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Compulsory heterosexuality and Caribbean queer identities: an investigation of Achy Obejas's *Memory Mambo* and Shani Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter*

Rio de Janeiro

2015

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

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To Grandma, for the endless protection

To my Aunt Rosangela for the strong friendship

To mom for the unconditional love

To Tamyris for accepting me for who I am

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RESUMO

PIRES, Raquel Gonçalves. *Compulsory heterosexuality and Caribbean queer identities*: an investigation of Achy Obejas's Memory mambo and Shani Mootoo's Valmiki's daughter. 2015. 88 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2015.

Esta dissertação pretende investigar de que forma idéias construídas socialmente impõem a heterossexualidade e afetam indivíduos não heterosexuais das ilhas Caribenhas, conforme ilustrado nos romances *Memory Mambo*, da Cubana-Americana Achy Obejas e *Valmiki's Daughters,* da Trinitária-Canadense Shani Mootoo. Este trabalho se concentra na análise de políticas sexuais ligadas à homossexualidade tanto nas ilhas do Caribe quanto nos Estados Unidos da América. Em *Memory Mambo,* a protagonista Juani Casas deseja entender como sua condição de exilada cubana molda sua identidade sexual e como seu lesbianismo afeta seus relacionamentos familiares e amorosos. Reconstruindo sua história através de uma memória não confiável, Juani procura descobrir como sua sexualidade e sua nacionalidade estão ligadas, para que ela possa conciliar as duas. Em *Valmiki's Daughter*, Viveka Krishnu e seu pai Valmiki Krishnu tentam esconder seus verdadeiros desejos por causa dos comportamentos supostamente corretos que foram designados tanto para homens quanto para mulheres em Trinidad, e mais especificamente na sociedade indo-caribenha. Pai e filha sofrem com a opressão e tentam não se tornarem vítimas de homofobia constante, ele escondendo sua sexualidade e ela deixando a ilha. Assim, através da representação literária, Obejas e Mootoo participam de uma discussão necessária sobre as consequencias das políticas sexuais na construção identitária de Caribenhos que vivem nas ilhas ou em destinos diaspóricos.

Palavras-chave: Heterosexualidade compulsória. Identidade. Exílio. Opressão. Homofobia.

ABSTRACT

PIRES, Raquel Gonçalves. *Compulsory heterosexuality and Caribbean queer identities*: an investigation of Achy Obejas's Memory mambo and Shani Mootoo's Valmiki's daughter. 2015. 88 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2015.

This thesis intends to examine how socially constructed ideas of compulsory heterosexuality affect non-conforming individuals from the Caribbean, as illustrated in the novels *Memory Mambo* by Cuban-American Achy Obejas and *Valmiki's Daughter* by Trinidadian-Canadian Shani Mootoo's. This work primarily focuses on the analysis of sexual politics concerning homosexuality both in the islands of the Caribbean and in the United States of America. In *Memory Mambo* protagonist Juani Casas wishes to understand how her condition of Cuban exile has shaped her sexual identity and how her lesbianism affects her relationships with family members and lovers. Reconstructing her story by means of an unreliable memory, Juani attempts to discover the deep connection between her sexuality and her nationality so that she can make sense of both. In *Valmiki's Daughter,* Viveka Krishnu and her father Valmiki Krishnu try to conceal their true desires because of so-called correct behavior prescribed for both men and women in Trinidad, and more specifically in a Hindu-Caribbean society. Father and daughter suffer from oppression and try not to be victims of constant homophobia by either hiding their sexuality or fleeing the island. Thus, through literary representation, both Obejas and Mootoo engage in a much-needed discussion about the consequences of sexual politics in the identity construction of Caribbean individuals living on the islands or in diasporic destinies.

Keywords: Compulsory heterosexuality. Identity. Exile. Oppression. Homophobia.

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

After the civil rights movements in the second half of the 20th century, and with mass migrations and the advent of globalization, discussions concerning personal and community identities have proliferated in the academy. The postmodern culture, as Linda Hutcheon mentions, "has a contradictory relationship to what we usually label our dominant, liberal humanist culture. It does not deny it, as some have asserted […] it contests it from within its own assumptions" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.6). Postmodern studies, then, primarily focus on deconstructing hierarchies that have previously been seen as natural. Those hierarchies were based on binary ideas of difference that placed so-called natural classes in opposite, unbalanced sites. Binaries such as male/female, white/black, global/local, straight/gay, and many others, have been constantly imposed by the ones in power in order to justify the historical oppression suffered by minorities as an inevitability of nature. However, "there are no natural hierarchies […], only those we construct" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.6), and in order to understand, and eventually dismantle, these constructions, there needs to be a discussion on the varied impositions that contributed to form them in the first place.

Postcolonial studies addresses the historic oppression suffered by those who were colonized by the greatest empires at the Age of Discovery, by European invasion of African and Asian territories in the 19th century and by the current imperial supremacy of the United States and a few European countries. Many of the colonized countries were able to claim their political independence but still suffer from economic domination, while others are still under the political sovereignty of hegemonic countries. Also, colonial oppression may arise not only from previous territorial conquests but also from economic impositions enforced by those in power. Consequences of colonialism are still brutally felt by those who have experienced it and those who still live it, and play an important part on the configuration of the globalized world of today.

