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From Captivity to Selfhood: Trauma and Female Subjectivity in Wide Sargasso Sea and Breasts and Eggs

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Abstract. This paper examines how intimacy, often idealized as trust and reciprocity, can become a site of psychological imprisonment through coercive control in cross-cultural literary narratives. By comparing Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea and Kawakami Mieko's Breasts and Eggs, the study highlights how intimate relationships generate "chronic violence" that reshapes female subjectivity across colonial and contemporary Japanese contexts. Combining trauma theory with the sociological framework of "coercive control", research shows that intimate oppression not only has cross-cultural universality but also presents unique forms in specific historical and social contexts. While Rhys depicts the destructive resistance expressed under colonial patriarchy, Kawakami demonstrates the possibility of women engaging in strategic subjectivity negotiations through silence, writing, and reproductive choices. This study not only expands the research scope of trauma literature from event-based violence to implicit and persistent psychological domination but also reveals its cross-cultural resonance and intergenerational transmission.

Keywords: Trauma literature, Coercive control, Comparative Literature, Feminist Subjectivity

1. Introduction

Intimacy is usually regarded as an area of reciprocity and trust. However, literary works often complicate this ideal, revealing that intimate relationships can also become psychological imprisonment. In this situation, emotional intimacy gradually erodes autonomy, and there is usually no obvious physical violence. Although this kind of intangible harm has been increasingly studied in psychology and sociology, it has not been fully explored in literary studies, especially in a cross-cultural context.

In the study of trauma literature, scholars have traditionally focused more on event-based trauma, such as war, colonization, political persecution, and physical abuse. However, in intimate relationships, the force of coercive control is a more concealed and widespread form of domination, constituting another significant type of trauma. This dynamic involves strategies such as isolation, dependency creation, language suppression, and emotional manipulation, which together reshape the subject's identity and sense of self.

Most studies on Wide Sargasso Sea emphasize its postcolonial rewrite of Jane Eyre and its critique of imperial gender relations, while studies of Breasts and Eggs have examined its feminist

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engagement with gender norms, reproduction, and bodily autonomy in contemporary Japan. However, existing research often focuses on colonial violence or feminist politics, and these two works are rarely studied within a unified theoretical framework, combining trauma theory with Stark's concept of coercive control. Most analyses discuss fragmented ways of silence, isolation or physical objectification, but do not reveal how these recurring themes constitute the systematic structure of psychological imprisonment. This gap is crucial because coercive control is best understood as a form of "chronic violence". Furthermore, without a cross-cultural comparative perspective, we might mistake these strategies for being specific to the environment rather than recognizing their universality in colonialism and contemporary patriarchy.

This study precisely responds to this gap by juxtaposing Wide Sargasso Sea and Breasts and Eggs as comparative cases of intimate coercion. This kind of dialogue is not only established due to the overlap of themes, but more importantly, it can reveal how the same psychological imprisonment pattern is presented in different cultural frameworks. By comparing a post-colonial context based on colonial racialized gender oppression as the foundation of intimacy with a post-industrial context that disciplines women's bodies through reproductive and economic pressures, this study emphasizes the universality of intimate coercion as a form of trauma, while also highlighting its special manifestations in specific cultural environments.

In terms of methodology, this study adopts a relatively close reading approach and combines trauma theory with the sociological framework of "coercive control" to depict the structural mechanism of intimate oppression and the protagonist's response to it. The contribution of this study lies in: on the one hand, it expands the scope of trauma literature from acute and event-based trauma to "chronic violence" in intimate relationships. On the other hand, it links two rarely juxtaposing literary traditions, thereby demonstrating the cross-cultural resonance of psychological dominance in intimate relationships. This paper first places the two novels in their respective social, cultural, and literary contexts to analyze how they depict intimate abuse, and then compares and analyzes the commonalities and differences between the two works as well as how they envision self-revival in intimate relationships. Through this structure, this study regards compulsive intimacy as an important but overlooked form of trauma in cross-cultural literature.

