'DREAMING ACROSS THE SEA': QUEER POSTCOLONIAL BELONGINGS IN SHANI MOOTOO'S NOVELS

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Queering specific normalised categories is not for the easy frisson of transgression, but for the hope of livable worlds (Haraway 1994: 60).

Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something (Butler 2004a: 23).

Abstract

This article explores the potentiality of queer and postcolonial theories to imagine non-violent ways of belonging. Focusing on Shani Mootoo's novels, *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *He Drown She in the Sea*, it suggests that the process of imagining relationships beside the demands of the colonial and heterosexual nation is a politically imperative project. This work is located at the intersections of queer and postcolonial theories in an attempt to, like Mootoo's novels, render intelligible those bodies and histories that come into being outside of existing norms. In this sense, it suggests that by existing beside norms we can begin to reformulate, revisit and recreate boundaries of existence and belonging. Moreover, it argues that these actions are constantly in process and always coming into being, thus demanding perpetual critique and responsibility as political necessities. Finally, it suggests that there is a need to work with our own vulnerabilities rather than representing the human as a contained, coherent, invincible being. Through this idea of the vulnerable, articulated in Mootoo's texts, we begin to see non-violent belonging as becoming imaginable.

Queer Postcolonial Imaginings

> […W]e is watered-down Indians – we ain't good grade A Indians. […] I used to think I was a Hindu *par excellence* until I come up here [Canada] and see real flesh and blood Indian from India. Up here, I learning 'bout all kind a custom and food and music and clothes dat we never see or hear 'bout in good ole Trinidad. Is de next best thing to going to India, in truth, oui! (Mootoo 1993: 45-47).

> I wondered what wisdom it was (if that is what it was) that kept people from committing crimes right there and then. A familiar burning touched my knuckles, but this time it was from too tight a fist wanting to impact with history. An urgent rage buzzed around my head and ears like a swarm of crazed mosquitoes. I unfisted my hands and flayed them round my head, brushing away the swarming past and present (Mootoo 1993: 121).

Migrating from Trinidad to Canada, as queer women of Indian heritage, the above narrators, from Shani Mootoo's short story collection *Out on Main Street*, become undone (Butler 2004b). That is, there is a critical and self-reflexive mode of existence formed through the questions posed as the first narrator tries to define her 'Indianness' in relation to those from India and as the second attempts to understand the relation between the class and race hierarchies of Vancouver and the history of colonialism in Trinidad. However, their questions become more complex when issues of class, skin colour, heritage, place of origin, colonialism, sexuality and gender all

come into play as, in varying encounters, others attempt to categorise their bodies and form or undo intimate attachments. Sometimes bonding through their Indianness, sometimes distanced as outsiders for being "Indian-in-skin-colour only" (Mootoo 1993: 51), sometimes attachments forming along lines of gender and/or sexuality and sometimes being excluded from communal bonding along these same axes, these women embody the high stakes involved in being both 'impossible' and intelligible subjects. If they become undone and transformed in their contact with others then, in turn, these others are also impacted upon, transformed, in negative and positive ways. In each encounter, I would suggest, a hopeful space of transformation, where a potentiality to rethink the boundaries of the human and the systems within which we exist, becomes imaginable.

This hopeful potential for change, central to Mootoo's literary works, emerges from the intersections of queer and postcolonial theories. To this extent, I use queer postcolonial to articulate an imagining of something different to and of something other than the here and now, as well as of other ways of coming together and belonging. The emphasis here is on 'imagining' where that which is being envisaged or dreamt of and about is always becoming. Judith Butler in her recent book *Undoing Gender* explores this continual process of imagining as fundamental to social belonging:

> […T]he "I" that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them. This is not easy, because the "I" becomes, to a certain extent unknowable, threatened with unviability, with becoming undone altogether, when it no longer incorporates the norm in such a way that makes this "I" fully recognizable. There is a certain departure from the human that takes place in order to start the process of remaking the human. I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable. This is the juncture from which critique emerges, where critique is understood as an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living […]. (Butler 2004: 3-4).

What we see here is a practice where becoming undone both threatens the liveability of a life and, paradoxically, potentially transforms existing norms, thereby making for a more liveable life. It is this space of negotiation, which is already of more than the individual, that I refer to as queer postcolonial. In the desire to form intimate attachments and communal alliances there is, to some extent, an imitation of that which already exists and a drive towards living, inhabiting and practicing existing and current norms. However, these acts and experiences are much more unpredictable and can and do fail, in both a negative and positive sense, to live up to supposed ideals. Lauren Berlant, in her book *Intimacy*, suggests that the shared narratives of connection that we mimic, resist, revisit and reformulate are namely those "within zones of familiarity and comfort: friendship, the couple, and the family form" (Berlant 2000: 1). Importantly, she goes on to say that the journey to these points of arrival, if indeed these forms are or ever were the desired ends, is much more erratic and fraught with complications:

> [T]he unavoidable troubles, the distractions and disruptions that make things turn out in unpredicted scenarios. Romance and friendship inevitably meet the instabilities of sexuality, money, expectation, and exhaustion, producing, at the extreme, moral

> dramas of estrangement and betrayal, along with terrible spectacles of neglect and violence even where desire, perhaps, endures (Berlant 2000: 1).