As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin explain in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*,

> Post-colonialism/postcolonialism is now used in wide and diverse ways to include the study and analysis of European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialism, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre-and-post-independence nations and communities (ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2007, p.169)

Feminist studies examine the relations of power between men and women, and how this relation is constantly cultivated as a way of justifying male supremacy. In “Feminism in/and Postcolonialism”, Deepika Bahri states that “feminist criticism emphasizes the significance of gender issues in history, politics, and culture”. Moreover, “feminism examines the relationships between men and women and the consequences of power differentials for the economic, social, and cultural status of women (and men) in different locations and periods of history” (BAHRI, 2008, p.200).

Queer studies deal with sexual oppression; it analyses how heterosexuality has been imposed, and how the normative rules of sexuality affect individuals that do not conform with these rules. Tamsin Spargo, in an analysis of Foucault’s work entitled *Foucault and Queer Theory*, remarks that “queer theory is not a singular conceptual or methodological framework, but a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender, and sexual desire” (SPARGO, 1999, p.9). Queer theory attempts to reclaim the right for sexual diversity by analyzing how sexual categories have been produced within the patriarchal power matrix.

In this dissertation I will attempt to show how postcolonialism, sexism, and homophobia leave their marks on individuals, insofar as those oppressions act as forces that shape identity construction. I will use two novels by Caribbean women, Cuban-American Achy Obejas’s *Memory Mambo,* published in 1996, and Trinidadian-Canadian Shani Mootoo’s *Valmiki’s Daughter,* published in 2008. I believe that both novels provide accurate literary representations that expose how multiple oppressions affect the way individuals see themselves and are seen inside a cultural framework based on compulsory heterosexuality. By extension, these novels also highlight how minority communities are perceived by mainstream society.

Much like Alison Donnell, when talking about her decision to work with Caribbean literature, “I am aware that my choice to research Caribbean literature was informed by my belief that our connections to others can be based upon a self-critical understanding of difference that need not rely on any essential sameness nor deny the significance of differences” (DONNELL, 2006, p.2). Therefore, though I was not born in the region and so far had not had the opportunity to visit any of the islands, my choice to work with Caribbean literature is consequence of how I was personally affected by relations of power connected to gender and sexuality that surrounded me from a very young age and that I was able to see represented in many novels by Caribbean women.

Born in a middle-class white family, I could easily enjoy privileges I know are restricted to my social class. As a child, I never suffered from any kind of physical or

psychological violence, and I could have walked the path of life very calmly without questioning my position inside my society, or how this society is sometimes malicious and cruel. What has always marked me, however, was an inner feeling of non-belonging. Even with all the love and support from my family, I have always seen myself as different, as if I were watching them from outside, a spectator of my own life story.

I do not wish to compare myself to the master mind of Gloria Anzaldúa in any way, I know that her struggles were much more difficult than mine and my intellectual capacity can never be equated to her genius, but her words are the ones that echo in my mind when I try to describe myself. As Anzaldúa states in *Borderlands/La Frontera,* while discussing her role as a woman in a Chicano family, "at a very young age I had a strong sense of who I was and what I was about and what was fair. I had a stubborn will. It tried constantly to mobilize my soul under my own regime, to live life on my own terms no matter how unsuitable to others they were" (ANZALDÚA, 1987, p.16). My stubborn, at times uncompromising temperament led others to classify me as the "difficult" child and later as a rebellious teenager, the one with the explosive temper, who was never willing to listen or to respect opinions I did not agree with. I often wonder if they would think the same thing if I had been born a boy.

My position as a woman determined how others would see me both inside my family and within my community, but most importantly, it dictated how I wanted to be seen, or simply, who I wanted to be. As Simone de Beauvoir states, "every time [a woman] behaves like a human being, she is declared to identify with the male" (BEAUVOIR, 2011, p.420), but identification with the male was never one of my wishes. On the contrary, female association was always a source of strength, a way of grounding, and recognizing myself through someone else. Yet, when I realized that female company and, what is more, same-sex relationship, were what I truly desired, the feeling of otherness that already involved me was enhanced by this "weird" sexuality. Much like Adrienne Rich, as she declares in "Compulsory Sexuality and Lesbian Existence", I believe that "woman identification is a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power, curtailed and contained under the institution of heterosexuality" (RICH, 1996, p.139). This source of energy was hidden from me by the silence surrounding female relationships. I did not see others that, like me, enjoyed female intimacy not only as a way to talk about their men, but as a way of fully enjoying each other's company.

