a voice whilst being locked away because of her narrating her own story, she is able to convey her feelings of loss of self through Mr. Rochester’s behaviour towards her. Antoinette’s voice thus shows that females did have feelings. Whilst it was normal for men to act superiorly over women during the nineteenth century, Rhys is able to use the development regarding the rights of women in the twentieth century in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Antoinette’s voice in *Wide Sargasso Sea* therefore sheds a different light upon Mr. Rochester’s way of treating his wife, as it gives the reader the idea that Antoinette was forced away from her identity, rather than her being mad, as is suggested in *Jane Eyre*.

Antoinette has a voice in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, because Rhys felt the need to give a fellow creole woman a voice, because her creole heritage is contextualised, and because she

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<sup>69</sup> Geetha, “The Retrieval of Relegated Identity,” 4.

<sup>70</sup> Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 143.

<sup>71</sup> Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 16.

narrates her own story, rather than it being told for her. As a result, the reader gets to know a different side to the story told in *Jane Eyre*, and is suddenly aware that Antoinette might not have been insane, but could have been forced away from her identity because of Mr. Rochester's imperialistic and controlling treatment of his wife. By giving Antoinette a voice, Rhys has effectively shown that creole people are worth their voices too.

#### Chapter 4: Bertha's voice compared to the voices of #MeToo's coloured women

The voice of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is similar to the voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement. Like black women during the #MeToo movement, Bertha only received a voice after her first appearance was recognised to be troublesome. Black and creole women were perceived to be inferior throughout history by slaveholders, British Imperialists, and racists. However, with the Emancipation Proclamation, in which slaves were pronounced free, and with the end of the British Empire, this was perceived to be a problematic situation, and thus it was being fought against, for instance during the civil rights movement. Furthermore, both Bertha and the black women of the #MeToo movement were silenced because of racial injustices and gender inequality.

Both Bertha Mason and the coloured women of the #MeToo movement received a voice only after their appearance was acknowledged to be problematic. Bertha did not have a voice in *Jane Eyre* because it was commonly accepted that creole people were inferior compared to the English, and thus the beliefs of Britain's nineteenth-century society are reflected in *Jane Eyre*. By creating the madwoman in the attic out of a creole woman, rather than out of for instance an English woman, Brontë adheres to the belief of nineteenth-century Britain that creole people are the 'Other'. Brontë acknowledges this in one of her letters by saying: "I agree with them that the character is shocking, but I know that it is but too natural. There is a phase of insanity which may be called moral madness, in which all that is good or

even human seems to disappear from the mind and a fiend-nature replaces it.”<sup>72</sup> Brontë thus states that it is natural for the character to be shocking, and as Bertha is a creole woman, she implicitly says that it is natural for a creole person to go insane. Rhys counterargues this by asking: “How then can I of all people, say Charlotte Brontë was wrong? Or that her Bertha is impossible? Which she is.”<sup>73</sup> Rhys was an admirer of Brontë’s work and thus doubted if she had the right to challenge the character of Bertha, but nevertheless she felt the character needed to be rewritten. She also called Bertha “an impossible monster.”<sup>74</sup> By calling out the racist ‘otherness’ of Bertha, Rhys gives Bertha Mason a voice in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as Antoinette Cosway a century after her initial appearance in *Jane Eyre*. Similarly, coloured women always have to fight for their voices to be heard, as their voices are also not initially heard. Even though the #MeToo movement was started by Burke, a black woman, most of the black voices are ignored during the movement whilst white women are credited with raising their voices against sexual assault.<sup>75</sup> The voices of black women are only heard after they address the white supremacy in the #MeToo movement, and even then the attention does not always shift to the experiences that black women have with sexual assault. Both Bertha and the coloured women of the #MeToo movement therefore are only heard after their appearance was seen as problematic. As opposed to the character of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, which was written in the context of British Imperialism which consequently led to the belief that creole people are inferior, the #MeToo movement started to gain popularity in 2017. This means that racism was already addressed numerous times, for instance during the Black Lives Matter movement, which started in 2013.

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<sup>72</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends: 1848-1851*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3, [The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: 1848-1851 - Charlotte Brontë - Google Boeken](#).

<sup>73</sup> Veronica Marie Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 271.

<sup>74</sup> Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, 82.

<sup>75</sup> Onwuachi-Willig, “What About #UsToo?,” 106.