Whilst we could add to this list of instabilities, as Berlant goes on to do, what she does emphasise here is a perhaps obvious but often overlooked idea, that encountering an other is never a straightforward narrative, regardless of the power and/or appeal of knowing in advance what a life, connection or body should be like. Furthermore, the unpredictability of coming together, whilst scary, sometimes violent and/or destructive, is also a space where existing narratives can be rethought and re-imagined.

Situated at the intersections of queer and postcolonial theories my emphasis on imagining takes it cue from the body of work focusing on the idea of the community and the body as that which is yet to come (Agamben 1993; Ahmed 2000; Shildrick 2002). Sara Ahmed emphasises that in the labour required to get closer to others and, what she calls, other others we can rethink the bodily formation of communities and keep open the notion of responsibility as infinitely incomplete:

> Alliances are not guaranteed by the pre-existing form of a social group or community, where that form is understood as commonality (a community of friends) or uncommonality (a community of strangers). The collective then is not simply about what 'we' have in common – or what 'we' do not have in common. Collectivities are formed through the *very work that we need to do* in order to get closer to others, without simply repeating the appropriation of 'them' as labour, or as a sign of difference (Ahmed 2000: 179 - 180 emphasis in original).

Deferring the boundaries of the community and the taxonomical imposition of commonalities (often identitarian - national, ethnic, sexual or gendered) does not signify a lack of politics. Rather, the political work takes place in the constant imagining (which is both 'real' and imaginary) and in the process of becoming undone in each encounter. That is, as connections are forming they are also always being critiqued, not to undermine their political potential or necessity but rather to avoid the reiteration of violence, insofar as one group's safety and/or norms can often be another's violences. Fundamental to this idea of collectivities always in process, as Butler, Ahmed and Shildrick suggest, is the notion of vulnerability. This is not a rendering of oneself vulnerable when already faced with violence or a "precarious life" (Butler 2004a). It is based in the already existing vulnerability that is at the core of being human. Butler works through this idea in relation to mourning suggesting that there is a fundamental "relationality" and "tie" between 'you' and 'I' (2004a: 22). That is, not only is my sense of 'I' always dependent on 'you' but also that 'I' am always tied to an other in a way that is more than the sum of 'you' and 'I' and more than a simple tie or relationship that can easily be forgotten or got over (or to use Butler's term "mourned"). Butler, as do Ahmed and Shildrick, suggests that this interdependency, which is foundational to being human, challenges the notion that we are separate, independent, self-contained individuals and, thereby, offers the potential to rethink communities as based on this (mutually dependent) vulnerability. In other words, we are always of and for an other whilst not merging indistinguishably into an other. Moreover, this vulnerability keeps in mind a sense of becoming, of always being open to others and affected by them as well as affecting and impacting upon them. Thereby, evoking a sense of (indefinite) responsibility to oneself and each other. Central to this process of

relationality, which is more than a simple tie, is an idea of being beside oneself. Intricately connected to the notion of becoming undone, being beside oneself evokes a critical distance between who one 'is', what one 'does', responsibilities, norms, social and political structures, others, belonging and becoming (Butler 2004b: 19). Being beside oneself, as Butler discusses in *Undoing Gender*, is critical to the process of 'imagining' that I am suggesting is central to queer postcolonialism. Being beside oneself infers that one is being formed by norms and structures but that having a 'life' means one is also forming and, thereby, potentially changing these sometimes overpowering, supportive, violent, encouraging and destructive epistemologies and systems. I do not want to romanticise or undermine the absolute political necessity involved in making a life liveable. Rather I want to suggest that Mootoo's novels offer a way into thinking about and imagining other ways of being and belonging. Furthermore, that this process of imagining, so central to queer and postcolonial studies, is a productive political way to making the world more bearable and liveable.

If I have chosen to stay with the terms queer and postcolonial it is because they border on the imaginary in dealing with representations and the 'real', insofar as they focus on unequal social and political structures.[1] That is, they both incorporate historical events, are situated in history and continue to imagine other ways of writing these histories, the present and that which is yet to come. Moreover, their self-reflexive, critical disciplinary distance is itself a worthwhile and productive methodology (Khanna 2006). If I use queer, it is not as referent but as a signifier with a plurality of meaning. Queer is more than 'having' a sexuality or gender, it is a desire to live a life 'beside' existing structures, not simply or solely for transgression's sake but to create a way of being in the world that allows for non-violent expression, desires and community formations. If I use postcolonial it is in Ahmed's sense of "failed historicity" (Ahmed 2000: 10). That is:

> [P]ost-colonialism is about rethinking *how* colonialism operated in different times in ways that permeate all aspects of social life, in the colonised and colonising nations. It is hence about the complexity of the relationship between the past and present, between the histories of European colonisation and contemporary forms of globalisation. That complexity cannot be reduced by either a notion that the present has broken from the past (a narrative that assumes that decolonisation meant the end of colonialism) or that the present is simply continuous with the past (a narrative that assumes colonialism is a trans-historical phenomenon that is not affected by local contexts or other forms of social change). To this extent, post-coloniality allows us to investigate how colonial encounters are both determining, and yet not fully determining, of social and material existence (Ahmed 2000: 11 emphasis in original).