Art is a form of representation. And it was only through art that I first saw others like me, that I realized my existence was not deviant, sick or unnatural. Literature has certainly been the most powerful influence in my life, and it has led me to discover places in which I

could belong, ways through which I could see myself portrayed. When someone asks me why I decided to work with literature, I think about Juani, Obejas's protagonist, and her answer as to why she wishes to visit Cuba. She says that her decision came from a need "for belonging. […] To get away" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.235), and I realize that her answer is no different from my own. Both Juani and Viveka, Mootoo's protagonist, are young women pursuing their destinies, while trying to figure out their identity inside societies marked by patriarchy and sexism.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler mentions that "[i]t would be wrong to think that the discussion of 'identity' ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that 'persons' only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (BUTLER, 1999, p.22). That is, people are only understood from the moment that the gender binary of male/female is imagined upon their body and they get to be categorized as either a man or a woman. Still, when dealing with female characters that suffer the consequences of diverse types of colonization, it is important to remember that not only their gender will be important in their identity formation, but also how colonialism has affected their female subjectivity. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" that,

> Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced configuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization (SPIVAK, 1988, p. 102)

Studies on gender, then, need to be related to studies on postcolonialism to analyze not only the patriarchal oppression suffered by the female body, but the colonial domination suffered by the female body in the homeland. *Memory Mambo* and *Valmiki's Daughter* are vibrant novels that lead to intense analyses. I do intend to work with both novels again in the future, but for the time being, my focus will primarily be in relation to how gender and sexuality work inside a postcolonial framework. Some important discussion could be developed in relation to memory and diaspora in both novels, but these will be secondary topics in this research, serving only the purpose of explaining how both memory and diaspora affect the sexual identity of the characters.

In the first chapter, I intend to delineate the development of feminist and gender theories, by reflecting on arguments developed by renowned scholars that have worked with these issues. Simone de Beauvoir, Monique Wittig, Adrienne Rich, and Judith Butler are some of the critics I have included in my discussion in order to explain the workings of

gender politics in today's society. Moreover, I will dwell on how gender studies have been confined to the realm of American and European scholars, and only recently have been developed by Caribbean critics. My claim is not that Caribbeans were not interested in how gender affects identity or that gender and sexuality should be a secondary concern since they are still dealing with colonial consequences. On the contrary, I believe that many Caribbean scholars have tried to engage in discussions that could encompass gender, sexuality, and postcoloniality. However, they were denied the possibility of doing so by their own peers, some of whom believed that sexuality really was less important than nationality, and by the lack of representation affecting those who wished to engage in such studies.

In the second chapter I will focus on Achy Obejas's *Memory Mambo.* I believe the novel clearly portrays the lives of a group of Cuban exiles after the 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro, but the main analysis will be on how exilic life and the revolution itself affected the gender systems that govern the lives of Cubans both inside the United States and back on the island. Memory, as the title suggests, plays a primordial role in this process of identity development, especially for protagonist Juani Casas, and will be analyzed as a medium for understanding this identity. By placing the lesbian body inside a nationalistic background, Obejas problematizes through her fiction issues that are relevant for many individuals who are told their sexuality is incompatible with their nationality, but still struggle to have both their national identity and their sexuality recognized as inseparable parts of themselves.

Moreover, due to the great amount of violence perpetrated by Juani's cousin Jimmy, I will analyze how Obejas deals with stereotypes of Cuban males and how patriarchal oppression may arise in different forms and may be perceived in different ways.

In the third chapter, I will discuss Shani Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter.* Differently from Obejas's novel, set in the U.S.A., Mootoo's story takes place inside the Caribbean island of Trinidad. Class and ethnicity play an important part in the constructions of the characters and can either facilitate or interfere with their understanding of their identities inside a postcolonial background. I will analyze how constructed categories of gender and class affect these individuals inside a Third-world country, and limit their mobility and expression in relation to their sexuality. Two major characters, Viveka Krishnu and Valmiki Krishnu, will be the main focus of my discussion, since both father and daughter suffer the distressing consequences of imposed compulsory heterosexuality. As Hindu-Trinidadians living in Trinidad, both of them elicit a range of questions that can be discussed as a way of understanding sexual politics on the island. Though my main objective with this work is to discuss female homosexuality, Valmiki's closeted homosexuality offers a major opportunity

to look into the effects of patriarchal oppression on upper-class males who do not conform to the norms of compulsory heterosexuality, so I will briefly discuss his position as a homosexual man living on the Caribbean.

I understand that imperialism leaves different marks in different communities, and that the structure of this system changes from time to time and from place to place. I do not wish to equate the experience of a Cuban-American living in the United States with the one of a Trinidadian of Hindu origins living in the Caribbean. Even though both protagonists are *queer*, in the sense that they do not follow the heteronormative rule, they have their own particularities that need to be recognized. However, I believe that "to suggest that it is impossible to determine a widespread common elements within these local particularities, […] seems equally inadequate as a basis for any but the most limited accounts" (ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2007, p.172), so I will conclude my work by making a brief comparison of the experiences of these characters and their ways of interpreting their identities.

1 **UNSPEAKABLE SEXUALITIES: SEXUAL POLITICS AND THE CARIBBEAN ISLANDS**

> Deviance is whatever is condemned by the community. Most societies try to get rid of their deviants. Most cultures have burned and beaten their homosexuals and other who deviate from the sexual common. The queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe's fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore sub-human, in-human, non-human (ANZALDÚA, 1987, p.18)

Judit Takacs, Hungarian sociologist and current researcher at the Hungarian Academy of Science, published in 2004 the paper "The Double Life of Kertbeny", in which she discusses the life of the man who crafted the word homosexual and the influence his invention has had to discussions on sexual politics. The word homosexual was first used in a private letter written in 1868 by Karl Maria Benkert, later called Kertbeny Károly Mária, an ordinary writer and translator from Hungary. Kertbeny was the author of several pamphlets that called for the legal emancipation of homosexual citizens, and it was in the first pamphlet, entitled "§143 of the Prussian penal code of 14 April 1851 and its retention as §152 in the draft of a penal code for the North German Confederation", that the word made its public debut. Curiously, Kertbeny also coined the term heterosexual, which classified individuals that were attracted to the opposite sex in "natural" or "unnatural" manners. That is, the first use of heterosexual was to define individuals capable of incest, bestiality and pedophilia, as well as common intercourse, as long as it was practiced with the opposite sex. In 1892 "heterosexual" appeared for the first time in an English Language publication and still meant "abnormal manifestations of the sexual appetite" (TAKACS, 2004, p. 30). But the use of the word as referring to "normal" sexuality, the meaning that remains until this day, had already appeared in the 1886 *Psychopatia Sexualis*, written by Richard von Krafft-Ebing, an Austrian psychiatrist.