2. Literature review

2.1. Trauma theory and intimate abuse

Trauma theory has long emphasized the temporal breaks of painful experiences. Caruth pointed out that the characteristics of trauma lie in its delay and "inexpressibility" [1]. Individuals cannot immediately understand or express trauma at the time of an event, but can only reproduce it in the narrative in a delayed, broken, and repetitive manner. This theory provides a powerful explanatory framework for literary criticism, enabling scholars to understand the fragmentation, repetition, and silence that are widespread in traumatic narratives. Meanwhile, Pederson raised a notable reflection: when people face violence, they often choose to banish it from consciousness, and the phenomenon of so-called "traumatic amnesia", although widely discussed, is still controversial as to whether it truly exists. Pederson also pointed out that Caruth's trauma narrative theory still holds a dominant position in contemporary times, believing that trauma is "inexpressible", but emphasizing that literature can "express" trauma experiences beyond words through symbolic narratives [2].

Early trauma research mostly focused on large-scale historical events like wars, genocides, and colonial experiences. However, Herman expanded the scope of trauma research by incorporating abuse in interpersonal relationships into the examination. She emphasized that the trauma caused by

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psychological dominance and “coercive control” in intimate relationships is as profound as violence on the battlefield. Under this framework, domination is not an isolated act of violence but a continuous structural pattern that gradually erodes an individual's sense of identity over time [3]. Stark further proposed that intimate partner violence is a prison system composed of surveillance, isolation, and verbal manipulation [4]. Lifton’s “thought reform” theory also reveals how language and silence constitute the form of psychological imprisonment [5]. Although these theories have laid the groundwork, literary criticism still largely focuses on collective and visible forms of violence, while paying insufficient attention to implicit control in intimate relationships, especially in cross-cultural contexts where research is even more scarce.

In this study, I will particularly draw on Caruth’s concept of the “inexpressibility” of trauma to analyze Antoinette's fragmented narration and silence in Wide Sargasso Sea. Meanwhile, Herman and Stark’s coercive control framework will be applied to Rhys and Kawakami to examine how intimate partners and social institutions enforce psychological imprisonment over time.

2.2. Research on subjectivity in feminism

The exploration of “subjectivity” in feminist theory has undergone a shift from unification to diversity, and from essentialism to constructivism. Early liberal feminism understood subjectivity as a “rational and independent individual”, focusing on women’s equal rights in education, work, and politics [6]. Research at this stage tends to view the female subject as a universal individual that can be compared with the male subject.

In the middle of the 20th century, Beauvoir proposed that “women are not born but formed”, revealing the social constructiveness of gender identity and laying the foundation for subsequent research on subjectivity [7]. Subsequently, Lacan's psychoanalysis and post-structuralism had a profound impact on the “decentralization” of the subject. Contemporary post-structuralist readings highlight how trauma and power structures regulate subjectivity, revealing how social norms inscribe themselves into women’s identities [8]. This perspective has been borrowed by feminist theorists to explain how patriarchy shapes the subjectivity of women.

Butler further shook the concept of a stable gender subject through the theory of “gender performative” [9]. She believes that gender identity does not exist in advance but is constructed in the continuous repetition of social norms and physical practices. This theory has shifted the study of feminist subjectivity towards fluidity, contextuality, and diversity, and rejected the fixed concept of “female subject”. Meanwhile, black feminism and postcolonial feminism have raised significant criticisms. The “intersectionality” theory proposed by Crenshaw emphasizes how multiple identities, such as race, class, and sexual orientation, jointly act on the subjective experience of women [10]. Hooks pointed out that if the multiple oppressions of social structure are not taken into account, feminist discussions on subjectivity tend to be confined to the experiences of white middle-class women [11]. Mohanty criticized the simplification and otherization of “third-world women” in the Western academic circle, emphasizing that subjectivity must be understood in the context of cross-cultural and global power relations [12].