Whilst the usefulness and profound implications of the term continue, rightfully, to be debated, this attempt to work with colonialism as a structural issue that continues to transform itself and affect us all, on very different levels, strikes me as fundamental to thinking about contemporary social relations and embodiment, as well as to the potential to bring about less violent modes of existence. Furthermore, queer postcolonialism has at its core the desire to imagine other presents and different futures.

Queering Colonialism in *Cereus Blooms at Night*

> […] Since the Africans let go from slavery, all eyes on how the

> government treating them. It have commissions from this place and from that place making sure that the government don't just neglect them. They have schools, they have regular and free medical inspection. Now, you see any schools set up for our children, besides the Reverend's school? When we get sick and we have pains, who looking after us? We looking after our own self, because nobody have time for us. Except the Reverend and his mission from the Shivering Northern Wetlands. All he want from us is that we convert to his religion. If I had children, I would convert! Besides, nobody but you really know which god you praying to. Convert, man! Take the children yourself to the mission school. And when you praying you pray with you eyes and you mouth shut. Simple so. That is all. (Mootoo 1996: 30-31)

> After much reflection I [Tyler] have come to discern that my desire to leave the shores of Lantanacamara had much to do with wanting to study abroad, but far more with wanting to be somewhere where my "perversion," which I tried diligently as I could to shake, might be either invisible or of no consequence to people to whom my foreignness was what would be strange. I was preoccupied with trying to understand what was natural and what perverse, and who said so and why. Chandin Ramchandin played a part in confusing me about these roles, for it was a long time before I could differentiate between his perversion and what others called mine (Mootoo 1996: 51).

Intricately woven in Mootoo's novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* is a tale of desire between Tyler, a queerly feminine man, and Otoh, a female-born man; a history of colonialism, as the children of indentured Indian workers, specifically Chandin Ramchandin, are offered the chance to be educated and leave a life of hard labour; lesbian desire between Mala's mother, Sarah and the Reverend's daughter, Lavinia; a failed marriage between Chandin and Sarah; migration; and a tragic story of Mala's physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her father, Chandin. In the town of Paradise on the fictionalised island of Lantanacamara, Tyler narrates these past events, moving in and out of the past and present, realism, magic realism and fairy tale, as he cares for the now old Mala who, having been acquitted, for lack of evidence, of the murder of her father, now resides at the Paradise Alms House. Reunited with her first true and only love, Ambrose, the father of Otoh, a violent history of sexuality, colonialism, gender and race unfolds as we learn how Mala, Tyler, Otoh and Ambrose attempt to form a sense of non-violent belonging. This living beside norms does not, however, supplant the current system but rather exists within it, challenging it, impacting upon it and, sometimes, changing it. In other words, their hope, metaphorised through the cereus plant, is located in the ways in which violence can be prevented, avoided and, potentially, brought to an end. Pushed by their own sense of unliveability within the heterosexual colonial structures that keep in place the violence to which they and those they love are and have been subject, these character begin to imagine, what I would suggest, is another form of kinship, one that challenges and destabilises the (violent) forms of the heterosexual colonial nation.

The interconnection between the individual and the nation, as well as the power of a national narrative, are emphasised by Berlant in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington*:

> […T]he fantasy of the American Dream is an important one to learn from. A popular form of political optimism, it fuses private fortune with that of the nation: it promises that if you invest your energies in work and family-making, the nation will secure the broader

> social and economic conditions in which your labor can gain value and your life can be lived with dignity. It is a story that addresses the fear of being stuck or reduced to a type, a redemptive story pinning its hope on class mobility. Yet this promise is voiced in the language of unconflicted personhood: to be American, in this view, would be to inhabit a secure space liberated from identities and structures that seem to constrain what a person can do in history. For this paradoxical feeling to persist, such that a citizen of the Dream can feel firmly placed in a zone of protected value while on the move in an arc of social mobility, the vulnerability of personal existence to the instability of capitalism and the concretely unequal forms and norms of national life must be suppressed, minimized, or made to seem exceptional, not general to the population. This sets the stage for a national people imagining itself national only insofar as it feels unmarked by the effects of these national contradictions (Berlant 1997: 4).

The promise of a better life is what takes Chandin on his journey from his parents' history of indentured work to the colonial missionary school in Paradise. The colonial nation offers a similar guarantee to what Berlant suggests America claims to offer its citizens. It is a story of social betterment full of (colonial) promises of not being stuck in class and racial hierarchies, one that demands not only an abandonment of Chandin's family and their beliefs but also a feeling of shame for their, and by inflection his, inferiority, in terms of skin colour, ethnicity and religion. Put simply, this colonial social ladder denies its very own contradictions. Homi Bhabha has described these ambivalences through an analysis of mimicry suggesting that a paradoxical situation emerges in the space between the 'original' and the 'copy':

> […C]olonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference (Bhabha 2004: 122 emphasis in original).