Takacs states that Kertbeny's first intention with the word homosexual was to convince the general public that the ones practicing same-sex relations "ought to have the right to be left alone by the state in their intimate lives" (TAKACS, 2004, p. 31). From then on, the word became popular in the medical environment. Takacs believes that "the increasing popularity of the word homosexual in medical, especially psychiatric circles led to the fact that its original context – opposing paternalistic state intervention into people's private life – became overshadowed and seen as a means of medical control" (TAKACS, 2004, p. 31).

Michel Foucault believes that it was not the invention of a new word that led to broader discussions on sexuality, but the fact that, with the word, a new class of individuals was created: the homosexual. As he mentions in his iconic *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*,

> We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized […] less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a new kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (FOUCAULT, 1990, p. 43)

Therefore, what was considered only a practice, though condemned by society, was now a part of the individual's character. As Judit Takacs mentions, "isolated sexual acts previously categorized mainly on the basis of their social functionality started to have a chance to become elements of lifestyle-creating sexual relationships (TAKACS, 2004, p. 31).

Sigmund Freud was among the first psychiatrists to believe that homosexuality was simply a trait of one's personality, and not a deviance. He even opposed Karl Heirich Ulrich, one of the founders of gay activism, because Ulrich's theory stated that "innate impulses driving men to love other men are associated with a certain kind of femininity of the soul" (TAKACS, 2004, p. 30) and that men who desired other men were part of a third, still unclassified, sex. For Freud, homosexuality was a part of human's sexual behavior, not a special quality, not an illness, just a characteristic.

Freud's contribution in the field of homo/sexuality is discussed in the article entitled "Freud, Male Homosexuality, and the Americans", written by Henry Abelove and part of one the best known anthologies on gay and lesbian writings, *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, published in 1993 and edited by Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin. In the article, Abelove discusses a letter addressed to Freud from a concerned mother, who seeks cure for her son's deviant behavior. The psychiatrist kindly answered the mother, as shown in the following excerpt:

> Many highly respected individuals of ancient and modern times have been homosexuals, several of the greatest among them (Plato, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vince, etc.) It is a great injustice to persecute homosexuality as a crime and cruelty too […]. By asking me if I can help, you mean, I suppose, if I can abolish homosexuality and make normal heterosexuality take its place. The answer is, in a general way, we cannot promise to achieve it. […] What analysis can do for your son runs in a different line. If he is unhappy, neurotic, torn by conflicts, inhibited in his social life, analysis may bring him harmony, peace of mind, full efficiency, whether he remains a homosexual or gets changed (FREUD, 1935 as quoted in ABELOVE, 1993, p.382)

Freud's response makes it clear that he did not see any kind of deviance in homosexuality. The psychiatrist believed that homosexuality by itself did not require any sort of treatment because it was only a sexual preference, not a disease. Actually, Freud refused to treat any patient solely on the basis of his homosexual condition. That is, unless the patient had any kind of real psychological condition (depression, hallucinations, etc.) he would not be treated by him. As Abelove mentions, there were many instances in which patients would start their treatment without Freud knowing they were there only because of their homosexual condition. Unfortunately, the doctor left no records on those patients, so it is not possible to know how he handled their initial treatment.

Even though Freud was one of the most respected professionals of his time, many of his colleagues did not share his beliefs. Actually, the majority of psychiatrists thought the exact opposite and Freud used the great prejudice against homosexuality, especially by Americans, in order to highlight the extreme sexual repression under which American citizens found themselves. Freud believed that Americans resorted to sublimation, that is, instead of focusing their energy on their sexuality, they worried about money and economic achievements. He also believed that it was this sublimation that caused Americans over sensitivity and prejudice against any debate on sexuality, resulting in their extreme moralistic behavior.

After Freud's death in 1939, many psychiatrists published articles trying to prove that homosexuality was indeed a disease. Without a strong opposition such as Freud's, "the American Psychiatric Association in 1952 formally classified homosexuality as an illness" (ABELOVE, 1993, p.391). Abelove also states that "when the gay liberation movement grew strong in America in the 1960s, this classification, still very much in the books, became a major issue for its adherents, and they devoted much effort to getting it rescinded" (ABELOVE, 1993, p.391).