Both Bertha and the black women of the #MeToo movement are silenced because of their race. Thomas argues that the concept of race in *Jane Eyre* consists out of the binary opposition of blackness and whiteness.<sup>76</sup> As Bertha's appearance is different from the appearances of the English people at Thornfield, she is considered to be black.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, during the nineteenth century the degree of whiteness was charted based on one's ability to both physically and intellectually adapt to sweltering weather circumstances.<sup>78</sup> As white creole people live in a tropical climate, they are much better at this than English people, and this is again reason for Bertha to be perceived as black in *Jane Eyre*. Brontë uses these ideas in her novel, connecting Bertha's supposed insanity to the weather of Jamaica: "One night I had been awakened by her yells—(since the medical men had pronounced her mad, she had, of course, been shut up)—it was a fiery West Indian night; one of the description that frequently precede the hurricanes of those climates."<sup>79</sup> Brontë makes it clear that Bertha is perceived as black by the English through describing the warm climate Bertha is used to. Furthermore, she effectively connects Bertha's blackness to her insanity by highlighting the yelling took place during "a fiery West Indian night"<sup>80</sup>, suggesting that Bertha's creole heritage causes her madness. Furthermore, Brontë effectively racializes Bertha by showing the reader she needs some character-building, which typifies the beliefs of the English during the time of British imperialism that creole people need the English to teach them how to properly behave. Likewise, the coloured women of the #MeToo movement are silenced because their race is perceived to be inferior. Feimster argues that: "The #MeToo movement is using some of the same strategies that Black activists used to mobilize during the anti-

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<sup>76</sup> Sue Thomas, "The Tropical Extravagance of Bertha Mason," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27, no. 1 (1999): 12, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25058436>.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas, "The Tropical Extravagance of Bertha Mason," 12.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas, "The Tropical Extravagance of Bertha Mason," 12.

<sup>79</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 311.

<sup>80</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 311.

lynching movement, which was really an anti-rape campaign for activists like Ida B. Wells.”<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, black women are barely heard during the #MeToo movement, whilst white women employ the platform with the same strategies that coloured women used. This means that black women are not silenced because their means of trying to get themselves a voice do not work, but because their race is different from the race of white women. As Feimster states: “We live in a world where Black voices are discredited and our history is only valued when whites see the value in our stories.”<sup>82</sup> Black women do not have the means to use their voices to the same extent as white women are, as oftentimes they are ignored when breaking the silence. Both Bertha and the coloured women of the #MeToo movement are therefore silenced because of their race.

Both Bertha and the black women of the #MeToo movement were silenced because of their gender. Mr. Rochester was for instance able to colonise Bertha in *Jane Eyre* because of her female gender. Kamel argues that Brontë used the concept of British imperialism as a validation for the superior behaviour of the English towards the West Indians, which includes Jamaican women.<sup>83</sup> Mr. Rochester was allowed to take Bertha away simply because he married her, which caused Bertha to lose all her rights about herself. Because Bertha is a creole woman, Mr. Rochester’s behaviour was justified in the eyes of Brontë. Moreover, Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a white creole woman living in the 1840s, and thus she carries the history of the slavery of coloured creole women with her.<sup>84</sup> The abolition of slavery plays a prominent role in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, shown by the fact that the black and white creole characters do not get on with each other in the novel. Antoinette for instance was followed once by a black girl who sang: “White cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody want

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<sup>81</sup> “#MeToo Won’t Succeed If We Don’t Listen to Black Women,” Shanon Lee, Healthline Media, revised February 22, 2018, [There Is No #MeToo Without Black Women \(healthline.com\)](https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/there-is-no-me-too-without-black-women).

<sup>82</sup> “#MeToo Won’t Succeed If We Don’t Listen to Black Women.”

<sup>83</sup> Kamel, ““Before I Was Set Free”,” 2.

<sup>84</sup> Kamel, ““Before I Was Set Free”,” 3.

you.”<sup>85</sup> This hate is caused by the history of black creoles during the slavery period. Black female slaves were sexually exploited by the slaveholders so as to ensure profits from the plantations and to disgrace the black female slaves’ heritage during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century, whereas white creole women were barely touched upon because of their skin colour.<sup>86</sup> As a result, the white creole women became estranged from the black creole women.<sup>87</sup> Antoinette calls this out in a conversation with Mr. Rochester: “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.”<sup>88</sup> Because of this estrangement, Antoinette lacks a female community, which makes it easier for Mr. Rochester to make her his bride. Married women did not have a voice in their marriage during the nineteenth century, as it was common for them to depend on their husband and for the husband to take care of them, which caused him to have much power of his wife. Antoinette thus gets silenced because of her female gender. Similarly, the coloured women of the #MeToo movement are silenced because of their gender. Black women face gender harassment that white women do not have to face because of racialised sexism.<sup>89</sup> Onwuachi-Willig states that racialised sexism includes stereotypes about black women, such as the angry black woman stereotype, which means that black women are naturally ill-mannered and ill-tempered, as well as claiming that black females are not true women because their appearances do not conform to the idea of ideal womanhood.<sup>90</sup> Because white women do not face such racialised sexism, and the #MeToo movement is not focussed on racialised sexism either, the voices of black women are both rejected and silenced in the #MeToo movement.

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<sup>85</sup> Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 8.

<sup>86</sup> Kamel, ““Before I Was Set Free,”” 3.

<sup>87</sup> Kamel, ““Before I Was Set Free,”” 3.

<sup>88</sup> Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 76.

<sup>89</sup> Onwuachi-Willig, “What About #UsToo?,” 118.