In other words, in never quite being the same, the "recognizable Other" is maintained as always inferior through her or his supposed differences. However, simultaneously, these spaces of "ambivalence" destabilise the authority of colonial rule and, thus, open up the possibility of creating something other than the desired colonial effect and affect. This potentiality is always constrained by various extremely powerful forces, ranging from military to epistemological ones, yet still it offers the possibility of hope for a different (non-violent) present. However, Chandin hopes only to be the same as the Reverend, to be an exact replica and, thereby, to no longer feel shame about his family, origins, 'accent' and skin colour. Feeling like he is on an irreversible and potentially destructive path (Mootoo 1996: 52), he doubts his ability to achieve his status as equal to the white missionaries:

> Chandin seemed to be well liked by the taller, fair, heavily accented men, but he wondered constantly whether it was because he was the Reverend's adopted son and Lavinia's brother [the Reverend's biological daughter], or because he was of the race that it was their mission to Christianize. He scrutinized every aspect of these men. Most were his age yet seemed so much more worldly. He copied their manners and dressed like them in the white shirts and trousers the Wetlanders considered the height of tropical fashion. He would turn their accented phrases over and over in his mind until he was brave

> enough to air them [...] (Mootoo 1996: 41).

Constrained by an education, a religion, an 'adoptive' missionary family and a class and racially hierarchical national ideology, Chandin does not and cannot take a critical distance that could bring about an undoing of his shame. Furthermore, his hopes of being the same as the white men, fully human and equal, are shattered after the Reverend tells him he must not have sexual feelings for Lavinia as she is his sister and then later reveals that she is to marry her cousin, Fenton:

> Yes, Chandin. I was sure that you would mention it. He is not truly her cousin. You see, my brother married a woman who had been married once before and brought with her a child – Fenton. My brother was good enough, wouldn't you say, to bring him up as his own child, give him his name and all of that sort of thing...but as you can see he is not a true relation. He is a marvellous gentleman by every standard, and on maturing he is slated to inherit a rather large estate from his blood father. He is a medical student (Mootoo 1996: 48).

Chandin can only scream "in the silent space of his own head" that he and Lavinia "were not siblings" (42). This news confirms for the reader (and possibly Chandin) that the prohibition of his sexual desires was not about incest. Unable to articulate to Chandin that a man with brown skin cannot desire a white woman, especially not his daughter, and presumably unwilling to acknowledge his own racism and classism, the Reverend here imposes and reiterates lines of colonial (sexual) acceptability. That is, the necessity for his daughter to legitimise herself and her family as respectable colonial missionaries by marrying a man with white skin, a 'foreign' education and a large inheritance. To alleviate his shame of not being a man, a full subject, in this colonial sense, Chandin decides, exerting power where he can, he will marry "a woman from his background", Sarah, also educated at the missionary school (49).

The tragic events that ensue where Mala is beaten and raped by her father until, as an adult, she finally murders him, suggest not a cause and effect situation, that men under colonial rule are disempowered and therefore must exert their power over more vulnerable persons such as their wives and children, as some critics seem to suggest, but a web more difficult to untangle. The novel moves between the structures that allow, encourage and even provoke violent behaviour in 'private', whilst 'publicly' opposing and condemning such actions, and the individual responsibility Chandin has in treating Mala so horrifically cruel as he believes she is his "property" (238) and, thus, should act as a substitute "wife" (213) – someone to cook, clean and fuck. What I am suggesting is that the institutions themselves not only potentially cause violence but more critically that the violent outcomes, such as familial abuse, are central to the structures. To return to the quote earlier from Berlant, the colonial nation denies the very paradoxes that are part of its constitution. To expand on this, Chandin reiterates his teachings from the Reverend not only by converting many Indians from Hinduism to Christianity but also by attempting to shame at least his family into being more like the white missionaries. He exercises the colonial system's desires of rendering 'Indian' others, namely his family, into "recognizable Other[s]". If his violence towards his daughters is against the doctrine of the Christian mission, it reads more as a step necessary in the maintenance of colonial ideology where Others are always different and, therefore, always inferior. His violence is in keeping with the colonial mission

and his agency is exerted through his belief in this endeavour. Revealed through his violence is a desire to maintain the colonial system and its values, as well as the contradictions of institutions, such as the church, family and nation, that publicly condemn the individual who performs such abhorrent acts, supposedly because they are against the institutions' doctrines which are, paradoxically, actively producing notions of the "recognizable Other".