Entering the 21st century, the study of feminist subjectivity has further expanded into new fields. Recent feminist discussions of subjectivity emphasize the struggle between silence and voice, showing how women’s voices are shaped by postcolonial and patriarchal power structures [13]. Recent studies also show how digital and cultural systems reshape women’s subjectivity, particularly through technologically mediated visibility and erasure [14,15]. On this basis, Standish pointed out:

“The man is drawn or provoked by the otherness of the woman, but with a view to converting it into a further means of his own recognition. In controlling the woman’s voice, he denies her

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inclination to speak in her own voice" [16].

This interpretation highlights the intimate entanglement between dominance and voice, revealing that the suppression of women's voice is not only an individual act of violence but also a form of cultural violence. Therefore, the feminist theory of subjectivity provides an important tool for understanding the transformation from "captivity" to "selfhood" in literary narratives.

Overall, the study of feminist subjectivity has gradually evolved from initially emphasizing liberation and universality to a complex analysis of differences, constructiveness, and intersectionality. The current research trend not only focuses on the theoretical "who can be the subject", but also on how women constantly negotiate and reconstruct their subjectivity at the practical level in education, labor, and culture.

2.3. Wide Sargasso Sea and trauma studies

Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea has long been central to postcolonial and feminist criticism. Spivak classically interpreted the novel as a colonialist allegory, where Antoinette's silencing exemplifies the erasure of colonial women's voices [17]. Building on this, Raiskin shifted the focus to intimate dynamics, arguing that Rochester's act of renaming Antoinette was not only a colonial gesture but also a form of coercive control within marriage [18]. Spencer further linked this silencing to Caruth's notion, suggesting that Antoinette's fragmented narration embodies trauma's inexpressibility [19].

Together, these perspectives reveal a trajectory: from Spivak's emphasis on colonial discourse, to Raiskin's attention to intimate control, to Spencer and Baer's trauma-focused readings, yet the concepts of surveillance, isolation, and language manipulation, as Stark theorized, remain underexplored [4].

2.4. Breasts and Eggs and contemporary Japanese literature

Miyoko Kawakami's Breasts and Eggs has drawn widespread attention in both Japanese literature and global feminist literature. Copeland situated the novel within Japanese women's literary tradition, emphasizing its negotiation between body, language, and society [20]. This raw and surprisingly funny novel's entry into the literary dialogue around gender, motherhood and pregnancy is confrontational and necessary [21]. From another perspective, Prough explored Kawakami's acceptance history from the perspective of the literary market, emphasizing the contradiction between social expectations and the self-writing of female writers [22].

Recent research also reveals the socially oppressive structure of Japan's marital system and gender politics [23, 24]. Yet, neither explicitly links these dynamics to Stark's model of coercive control, particularly strategies of isolation and language suppression. From this perspective, Breasts and Eggs can be seen not only as a feminist critique but also as a powerful narrative of chronic, everyday trauma.

2.5. Summary of research gaps

In summary, while existing studies have indeed revealed the colonial allegorical nature of Wide Sargasso Sea and the feminist politics of Breasts and Eggs, they have yet to systematically compare these two works as narratives of intimate trauma. Although relevant theories have long acknowledged the significance of psychological domination, its cross-cultural manifestations within literary narratives remain insufficiently explored. This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis

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of these two works by integrating trauma theory with the framework of “coercive control”. Through this examination, it becomes evident that abuse within intimate relationships constitutes not merely an expression of personal suffering but a central battleground within the narrative: the self may be lost, shattered, or partially reconstructed within this process. Consequently, this study expands the boundaries of trauma literature research by incorporating the implicit violence of intimate relationships into cross-cultural literary traditions, revealing its unique significance within the ‘captivity to selfhood’ narrative trajectory.