The gay liberation movement that Abelove refers to saw its climax in 1969 with the Stonewall riots. On June 28th, 1969, the police of New York City made one of their regular raids on the Stonewall Inn bar, located in the Greenwich Village. Police raids to bars known as gay, such as Stonewall Inn, were common in the 50s and 60s due to a still lingering history of repression against sexual minorities and to laws that forbade the selling of alcohol to gay people. The customers were usually lined up and had their identifications checked. But that evening the customers decided to fight back and not accept the harassment from the officers any longer. United, patrons stood up to the police, demanding a safe place to express their identities. Their effort led other people to join in and form activist groups that faced the police

for days and nights in search of justice and respect. Their struggle lasted until July 3rd, and today The Stonewall Riot, as it was later called, is commonly known as the one single event that changed the history of gay visibility in the United States (WRIGHT, 1999, n.p.).

In 1973, partly because of constant fight from protesters, homosexuality stopped being considered a disease. But its removal from American Psychiatric Association's list did not improve the situation of millions of individuals that needed to hide their preferences for fear of losing their jobs, their families, and their physical integrity. On the contrary, it problematized yet another issue that needed to be immediately addressed; for Freud's work on sexuality, Foucault's iconic *The History of Sexuality* and the huge commotion that was consequence of The Stonewall Riots did not address the varied ethnic, gender, class, and color background of homosexual individuals. In other words, though Foucault's works and the public ardor that surrounded the gay liberations movement did increase discussions about sexuality, those discussions were still restricted to white/middle-class/males.

Barbara Smith, an activist and pioneer of Black Feminism, mentions in her article "Homophobia: Why Bring it Up?", that many movements from the 70s and 80s actually believed in choosing a primary oppression. That is, activists from the Gay Movement, the African-American movement, the Latino movement, and the Feminist Movement, to name a few, worried about one trait of the individual's identity, the one that concerned them the most, without acknowledging that oppression is actually multiple. Smith believes that "lesbians of color have often been the most astute about the necessity for developing understandings of the connection between oppressions" (SMITH, 1993, p.100). Smith's statement is supported by Sara Ahmed's observation that "we don't tend to notice what is comfortable, even when we think we do" (AHMED, 2004, p.147). In other words, even though gay men, black men, and women needed to fight for their rights, lesbians of color were especially concerned with the intersections involving gender, color, class, and sexuality because they were the ones affected by those oppressions. There came the need, then, urged by African-American and Third-World women to engage in discussions that would encompass the many different traits of one's identity in order to recognize the adversities and struggles that many individuals still went through. With discussions that intersected gender, class, nationality and sexuality, many scholars set out to challenge the previously established categories of minorities and to acknowledge that prejudice was also constituted of more than one source.

Thanks to the path-breaking volume, *This Bridge Called my Back: Radical Writing by Women of Color*, first published in 1981, organized by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, women from different backgrounds got together "out of political necessity" to create a "theory

in the flesh" able to recognize both the differences and the similarities between women of color, so that a change can be performed (MORAGA, 1983). Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa was one of the first voices that emerged from the Third World and wished to challenge society's framework in relation to gender and nationality. Anzaldúa, in her inspirational work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, states that "[c]ulture forms our beliefs. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through culture" and she continues, saying that "[c]ulture is made by those in power – men" (ANZALDÚA, 1987, p.16). But how to challenge those beliefs, those predefined concepts, as a woman when "males make the rules and laws; women transmit them" (ANZALDÚA, 1987, p.16)?

One of the ways chosen by homosexuals to confront the already established male/heterosexual society was by engaging in movements that aimed at raising public awareness, including subverting the meaning of a word that had always been used in a derogatory way towards homosexuals. The word *queer* was used primarily as an adjective that meant "odd, slightly mad, sick" back in the 16th century. It was only introduced as referring to homosexuals in 1922, as Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle mention in their book *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, first published in 1995. Bennett and Royle assert that

> In the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, partly in response to the spread of AIDS among gay men, the word took a queer turn: homosexuals themselves began to 'reclaim' the word, to use it in place of the gender specific and arguably effete term 'gay' or the clinical and cheerless 'homosexual' or the polite and even mythological-sounding 'lesbian'. 'Queer' becomes a term of pride and celebratory self-assertion, of difference affirmed and affirmative difference (BENNNET AND ROYLE, 2004, p.188).

Therefore, *queer* has gone from the original meaning of "sick" and "mad" to an umbrella term used to describe anyone that does not fit into the binary categories of sex/gender/sexuality. But more than just understanding the reasons behind the reappropriation of the word, it is necessary to discuss how and why those binary categories were established in the first place.

Judith Butler is certainly one of the most important names concerning discussion on gender identity. Her work is based on varied theories and arguments from preceding scholars and her biggest influences are the already mentioned works of Michel Foucault and of important feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Lucy Irigaray, and Monique Wittig. In her best known work, entitled *Gender Trouble*, Butler not only uses the scholars' theories as

standing points for development, but also advances the discussion on gender and the construction of the categories of sex, gender, and sexuality.

In the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains the biggest problems concerning the first waves of feminism and its concern with an essential identity. According to the critic,

> […] there is the political problem that feminism encounters in the assumption that the term *women* denotes a common identity. […] If one "is" a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained (BUTLER, 1999, p.6).