Whilst Chandin desires the full dream of missionary life without its violent contradictions, his wife, daughters, the next generation (of queers) and those affected by these characters imagine something else, the possibility of non-violent lives. In so doing they begin to challenge the colonial system's status as the only imaginable future. Lavinia uses her inheritance money so that she, Sarah and the latter's daughters, Mala and Asha, can create a liveable life together. The women's queer interracial desires are represented as impossible within the colonial structure of Lantanacamara and, thus, they decide to migrate in a hope of coming together as a "family" (63). Although Sarah and Lavinia flee successfully, Chandin intercepts their departure blocking the children's exit. In spite of the couple's invisibility, we hear very little of them in the rest of the novel, the inherently heterosexual colonial system that forbids cross-ethnic relationships is impacted upon as their migration has wide reverberations. The most tragic events that occur after are undoubtedly the violence to which the two daughters, but mainly Mala, are subject. However, I want to suggest that Sarah and Lavinia's attempt to imagine a life beside that of the colonial missionaries' creates the possibility of more liveable lives for their own and, significantly, the next generations.

The erraticness and wildness of Lavinia and Sarah's coming together, in contrast to that of their parents', offers the possibility of visualising a sense of belonging differently to the violent colonial one that is being perpetuated. This potentiality is critical to Asha fleeing her father's violence through migration, to Mala killing her father, to Tyler taking a critical stance between his own "perversion" and Chandin's and to Otoh refusing to live a life of deep sleep like that of his father, Ambrose.[2] Otoh, a simulacrum of his father, is in search of knowledge of why his father sleeps only to wake up once a month to transport food parcels to his first and only love, Mala. Otoh is a copy with a difference, a haunting memory of his father, who brings the past into the present with a bang as he, dressed in Ambrose's clothes, attempts to see Mala and she, believing him to be Ambrose, shows him the dead body of her father. Not only does Otoh awake Mala's memories of the day Ambrose originally fled her house as the latter doubted whether she had been "agreeable to intimacies with her father" (246) but he provokes Ambrose into action, which eventually leads to his wife leaving him and him being reunited with Mala. Otoh's haunting embodiment is encapsulated by his father, who says:

> I remember now, son. You are indeed a reincarnation but not of a person per se, merely of a forgotten memory. You are a perfect replica of me in my prime. I have never seen you look so stunningly like myself before (Mootoo 1996: 155).

It is through this stepping into a past that is of the present that Otoh, different to his father, unleashes the "business of an ugly, lurking phantom" (183). Trespassing into Mala's house and psychically into her and Ambrose's deeply buried traumatic memories, Otoh breaks the binding spell that has kept the two apart. The system that condemns Mala, for possibly being agreeable to her

father's abuses, and, excuses Chandin, for "what man would not suffer a rage akin to insanity" under such circumstances (211), is challenged when Otoh, who has already crossed colonial lines of acceptability through his gender transitioning, crosses into Mala's space causing mayhem leading to her being taken to the alms house, her house burning down and her case being dismissed by Judge Walter Bissey for lack of a "victim", "witnesses" and "crime" (8). Otoh's unreasonable and illogical desire to meet Mala, to reveal his own sense of "differentness", transforms his own life as well as that of Ambrose, Tyler and Mala. His actions highlight both the transformative potential of individual encounters and the randomness and unpredictability of ways of coming together with others.

Mala, Otoh, Tyler and Ambrose, come together through a "shared […] common reception from the rest of the world" (21) and a "shared queerness" (52). To return to Butler, coming into play is a sense of mutual vulnerability that emerges from the absolute necessity to avoid the systemic and individual violences to which they have been subject and/or to which they have, at times, contributed to keeping in place. This vulnerability allows Tyler to finally express his "queer femininity" (Gopinath 2005: 185) openly and without shame, Ambrose to lose his sense of shame in having doubted Mala and, thereby, to stay awake, Otoh to express his queer desires towards, and have them returned by, Tyler and Mala to express and have heard her always incomplete life story. It is not a space where a commonality is assumed or taken for granted but rather a hopeful space that exists within the cycle of destruction and renewal, symbolised through the soon to blossom cereus plant. Their non-violent space of belonging is always becoming as they continue to search for Mala's sister in a hope of being reunited. In other words, the boundaries are always in motion, under construction and open to redefinition, and most central is a desire to avoid the reiteration of violence, whilst potentially challenging existing individual and structural violences.

Climbing the Social Ladder of Respectability in *He Drown She in the Sea*

> They, the dark-skinned island people, he [Harry] said, squinting mischievously at her [Kay], had been too wounded by centuries of Old World greed and exploitation to unbegrudgingly partake of its stuffy fare, the result of which was that he and his ex-taxi-driver friends agreed to drink only the less expensive but lighthearted wines of Chile and Argentina, those of Australia, since it was, after all, a commonwealth country and, one way or the other, their consumption would benefit the aboriginal population. They conceded, Harry added, to support the British Columbia wine industry, and still drank Californian wines because they were all in agreement that much of the labor propping up that industry was immigrant, and it was the support of the immigrant – not the consideration of taste – that was of significance to them (Mootoo 2005: 35).