3. Discussion

3.1. Wide Sargasso Sea

Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea, as a prequel to Jane Eyre, reconstructs the story of the attic "mad woman" Antoinette Cosway. From this perspective, Rhys reveals the interweaving of colonialism and gender power, endowing the suppressed characters in classic texts with voices. In Wide Sargasso Sea, the story of Annette and Antoinette presents a similar trajectory across generations: they both fall into abuse and isolation in an intimate relationship shaped by colonialism and patriarchy, but at the same time try to regain their agency in resistance and destruction.

Isolation and Silencing of Female Voice: Annette’s Marriage and Breakdown. At the beginning of the novel, Annette's image is closely associated with the decapidated Curibury Estate. Rhys uses dilapidated space to imply the isolation of Creole widows in colonial society:

“Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible–the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown, and a smell of dead flowers hung in the air” [25].

“The smell of dead flowers” symbolizes both the social unrest after the liberation of slaves, and it also symbolizes the gradual loss of security and social status in the Annette family. As a widow with two children, she had no source of income and was excluded by the black community as a remnant of colonial oppression.

It was precisely against this isolated backdrop that Annette chose to attach herself to the British colonizer Mason. Her marriage seemed to offer economic security, but at the same time, it placed her in the double trap of patriarchy and colonial power. Annette was highly sensitive to the hostility of the black community around her. She constantly reminded Mason to be cautious, but Mason immediately denied her voice and even ridiculed her concerns: “They are too damn lazy to be dangerous” [25]. This dialogue is a very typical example of emotional abuse in intimate relationships: women’s experiences and intuitions are denied, replaced by the confidence and authority of male colonizers. The patriarchal discourse in colonial contexts often sustains its dominance by silencing women's voices [26].

More symbolically, Annette's horse was poisoned to death. The horse symbolizes freedom of movement and social mobility. Annette, who lost her horse, was forced to be trapped in Curry Bury, symbolizing the gradual loss of her initiative in marriage and social relationships. Her voice was ignored, her space was restricted, yet Mason still stubbornly maintained his colonizer imagination. This silence was eventually re-encoded by society and families as “madness”. After the manor was destroyed, Annette's anger and hysteria were interpreted as insanity. She was isolated and imprisoned, losing her subjectivity as a wife and mother. Spivak pointed out that the oppressive mechanism of colonial patriarchy often “crazy” women, transforming their resistance and suffering into pathological labels [17]. Annette's intense reaction was in fact an attempt to reject silence, but under the dual discipline of colonial and patriarchal discourse, she was completely deprived of the legitimacy to speak out.

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Therefore, Annette's marriage was a concentrated manifestation of intimate abuse; she was deprived of her voice, her experience was denied, and her initiative was gradually suppressed until it was pathologized and silenced. Her ending not only reveals the marginalization of white Creole women by colonial society, but also provides a "prophetic" parallel mirror image of Antoinette's later fate [18].

Coercive Naming and Imprisonment: Antoinette's Marital Trauma. If Annette's marriage follows a trajectory from "voice deprived" to "anger pathologized" and then to "subjectivity siloed", then Antoinette's marriage continues this pattern, but at the end, another possibility of agency emerges. Her marriage to Rochester was full of inequality from the very beginning. For Rochester, this marriage was more of an extension of colonial economic transactions, while for Antoinette, however, it meant an effort to seek a sense of belonging and security.

In this marriage, the racial prejudice of colonialism and the imbalance of power in intimate relationships were closely intertwined. One of the most obvious manifestations is that Rochester explicitly regarded Antoinette's Jamaican identity as an insurmountable obstacle, thereby rejecting his love for her. In his account, he constantly emphasized that Antoinette was neither a "true English" nor a "European":

"Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either. Oh no, they are not European. I know that now. And they certainly are not English" [25].