Many assumptions can be made from Butler's statement, and many discussions can come from these assumptions. First of all, she clearly states that the first wave of feminism believed all women to be a coherent class of individuals that went through the same struggles and had the same needs. Secondly, it did not recognize that the very category of woman changes over time and space, precisely because it is a social construction in the first place; therefore, it needs a special set of social framework in order to operate. Finally, even if feminism was concerned about the construction of the category of woman throughout time, it failed to recognize the other social impositions that keep individuals in the margins, such as class, ethnicity, and skin color. One might try to understand the frameworks in which gender identities are formed, but failing is inevitable for the very reason that those frameworks are unstable and ever changing.

For Monique Wittig, in the article "One is not Born a Woman", not only the traits that identify women are constructed, but the category of woman itself is a product of social structures, which early feminists, instead of recognizing, believed to be natural. She uses as an example the capacity of women for childbearing. Instead of considering giving birth as a biological feature of women, Wittig believes that it is but a mark in order to make this categorization, an excuse to define certain individuals as being part of a category that is itself constructed, much like the concept of race, that uses the color of a person's skin as a way to differentiate that person from others with white skin. According to Wittig,

> A materialistic feminist approach shows that what we take for the cause or origin of oppression is in fact only the *mark* imposed by the oppressor: the 'myth of woman', plus its material effects and manifestations in this appropriated consciousness and bodies of women. […] what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an 'imaginary formation', which reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as any others but marked by

> the social system) through the network of relationships in which they are perceived (WITTIG, 1993, p.104).

In other words, the ability to give birth is simply a feature of some individuals and this feature is used to place these individuals inside a category that could actually require any other trait in order to exist. Further proof that this category is actually constructed is the belief that some biologically female individuals are not "real" women because they do not present the set of features required to be one. Therefore, a person needs to possess several elements that enable her to participate in this category.

One of the features that classify women as "real" is, obviously, her hetero/sexuality, which means lesbians cannot inhabit this category. But more than just not feeling desire towards the opposite sex, Wittig states that being a lesbian before the liberation movements also meant wanting to be a man. Here, Wittig echoes Simone de Beauvoir's words in her famous *The Second Sex* in which she states that "[a]ccording to Jones and Hesnard [two famous British psychiatrists used in Beauvoir's work], lesbians mostly fall into two categories: 'masculine lesbians', who 'try to act like men', and 'feminine' ones, who 'are afraid of men'" (BEAUVOIR, 2011, p.420). However, not being part of the category of woman "does not mean that one has to become a man" (WITTIG, 1993, p.105),

> [b]ut even if she would like to, with all her strength, she cannot become a man. For becoming a man would demand from a woman not only a man's external appearance but his consciousness as well […]. This is impossible, and one feature of lesbian oppression consists precisely of making women out of reach for us, since women belong to men. Thus, a lesbian has to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society (WITTIG, 1993, p.105).

This categorization of lesbians as not a man and not a woman, and the confusion that surrounds lesbian desire are products of binary constructions in relation to gender and sexuality, which claim that both gender and sexuality need to be coherent to the person's sex of birth. This gender binary is maintained as a way to classify individuals as either male or female, because it is only through this categorization that it is possible to preserve the frameworks of power which men have established and still control. That is, a "real" woman is the one who was born with female sexual organs, expresses herself in what is believed to be a feminine way, and feels sexual desire towards men. Any person that does not follow this order, like the lesbian, loses their personal integrity and is not understood as a person. In Butler's view,

> the "coherence" and "continuity" of "the person" are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility. Inasmuch as "identity" is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of "the person" is called into question by the cultural

> emergence of those “incoherent” or “discontinuous” gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined (BUTLER, 1999, p.23).

That is, sex, gender, and sexuality neither depend on nor reflect each other when it comes to identity formation. Then, a person may have been born with male organs, have a female gender expression, and still maintain a sexual preference towards other women, as much as someone could be born with female organs, have a female gender expression, and have a sexual preference towards men. But why is the latter so much more present in society than the first? Butler believes that the answer lies in “compulsory heterosexuality”. According to her,

> The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between “feminine” and “masculine,” where these are understood as expressive attributes of “male” and “female.” The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist”—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender (BUTLER, 1999, p.24).

The “heterosexualization of desire”, therefore, is both the device used to maintain the gender norms, and the consequence of what can be called gender schema. According to Robert Ryle, sociologist and author of the book *Questioning Gender: A Sociological Exploration*, a gender schema “is a cognitive structure that enables us to sort characteristics and behaviors into masculine and feminine categories” but they only exist “because cultures are structured in such a way to convince us that society cannot function without the existence of sex and gender categories” (RYLE, 2014, p. 134). Therefore, gender schemas are not innate, for no one is born with an inherent consciousness of each gender’s features, but culturally constructed through constant reinforcement of those features as pertaining to one gender or the other.

Yet, even more than just categorizing what is male and what is female, the reinforcement of gender schemas is also used in order to maintain male power over women, since it is based on androcentrism. As Ryle states, “androcentrism is the belief that masculinity and what men do in our culture is superior to femininity and what women do. Femininity and all it entails are seen as deviations from the universal standard of masculinity” (RYLE, 2014, p. 134), which reinstate the belief of male supremacy and women’s dependency on male protection. Ryle’s definition of androcentrism and gender schemas may be useful in order to explain the gender inequality that is their consequence, but it does not

fully account for the endless and varied oppressions that are still imposed upon women's bodies.