Thus far I have focused on the impact of queer postcolonial practices, crossings and transitions on inherently heterosexual colonial structures and relations. In *Cereus*, the queer migratory acts that provoked and brought about change and allowed the characters to imagine something else beside the existing system are mainly those of the lovers Sarah and Lavinia and Tyler and Otoh. In this section I suggest that Mootoo's second novel, *He Drown She in the Sea*, articulates more fully a sense of queer postcoloniality as the everyday possibilities of living with and in life's

negative and positive paradoxes. In this sense, *He Drown She in the Sea* suggests that living with the inconsistencies and incoherencies of a national, sexualised life, the living of an improper national life, is in itself one productive way of imagining and creating other ways of belonging and, potentially, of transforming systemic and individual violences.

Through the insecurities and contradictions of class, skin colour, gender, ethnicity, national boundaries, colonial rule and sexuality Mootoo presents Harry, a man of Indian descent, by luck, chance and hard work climbing a transnational social ladder. However, this is not simply a story of one unlikely man becoming wealthier, which he does, but a struggle to understand the structures which confine him to the mantra that runs through the novel: "Once a servant son, always a servant son" (Mootoo 2005: 205). Unravelled through Harry's impossible cross-class desires for Rose, who is also of Indian origin but from a 'superior' class, is a subtlety of violence that keeps not only those of African origin on the fictionalised Caribbean island of Guanagaspar as the most inferior and poor, but also divides those of Indian descent into those who have made money out of indentured servitude and are now able to employ their own servants and those who remain servants. Harry's desires largely represent a microcosmic view of the island's increasing unrest and desire for change, yet unlike *Cereus*, the dissatisfactions and transformations do not stop at a set of individuals but simmer into a more widespread violent potentiality that could result in a national upheaval of existing class and racial structures. As in *Cereus*, the haunting queer presence central to individual and wider transformations is represented through a queer migratory figure, in this case Rose's daughter Cassie. The transformative potentiality that I am suggesting is central to queer postcoloniality emerges at the intersections of Cassie's queer subjectivity and historical and contemporary migratory enforcements, possibilities and necessities.

Quickly moving away from the nightmaresque scenario with which the novel opens, we are introduced to Harry's immigrant life in British Columbia. Interspersed with his memories of colonial Guanagaspar, his mother and Rose are his, often amusingly narrated, experiences of class and racial prejudices in Canada. Rising from the status of the servant's son to fairly wealthy, house-on-the-sea owning, landscape gardener, Harry, in this simple description, epitomises what has become largely known as the American Dream. However, this cosmetic view disguises his and his "ex-taxi-driver" friends' experiences of climbing a social ladder that reiterates the sometimes painful sometimes amusing idea that "[…] no matter what else we achieve, always, in the eyes of many, [we] remain taxi drivers. Once a taxi driver, always a taxi driver" (285). Thereby reinforcing that whilst he may have moved beside the Guanagasparian class system he is still caught in Canada's. Their "Once a Taxi Driver Wine-Tasting and General Tomfoolery Club" (35) encapsulates their immigrant experiences of living a contradictory national life. In other words, they refuse, in an always tongue-in-cheek but potentially transformative way, to be constrained by an already existing image of "dark-skinned" people as ignorant of wine. As flawed and amusing as this philosophy is, and they recognise this themselves, Harry and his friends re-imagine wines as flavoured less with European grapes and more with "mango", "coconut", "vindaloo" and "garlic" (35). I would therefore suggest that what is going on here is less a reproduction of a "recognizable Other", as Bhabha suggests takes place in the process of colonial

mimicry, and more a destabilisation of what "Others" might, can and/or are constrained to 'do' and/or 'act like'. This is not a copying that desires to be read as white or as upholding Europeanness but a politically critical move that questions what taste is and who can have it. Importantly, it opens up the way for 'acting' differently in a socially and economically unequal global. It opens up a possibility for Harry and his friends to imagine themselves and their futures otherwise, as well as for others to reconfigure their perceptions of migrants in Canada. In other words, they are questioning their own norms and values, eventually rethinking their own philosophy so as to "give the Europeans a second chance" (65), and thus repositioning themselves in a site of political power, impacting upon what can be and what is imaginable.

Moreover, their coming together is based not on their ethnic or national allegiances but rather, I would suggest, on a sense of vulnerability that emerges through their experiences of migration, class, skin colour and ethnicity. Their coming together is based around an ability to be vulnerable in the face of an other and to have that vulnerability recognised, not as an appropriation of feelings where they would claim to be able to understand what the other feels but rather in a willingness to step beside their own understanding of life, have it challenged and reconfigured and, thereby, possibly, make space for more liveable lives. These ways of being communally occur each time they meet, as they critically and humorously reflect on redefining and re-articulating the possibilities and complexities of climbing a transnational and local social ladder, of living a life where home is always under construction and of drinking wine made within an economy that keeps "the darkies of the world – in what was supposed to be their rightful place: that of backwardness" (33).