<sup>90</sup> Onwuachi-Willig, “What About #UsToo?,” 115, 117.

Both the voice of Bertha and the voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement are therefore silenced because of their gender.

Bertha in *Jane Eyre* and Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as well as the coloured women of the #MeToo movement only receive a voice after their appearance was proven to be troublesome, and they are silenced because of their race and female gender. Bertha was only given a voice as Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which was published a century after *Jane Eyre*'s initial publication. Likewise, the black women of the #MeToo movement were only given a voice after calling out the white supremacy that exists in the #MeToo movement, and even then they are not fully heard because of intersectionality, as most white women do not understand the component of race that is involved in many of the sexual abuses that black women face. Both the creole heritage of Bertha and black features of coloured women also influence their being silenced. Because Bertha is a creole, she is perceived to be of inferior quality compared to the English people. The black women are also seen as inferior because of their race, as is shown by the fact that white women are heard using the strategies of black women. Lastly, Bertha and the black women are silenced because of their gender. Because Bertha is not part of a female community, Mr. Rochester can easily colonise her, as Bertha is not protected against the ease with which Mr. Rochester is able to convince her to marry him, with all the bad consequences that follow. The black women furthermore face racialised sexism, which white women do not know, and therefore they are not a part of the #MeToo movement. Both Bertha and the black women of the #MeToo movement are therefore only heard after their initial appearance was seen to be troublesome, and they are silenced because of their race and female gender.

### Conclusion

The voice of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is similar compared to the voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement. The following research question was the scope of this research: how is the voice of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* similar to the voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement? This led to the following hypothesis: the voice of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is similar to the voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement. Bertha was silenced in *Jane Eyre* whilst she was heard in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She likely was silenced in *Jane Eyre* because of her being a Jamaican woman with creole heritage, which same gender and race is used in *Wide Sargasso Sea* to give her a voice. Similarly, mostly white women were heard in a movement that a coloured woman started, so many of the black women are silenced whilst most of the white women are not.

The hypothesis was confirmed. Both Bertha Mason and the coloured women part of the #MeToo movement were silenced because of their race and gender, and only received a voice after this silence was acknowledged to be problematic. Because *Jane Eyre* was written in the context of British imperialism, the English, including Brontë herself, believed they were superior compared to the colonised, such as the creole people living in Jamaica. Mr. Rochester therefore felt entitled to imprison Bertha at Thornfield Hall. Furthermore, the nineteenth-century society was patriarchal, which means that Mr. Rochester by right has more power than his wife Bertha. As *Wide Sargasso Sea* was written a century later, it was not accepted for the husband to treat his wife as if she were inferior to him anymore. Furthermore, Rhys is a creole woman herself and thus felt the need to give Antoinette a voice. She gave Antoinette a voice by contextualising her creole heritage and letting her narrate her story herself. Similarly, the coloured women during the #MeToo movement were silenced. Because race and gender intersect in the sexual abuse they face, they are often not heard, as this type of

racialised sexism is not understood by most white women. The concept of intersectionality explains this phenomenon: both race and gender discrimination exist in the lives of black women, and these thus intersect with each other.<sup>91</sup> This complexifies the sexual abuse of black women, because most white women do not face race discrimination. This is connected to the long history black women have with abuse, for instance during the slavery period. Moreover, the media hardly reports any instances of sexual abuse of black women during the #MeToo movement, which makes it harder for white women to understand racialised sexual abuse, as it is not commonly addressed. Both the voice of Bertha and the voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement are therefore similar in the way they are silenced.

The voices of coloured women during the #MeToo movement had not been compared to the voice of Bertha in *Jane Eyre* and Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* in earlier research. Onwuachi-Willig for instance looked at the element of race involved in the #MeToo movement and Donaldson researched the role of mental illness in *Jane Eyre*. The voices of Bertha and the black women of the #MeToo movement have thus only been looked at separately. Nevertheless, the comparison is important to make, as it underscores that gender and race discrimination exist in both fictional and real life, as both real-life and fictional women receive a voice or are silenced because of their race and gender. Through using feminist and postcolonial criticism, it became apparent that the voice of Bertha is indeed similar to the voices of black women during the #MeToo movement.

Future research could further research the relationship between Bertha and Mr. Rochester in the context of other silenced wives, such as the main character in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, who also goes insane at the hands of her husband. This could be connected to the nineteenth-century patriarchal society. It is useful to research this even further, as literature reflects society and it thus will bring about new understandings about the ways in which

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<sup>91</sup> Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1244.

women lived during the nineteenth century. It could also be useful to further analyse the role of white women during the #MeToo movement. By doing so their viewpoints will get highlighted, which creates a more nuanced perspective on the matter of voice and silence in the #MeToo movement, as the movement is progressive in highlighting new voices in itself.

All in all, the black women of the #MeToo movement have been silenced for too long. Luckily, Bertha in *Jane Eyre* did receive a voice as Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

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