In "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", Adrienne Rich offers a better view, or at least a more thorough explanation, as to why the impositions of certain gender behaviors have been reinforced throughout the centuries. Rich believes that the lie of compulsory heterosexuality acts as a way of not only maintaining male supremacy, but also of preserving male sexual control over women. The poet states that,

> whatever its origins, when we look hard and clearly at the extent and elaboration of measures designed to keep women within a male sexual purlieu, it becomes an inescapable question whether the issue feminists have to address is not simple "gender inequality" nor the domination of culture by males nor mere "taboos against homosexuality," but the enforcement of heterosexuality for women as a means of assuring male right of physical, economic, and emotional access (RICH, 1996, p.135).

Rich believes that the constant reinforcement of compulsory heterosexuality is not only a way to keep women's dependence but comes out of a fear "that women could be indifferent to them [men] altogether, that men could be allowed sexual and emotional—therefore economic—access to women only on women's terms, otherwise being left on the periphery of the matrix" (RICH, 1996, p.134). Therefore, there needs to be a continual reestablishment of gender norms, primarily through the imposition of heterosexuality, in order to allow men to have unlimited access to women.

The lesbian, then, the one who has not fallen for the lie of compulsory heterosexuality, is the one who will be kept in the margins, as a deviant and sick being, because she chooses not to "enjoy" male protection. These women will be constantly denied of their sexuality, because their sexuality is not even seen as real and normal. Rich states that, "[a]s the term lesbian has been held to limiting, clinical associations in its patriarchal definition, female friendship and comradeship have been set apart from the erotic, thus limiting the erotic itself (RICH, 1996. p.136).

A woman's eroticism, however, is not only related to how she enjoys her sexuality, but also by the pleasure she gets from any experience. As Audre Lorde discusses in "The Use of The Erotic", these experiences have been denied to women, because the male dominated society confined them to a place where they should only serve men, and never themselves. By not being able to enjoy their own eroticism, women are the object of men's desires, but never the subject of their own. By not being allowed to feel any kind of pleasure the woman remains unaware of her full potential, and unable to share her pleasure with others. Lorde explains,

> The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling.
> The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves (LORDE, 1993, p.340).

With Lorde's explanation of eroticism, it is possible to understand why the regime of compulsory heterosexuality has been so widespread, since with the knowledge of their own capacity, a capacity that has been overshadowed by male dominance, women would not have been subjected to men's dominance in the first place.

Yet, the lesbian is the one who defies male dominance, the one that faces her eroticism as the subject, not as the object of desire, thus she is left outside the category of woman. But then again, by not being categorized as an intelligible human being, for there is no space for her into the constructed gender binary, lesbians are subject to what Butler calls "precarity". Butler believes that "'precarity'" designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death (BUTLER, 2009, p.ii). The critic further explains the term and mentions that

> Precarity is, of course, directly linked with gender norms, since we know that those who do not live their genders in intelligible ways are at heightened risk for harassment and violence. Gender norms have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space; how and in what way the public and private are distinguished, and how that distinction is instrumentalized in the service of sexual politics; who will be criminalized on the basis of public appearance; who will fail to be protected by the law or, more specifically, the police, on the street, or on the job, or in the home (BUTLER, 2009, p.ii).

Therefore, precarity is related to how an individual is perceived in a public space, and whether or not this public space will be safe or dangerous for those individuals' gender and sexual expressions. Then, precarity can be understood as being related to the image of the closet, as whether or not someone is "in the closet" (not displaying non-conforming gender and sexuality) or "out of the closet" (displaying traits of non-conforming gender and sexuality) will determine how his/her integrity will be maintained.

Also, someone´s status as "in" or "out" of the closet will be determined by how one´s body subjectivity is perceived by others. If one´s body expression is coherent with his/her biological sex, then the status of the closet may be maintained since that subject remains

intelligible inside the heterosexual framework. But the expressions of one´s body are themselves determinants of one's gender identity. Using Rich´s compulsory heterosexuality as a starting point for discussion, Butler believes that the corporeal significations of one´s body will lead the subject to search for coherence. According to the critic, "acts, gesture, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal the organizing principle of identity as a cause" (BUTLER, 1999, p.173). Thus, gender identity can be understood not as the cause of gender expression, but actually produced because of this expression, since those expressions "are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (BUTLER, 1999, p.173).

In this regard, if there is no interior essence to be expressed, since that essence is actually a fabrication of these expressions, it is possible to say that public and social discourses are the ones that constantly organize gender through its expression in order to maintain an illusion of natural heterosexuality. Consequently, "acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (BUTLER, 1999, p173). Therefore, bodily expressions are not an extension of gender identity; they do not express an interior gender, but are actually a performative way in which identity will be constructed, a performance of this gender. As Butler states, "if gender attributes […] are not expressive but performative, these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal" (BUTLER, 1999, 180).

It is necessary to understand what Butler believes to be the difference between expression and performativeness. According to her,

> If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notion of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity and femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender´s performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality (BUTLER, 1999, p.180).