This coming together of "ex-taxi-driver" "immigrant" friends is an active production of the nation; it suggests the nation is under formation through intimate connections other than that of the family structure. Indeed, Harry's friends represent experiences of coming together and class and racial prejudices and histories that the nation actively disavows. Berlant captures this process in *Intimacy*:

> For intimacy refers to more than that which takes place within the purview of institutions, the state, and an ideal of publicness. What if we saw it emerge from much more mobile processes of attachment? While the fantasies associated with intimacy usually end up occupying the space of convention, in practice the drive toward it is a kind of wild thing that is not necessarily organized that way, or any way. It can be portable, unattached to a concrete space: a drive that creates spaces around it through practices. The kinds of connections that *impact* on people, and on which they depend for living (if not "a life"), do not always respect the predictable forms: nations […]. These spaces are produced relationally; people and/in institutions can return repeatedly to them and produce *something*, though frequently not history in its ordinary, memorable, or valorized sense, and not always "something" of positive value (Berlant 2000: 4-5 emphasis in original).

Berlant is suggesting that spaces are constantly being forged through practices as much as spaces are repeatedly producing practices. She also intimates that the fantasies available to us do not determine, even if they hold great sway, how we come together and, indeed, that the process of encountering others can transform our ability to imagine yet other ways of coming together. Through this sense of space in process, where relationships create spaces as much as spaces

forge relationships, we begin to see in *He Drown She in the Sea* potentially revolutionary relationalities emerging from and impacting upon individuals and the island as a whole. This novel suggests that notions of the family are always formed in much more erratic ways than in the ideal representations of national (colonial) discourse.

Harry is the son of Seudath and Dolly, both of Indian heritage and, thus, descendants of indentured workers. Dolly is thrown out of her house by her brother and mother, as they learn she is pregnant by the man she loves dearly. Seudath, the "strange more-African-than-Indian Indian" (94), was abandoned as a baby, presumably by a young woman who, like Dolly, did not want to bring shame on her family, and raised in a village populated by people of African descent. His origins, heritage and memories are formed through the intimate attachments forged with the villagers, namely his main carer figures Tante Eugenie and Uncle Mako. Their life together, brought to a quick end as Seudath dies whilst out fishing at sea, starts again, not anew, through a sense of breaking with a past whilst trying to remember what has passed. In other words, they imitate the family structure, man, woman, child and marriage, however, their ties are formed not through blood or ethnicity but through, what I would suggest is, a desire to not reiterate past violences. Here, I am referring to a desire to produce a structure beside that of the expected (normal) heterosexual and ethnic 'family', a structure that may look similar but actively refuses the constraints required to live up to the ideals. The repudiation of the system's violences, such as shaming and clear distinctions between those of Indian and those of African heritage, is not simply one couple's attempt to secure their own happiness but social and political acts with much wider reverberations. Although not immediately related to Harry but directly associated with the impact an Indian living in an African community has, the younger generation of Guanagasparian Indians and Africans are beginning to unite through unions to fight against their existing unequal racial and class systems. Indeed, I would argue that Dolly's decision to marry Persad Bhatt, a gas-station owning Indian, is to give her son the possibility of going to school and of moving away from a life of dangerous fishing. Both Persad and Dolly dream of a different type of life for the next generation and, in this sense, they do not simply want the American Dream but imagine something different emerging from the fissures and cracks of the heterosexual colonial nation. That is, this imagining, especially for Harry, comes not only through acts of migration but also through a heritage, familial, national and ethnic, that exists in the paradoxes that the nation disavows:

> As he and the boy [Harry] worked the green net cord, heavy in the boy's easily bruised hands, Uncle Mako would babble on about a family waiting for him across the sea. When Tante Eugenie was far enough away, for she'd had enough of his daydreaming and prattling about faraway family, he pointed his finger here and there toward where a country called Africa might or might not be. He told the boy that Africa was really the home of his ancestors, from where he was taken against his will, but the boy couldn't understand this. It was a story Uncle Mako himself could not make sense of, let alone explain to a little boy. He said only that he planned one day to return there. […] The little boy would squint at the horizon, willing to see anything faint that might suggest Uncle Mako was right (Mootoo 2005: 182).

The impossibility of Uncle Mako's return is reiterated by Tante Eugenie's annoyance that most villagers have little idea where Africa is, from what

part of Africa their families were brought and if they have any living relatives in Africa. Yet, his "dreaming across the sea"[3] is mimicked by Harry both through his migration to Canada, in order to flee the increasing violence on the island, and his escape via the sea, at the end of the novel, with Rose. Dreaming across the sea is about a desire for knowledge, a search for what has happened and a willingness to imagine that change is possible, even within a system that allows for little change.