Here, Rochester directly marked Antoinette's Creole identity as a kind of "otherness", and even though she had European ancestry, he still insisted that she could not belong to "true English". This racialized rejection does not remain at the conceptual level but directly affects the intimate relationship itself. Rochester gradually rationalized his indifference and suspicion towards Antoinette because of her Jamaican identity.

Not only did he deny her love, but he also completely deprived her of her identity by changing her name. Antoinette tries to protest, "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name" [25]. Here, language itself becomes a tool of control; the act of changing her name has a dual significance in the narrative. On the one hand, it deprives Antoinette of her individual identity and reshapes her into a submissive wife in line with colonial imagination. On the other hand, it included her in the category of "crazy women". Names are often the starting point of subjectivity in feminist narratives, as they carry meanings of belonging, identity, and relational positioning [27], and being renamed means losing the right to narrate.

Moreover, Rochester's logic simultaneously reflects the contradiction between desire and rejection. He questioned Antoinette's bloodline and mental stability, "Her mother was mad, they say. My wife's family has a history of it" [25]. Through this doubt, He pushed Antoinette into a helpless and isolated situation, making her anger and resistance easily interpreted as madness. But at the same time, he also confessed: "She's mad but mine, mine... I will not give her up. She is not for another" [25]. This possessiveness coexists with a denial of love, indicating that he is unable to establish intimacy with Antoinette. Instead, he chooses to replace equal intimacy with the logic of colonial ownership. He "possesses" her but refuses to recognize her qualification to be loved as an independent entity. As Raiskin pointed out, Rochester's rejection of Antoinette was not merely a breakdown of personal emotions, but a microcosm of how colonial patriarchy used "racial differences" to rationalize oppression in cross-cultural intimate relationships [18]. In other words, Rochester's racialized rejection not only constituted emotional abuse of Antoinette, but also transformed her identity as a "Creole woman" into the source of oppression, thereby further driving her towards an isolated and "insane" outcome.

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Spatial imagery is particularly important in the description of the abuse Antoinette endured from an intimate relationship. Ultimately, Antoinette was imprisoned in the attic of Thornfield. She said painfully, "There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now... What am I doing in this place and who am I?" [25]. The absence of the mirror symbolizes the disappearance of self-confirmation, and the confinement of the attic gradually disintegrates her sense of identity. Rhys saw the madwoman in the attic as a racial and gender-based denial of voice [28]. Antoinette's isolation was not merely a physical entrapment, but a process of being removed from social discourse.

Apart from plot development, Rhys' narrative technique itself is a reproduction of trauma. Antoinette's voice is presented as fragmented, leaping, and dreamlike. For example, at the end, she said: "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do" [25]. Semantic ambiguity reflects the "sense of dissociation" in a traumatic state. Caruth pointed out that traumatic experiences often cannot be integrated in a linear narrative but can only surface in the form of fragments and echoes [1]. Fragmented narratives not only reflect Antoinette's psychological state but also allow readers to personally experience the "discontinuity" of trauma.

In this novel, Antoinette attempted to maintain her identity by using Obeah to recall her mother and her connection with Christophine, but all ended in failure. At the end of the story, Antoinette set fire to Rochester's estate and also ignited her own life. The flame is both destruction and creation: it ended her "Bertha" identity imposed by colonial patriarchy and also enabled her to reclaim subjectivity through action.

3.2. Breasts and Eggs

Kawakami Mieko's Breasts and Eggs shows the traumatic experiences and resistance patterns of women in their bodies, intimate relationships, and reproductive choices through Makiko, Natsuko, and Midoriko. A wealth of details in the text reveal how women struggle between oppression and silence.

Objectification and Isolation of the Female Body: Makiko's Obsession with Breast Augmentation. When Makiko stayed in Tokyo, she was almost completely obsessed with the idea of breast augmentation surgery. "Makiko had become obsessed with breasts, her own and other people's, to the point that she couldn't talk about anything else" [29]. This obsession essentially stems from the objectification of the female body by society. The breast is simplified to a symbol of sexual attraction and social capital in the male gaze, but Makiko internalized this gaze, forcing her physical experience to be associated with shame and anxiety. She even confessed, "If I don't do it now, I'll never be able to live with myself. Everyone's looking, all the time" [29]. The phrase "everyone's looking" here indicates her ubiquitous perception of the gaze of society. Patriarchal culture extends into psychological abuse in intimate relationships: even without a specific "abuser, social discourse itself becomes oppression. Kotani pointed out that Japanese literature has long depicted the female body as a "field of conflict between desire and shame" [30], and the naked presentation of Makiko Kagami's obsession is precisely a critique of this patriarchal gaze.

However, Makiko did not sink alone but engaged in dialogue with Natsuko and Midoriko. The interrelationship among women is an opportunity to break the silence of the body, through being listened to, her obsessions are gradually contextualized rather than merely pathologized.

Intergenerational Silence and Resistance: Midoriko's Diary. Midoriko had long refused to speak to his mother, Makiko, and instead resisted society's physical discipline through writing. She wrote in her diary about her aversion to her mother's obsession and her own confusion about her body. "Why is it always breasts, breasts, breasts? Is that all we are" [29]? This silence and writing are both a resistance to the mother and a protest against the patriarchal gender logic. The girl cannot control

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the words in face-to-face intimate communication, but through writing, she reclaims another way of expressing subjectivity.

When discussing contemporary Japanese female literature, Aoyama mentioned that many writers expose the “inexpressible nature of female experience” through the confrontation between body and language in their writing [21]. In Kawakami's novels, language and the body are alienated from each other. Language is no longer a tool for communication but an extension of power. The body no longer belongs to the subject but becomes the object of external gaze. This alienation continuously dissolves the female subject at the spiritual level. Midoriko's silence was not a passive absence but a strategic remaking of voice, which revealed the transmission and resistance of intergenerational trauma at the language level.

The Challenges of Reproductive Selection and Intimate Oppression: Natsuko's Celibate Motherhood. The protagonist Natsuko is not confronted with an obvious prisoner, but with the combined pressure from society and his family. On the one hand, she yearns for motherhood; on the other hand, she rejects marriage and sex: ‘I want a kid so bad...And I can’t have sex, I just don’t want to do it...I just wanted to die” [29]. This fragmented monologue demonstrates how social norms permeate individual psychology: desires and rejections are torn apart within the same body, leading to confusion in identity. When she consulted about artificial insemination, the doctor expressed doubts, “Why do you want to have a child on your own? Don’t you think it’s unfair to the child” [29]? This kind of questioning is not only a denial of her personal choice, but also another deprivation of women's autonomy by the patriarchal system through the logic of "what's best for the children". North emphasized in the translator's preface that Natsuko's choice reflects the possibility for women to reconstruct the meaning of family on the premise of bypassing the patriarchal system [31]. In other words, procreation is no longer a right granted by patriarchy, but an act of reclaiming agency by women.

The comment in the novel “free labor with a pussy” [29] directly binds the female body to unpaid labor. Through this rough language, Kawakami reveals how gender-based violence can be institutionalized through everyday discourse. Despite widespread delay in marriage and childbearing, strong norms surrounding marriage and parenthood continue to exert influence over individuals’ life course trajectories [32]. The novel depicts the modern form of spiritual imprisonment in the contradiction that individual choices seem free, but are always restrained by intangible expectations. What Natsuko experienced was precisely this kind of “invisible” long-term imprisonment. Her self-doubt and self-denial were not innate but gradually "internalized" by these external voices.

Structural and symbolic violence exacerbate the risks and consequences of sexual- and gender-based violence [33]. Natsuko kept asking himself: “What if you have a child, and that child wishes...she’d never been born?” [29]. This kind of questioning is not a one-off psychological fluctuation but a recurring mental burden. According to Allison, female characters in contemporary Japanese literature often present the consequences of social structural violence as “chronic depression” or “long-term anxiety” [34]. Kawakami continued this literary tendency, but at the same time provided a gentle outlet. At the end of the novel, when facing the newborn, Natsuko whispered, “Where were you?" You’re here now” [29]. This calm statement is not a heroic declaration but a daily reconstruction of the subject.