Whilst we learn that Harry's decision to migrate to Canada is taken as his life as an Indian gas-station owner becomes increasingly precarious and, amusingly, because the queue for the Canadian High Commission was shorter than that of the American embassy (261) Rose's life, like the class and racial system, remains static. The overpowering sense of immovability of both the social structures and her life are captured in the repeated mantras of the novel ("Once a servant son, always a servant son" (205) and "Once a taxi driver, always a taxi driver" (285)) and through the replication of events from one generation to the next. *He Drown She in the Sea* opens with a scene that is reproduced at a later point in the novel but which is actually taking place at an earlier chronological point. In the first scene, Rose is narrating her recent encounter with Harry, whilst visiting her daughter Cassie in Canada, to her most intimate companion, her "servant", Piyari. The exact mirroring of this event occurs when we later learn that the most intimate person in Rose's mother's life was her "servant", Harry's mother, Dolly. The replication of chronologically earlier events at later points in the novel, and there are many more examples, serves to stress the inevitability of Rose's life, as well as the burdensome timeless weight of the seemingly immovable class structure in Guanagaspar. Yet changes are occurring all around building up to Rose's planning of her own drowning, so as to escape with Harry, and to a possible violent revolution.

Gayatri Gopinath (2005) puts forth the idea that a queer diaspora, or what I would call queer postcoloniality, "recognizes the past as a site of intense violence as well as pleasure; it acknowledges the spaces of impossibility within the nation and their translation within the diaspora into new logics of affiliation" (186). This possibility of "new logics of affiliation" becomes apparent for Rose after visiting her queer daughter now living in Canada. Rose visualises in concrete terms, by moving beside the Guanagasparian system, both in terms of heterosexual and class norms, that class, sexual and racial hierarchies exist differently in other spaces. It is this possibility of being beside herself and the structures within which she has lived that allows Rose the possibility of imagining a life different to that of her husband Shem and their parents; a life that will have reverberations on other lives. Furthermore, it is Cassie who brings Harry back to Guanagaspar in an attempt to understand how her mother, an excellent swimmer, could have drowned in the sea. It is highly symbolic that Rose organises her own (fake) drowning, thereby killing off her own prejudicial class beliefs that she could not marry Harry because he was the servant's son. On a societal level, Rose embodies the changes that are occurring on the island as Indian and African Guanagasparians unite to fight for "the country they knew as their one and only home" (260) and thus for another (less systemically violent) way of being communally. If dreaming across the sea is a metaphor for imagining a life beside existing systems and thereby attempting to transform them, the dream with which the novel ends is an attempt to actualise this through Rose and Harry's cross-class desires. In spite of Uncle Mako never having made his journey to the

haunting space of Africa it is on his pirogue that they leave the island in order to begin an uncertain and unpredictable life together. The doubts about whether they will survive their journey are expressed as the two, through a dream-like representation, are about to be hit by two crashing waves and as Tante Eugenie recalls that Harry's own father drowned at sea. After surviving the impact of the waves and what we may want to suggest is symbolically the class system of Guanagaspar, we are left with a sense of hope that all is about to change, and the outcome, whether positive or negative, is unknown. What we do know is that change is about to happen as the next generation struggle to overcome the class and racial prejudices through unionised violence and as Harry and Rose out on a changeable and unpredictable sea "hope that here they are finally free" (319).

Making more and more lives liveable through fictional imaginings is a politically imperative process. Butler captures this necessity when she states, "The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality" (2004b: 29). Mootoo's novels suggest an urgent need to bring about systemic and individual changes, as well as emphasising the importance of narrating other versions of belongings. Existing outside of an intelligible code can provoke, cause and bring about physical and epistemological violences. *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *He Drown She in the Sea* render intelligible migrations, bodies, histories and experiences that fall outside of contained, linear and coherent familial, national and colonial discourses. These 'exceptional' lives, insofar as they exist in the cracks and fissures of a heterosexually demanding colonial nation, challenge the images and representations of the nation and the family as protective and safe. Instead, we see these very institutions producing violences that they publicly condemn. In these contradictions we begin to see that perhaps other ways of existing and coming together have the potential to avoid such violences. However, this process of challenging norms in order to expand their definitions in a hope of making life more bearable for more is not a simple process. As Margrit Shildrick argues, "it is only by reconfiguring thought that we can move on to potentially more creative modes of becoming in ourselves and of encountering others, whatever form those others might take" (2002: 8). This constant process of always becoming and, hence, existing within a state of human vulnerability that is non-violent is but one hopeful way in which queer postcolonialism attempts to imagine different presents and other futures.

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Notes

[1] This distinction, I would argue, is extremely blurred insofar as representations are what constitute our understanding of and our actions in society. There are, evidently, events and experiences that we experience as real and not fantastical. However, these occurrences and embodiments are formed through representations rather than existing in some realm of the real, understood as unaffected by and even outside of representations and/or fantasy.

[2] Mala's inaction is part of the systemic shame in which Chandin is bound. She believes him to be her responsibility and that she must respond to his needs. I do not have the space here to explore the ways in which Mala reiterates the same system by remaining faithful to her father and challenges it by, both, refusing to let her sister be hurt and, eventually, killing him. Gopinath explores how Mala creates an alternative space for herself outside the family home in her garden, thereby already challenging the colonial structure of Indian female sexuality and subjectivity.

[3] See http://www.writerscafe.ca/book_blogs/writers/shani-mootoo_he-drown-she-in-the-sea.php (accessed 14/07/2006).