3.3. Comparative analysis

Similarities between these Two Novels. Despite their different cultural contexts, both works start from intimate relationships and reveal the trauma and oppression of women in the social structure.

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Firstly, both reveal that intimate relationships or social structures serve as important venues for spiritual imprisonment, jointly demonstrating the silenced situation of women within the family or in intimate relationships. In Wide Sargasso Sea, Annette couldn't allow her voice to be heard in her relationship with her husband, Antoinette protested that Bertha is not her name. Meanwhile, in Breasts and Eggs, Makiko and her daughter Midoriko respectively reflect the oppression of patriarchal discourse through obsession and silence. In these two novels, women's language rights have always been weakened, and the discourse space has become the core of the struggle.

Additionally, both works emphasize the materialization of the body. Rhys' role was racialized and gendered in the colonial context, and the body became the carrier of the interweaving of colonial and patriarchal power. Similarly, Kawakami depicted in modern Japanese society the process by which the female body is regarded as an object of consumption, especially revealing the internalization mechanism of patriarchal culture through the social pressure of reproduction and appearance. This objectification of the body has constantly alienated women's intimate experiences into tools of power for others.

More importantly, both works demonstrate how the trauma in such an intimate relationship is passed down from generation to generation through blood ties. Rhys presents in the novel the fates of Annette and Antoinette, the mother and daughter, reflecting each other. Annette, as a widow, was isolated at Curibury Estate, denied by her husband Mason, and went insane after the fire. Antoinette witnessed her mother's mental breakdown during her growth. This not only made her realize the hostility between patriarchy and the colonial environment at an early age, but also led her to repeat her mother's predicament in adulthood. In her marriage, she was also silenced, objectified, and deprived of her identity. Annette and Antoinette formed the "mirror cycle of Female trauma" [17], where the unheard voice of a mother is played out again in her daughter. In other words, the violence of colonialism and patriarchy is passed down from generation to generation through mother-daughter relationships, perpetuating the intimate trauma of women.

Kawakami also depicted the continuation of trauma through intergenerational relationships. Makiko was obsessed with breast augmentation surgery due to society's gaze on the female body. This anxiety was internalized by her daughter, Midoriko, who refused to talk to her mother and wrote in her diary a protest against the fact that the female body was only regarded as breasts and sex. This silence is precisely a response to the mother's anxiety, but it also indicates that the trauma has been passed on to the next generation. Meanwhile, the narrative further expands to Natsuko's choice; she hopes to become a mother but refuses marriage, attempting to break the traditional intergenerational cycle through single motherhood. Several scholars pointed out that in Breasts and Eggs, "reproductive selection" (such as whether to become a mother, whether to use assisted reproductive technology) became an important node for women to resist patriarchal intergenerational and social reproductive expectations [35,36]. Therefore, Kawakami's narrative reveals how trauma is passed on through blood ties, but also depicts the possibility of a new generation of women proactively rewriting intergenerational narratives. It can be said that the trauma of women in intimate relationships and social structures is not merely an experience at the personal level, but is inherited and reproduced through mother-daughter, sister-sister, and blood ties.

Differences between these Two Novels. Although the two works resonate in theme, their differences are equally significant. The first difference lies in the historical and cultural context. Rhys' narrative is deeply rooted in the Caribbean colonial context, and the tragic fates of women are often closely linked to race, class, and colonial identity. The tragedy of Annette and Antoinette is not only an issue of patriarchy, but also a cross-cultural conflict caused by colonial power. In contrast, Kawakami's novel takes place in contemporary Japan, where oppression stems from the combined

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effects of the marriage system, capitalist logic, and reproductive norms in modern society. Its focus is not on colonial identity but on the institutional predicament of women in intimate relationships under modern conditions.

Secondly, the manifestations of intimate relationships also vary. The core of Wide Sargasso Sea is heterosexual marriage. The oppression in intimate relationships is mainly reflected in the imbalance of power between husband and wife. Breasts and Eggs, on the other hand, places more emphasis on the relationships among women within the family, such as those between mother and daughter, sisters, and between women and their future children. In Breasts and Eggs, intimate relationships are no longer confined to love or marriage, but are expanded to emotional bonds and conflicts between generations. This difference indicates that Rhys focuses on the direct oppression of patriarchy and colonialism, while Kawakami reveals how institutional trauma is passed down from generation to generation through the complex relationships within the family.

The two novels also differ in the expression of initiative. Rhys' characters often reclaim agency through destructive actions, such as madness and arson. Although these actions break the control of patriarchy and colonialism, subjectivity can only briefly emerge in the midst of destruction. Kawakami, on the other hand, demonstrates greater openness. Women strive to carve out new survival paths outside the patriarchal structure by remaining silent and speaking up again, and by rejecting marriage and choosing to be single mothers. In contrast, Rhys' narrative can be understood as a kind of "self-destructive agency" proposed, while Kawakami's characters are more like engaging in strategic negotiation [17]. This difference indicates that the dual oppression of colonialism and patriarchy often leads to the absolute dissolution of subjectivity, while the invisible oppression in modern urban society, although persistent, leaves gaps for individuals to explore new self-identities.

4. Conclusion

This study reveals how intimate relationships are constructed as places of mental imprisonment in different cultural contexts by juxtaposing Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea and Mieko Kawakami's Breasts and Eggs. Analysis shows that women's traumatic experiences in intimate relationships are not merely individual but are deeply embedded in history, culture, and family structure.

An important commonality between the two works lies in the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Rhys shows how Antoinette repeats his mother's fate, suggesting that such a cycle is almost inevitable in a colonial context. At the same time, Kawakami depicts how Midoriko and Natsuko internalize their mother's anxiety and, through Natsuko's choices, presents the possibility of breaking the cycle. It can be seen from this that the trauma in intimate relationships does not remain at the individual level but is constantly passed on through blood ties and intergenerational relationships, shaping the life experiences of the next generation of women. Meanwhile, the comparison also reveals the differences between the two works. Rhys' narrative is deeply rooted in colonial history, and women's resistance often manifests as destructive and tragic postures. While Kawakami's narrative is set in contemporary Japan, where women's initiative is more often presented in constructive ways, such as rejecting marriage and choosing to be single mothers, thus opening up new possibilities for the future. The former presents a world where resistance ends in extinction, while the latter imagines the path to break the patriarchal cycle.

In conclusion, the two works demonstrate that regaining initiative in a cross-cultural context is never a linear process. Women must strive for space for survival and self-definition through multiple strategies such as silence, madness, writing or reproductive choices. At the same time, these stories also prove that women's voices possess great resilience. Even when silent, distorted and forced to

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appear in unconventional forms, they still keep surfacing, constantly challenging the patriarchal and cultural structures that attempt to bind them.

Future research can be carried out in two directions. Firstly, expand the comparison of cross-cultural trauma narratives, incorporate more texts involving intimate violence and mental control into the analysis, in order to further clarify their universality and differences. Secondly, interdisciplinary research achievements from psychology and sociology should be introduced to enrich the theoretical dimension of literary analysis and explore the unique role of literature in presenting and reconstructing traumatic experiences. For instance, from a sociological perspective, explore how the institution of marriage and maternal norms shape women's choices at the practical level. Or, from a psychological perspective, explore how trauma reappears in the mother-daughter relationship through silence, anxiety, or fantasy, thereby echoing the manifestations in literary narratives.

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