Regulations on gender and performativity are constructed and imposed to avoid disrupting sex/gender/sexuality binaries, in which sex/gender/sexuality need to be coherent so that the individual can be understood inside the heteronormative framework. Once one is thus understood, he/she is not subjected to precarity because the hiding closet is maintained. The

"closet", this imaginary space in which non-conforming individuals inhabit, is discussed in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "Epistemology of the Closet". For Sedgwick, this space has different layers because, "for many gay people, [the closet] is still the fundamental feature of social life; and there can be few gay people […] in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence" (SEDGWICK, 1993, p.46). The closet is a space where escape becomes impossible for even if someone is open about his/her sexuality, the need to hide, if only in certain situations, is still present. The shaping of the closet is obviously related to the regime of compulsory heterosexuality, that perceives straight relationships as the norm, and demand explanation and disclosing of non-conforming sexuality through discourse. Not only because of preconceived thoughts that individuals are inherently heterosexual, the closet is also the place that offers protection against physical violence, for homophobia is still very present is society.

Barbara's Smith's previously mentioned article "Homophobia: Why Bring it up?" discusses why homophobia is still so very present all over the world. Smith believes there are four main reasons for homophobic attitudes. First, there is the belief that homosexuality and violence against homosexual individuals are private, not political, matters and that the oppression suffered by homosexuals is not as serious as the one suffered by other minorities. Second, there is the preconceived image of homosexuality being confined to white/middle-class/males, ignoring that many other characteristics may overlap, such as skin color, class, and gender. Third, there is the concept, especially among people of color, that homosexuality is a "white" issue, which justifies the number of civil rights activists that are still homophobic. Finally, Smith mentions that the verbalization of slurs against gay people is a lot more acceptable than those against other minorities, that is, "jokes about 'dykes' and 'faggots' can be made without the slightest criticism in circle where 'nigger' and 'chink' jokes, for instance, would bring instant censure or even ostracism" (SMITH, 1993, p.101).

A harmful combination of gender binaries with the imposition of a compulsory heterosexuality that brings forth homophobia and violence as their consequences, keeps millions of *queer* individuals (gays, lesbians, bisexual, transgender, etc.) trapped in an imaginary closet that is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to escape. Their lives become unrecognizable, invisible, their very subjectivity becomes unintelligible to others, sometimes even to themselves. This situation is even more complicated for individuals living in nation-states created after independence from former colonial powers.

In the article "Postscript: Cyberscapes and the Interfacing of Diasporas", Anita Mannur discusses networks in which displaced individuals may rely on in order to maintain a

connection to their home, wherever this home may be. As Mannur states, the U.S.A., which she calls the West, is not “the liberatory space that allows for a freer celebration of non-heteronormative sexualities” (MANNUR, 2003, p.286), as it is confirmed by the many acts of violence and homophobia still suffered by homosexuals in that country. Yet, if the West still establishes politics of compulsory heterosexuality, countries where the consequences of colonialism are still felt, such as the ones located on the Caribbean, may impose it even more severely.

In the article “Introduction: Queerly Postcolonial”, Terry Goldie discusses how the idea of homosexuality as separate from race and ethnicity constantly excludes postcolonial characters from queer studies. Goldie mentions the famous *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, published by Routledge, one of the best known anthologies of gender studies and one of the main sources of this thesis. Yet, as Goldie states, “only three out of the forty-two contributors were not American residents at the time” the publication was released. Goldie claims that “ it is as if the Americanness of gay and lesbian studies is a given that requires no justification, no explanation and no apology” (GOLDIE, 1999, p.15), and believes the reason for this assumption may be related to the fact that “the universal homosexual is one feature of queer theory, in which the social configuration of homosexuality becomes a very minor element in contrast with a universal sexual orientation which not surprisingly looks very American” (GOLDIE, 1999, p.21).

Thus, while there are queer subjects inside postcolonial backgrounds, there is also the idea that issues of race are the only ones important for those subjects. Though Goldie does not acknowledge the difference between queer studies and gay and lesbian studies, his main point is not far from the truth. Much like the first wave of feminism, that excluded the many different categories of women, queer studies tend to have an essentialist view of homosexual individuals and disregard issues of race, ethnicity, and nationality. Hence, academic discussions very often erase the particularities of queer bodies, and “the various aspects of the colonized position tend to be subsumed under the category of race, and the category of other” (GOLDIE, 1999, p21).

Aside from the exclusion of postcolonial subjects from queer studies, there is also the exclusion of queer subjects from postcolonial investigations. In the article “Caribbean Sexuality: Mapping the Field”, Kamala Kempadoo discusses this exclusion. Kempadoo believes that “ in many [postcolonial] studies, same-sex relations are not in the first instance claimed as identity but rather as activity, as people disclose information about their practice without identifying or viewing themselves as homosexual, queer, gay, lesbian, or transgender”

(KEMPADOO, 2009, p.5). This belief does not consider multiple oppressions suffered by homosexuals in postcolonial backgrounds and of postcolonial subjects in queer environments. Kempadoo believes that “for sexuality to be a vantage point for Caribbean research and study, the current complexities need to be acknowledged, and the intricacies of a range of sexual arrangements and practices appreciated” (KEMPADOO, 2009, p.12).

In order to understand the overlapping oppression that Caribbean homosexuals still suffer because of essentialist ideas concerning nationality and gender, one needs to see gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, etc. as interconnected aspects that lead to the construction of identity. Claiming that one identity trait is more relevant than others is erasing the struggles many subjects still face as consequence of multiple marginalization.

In the beginning of *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler asks the following question: “How does one live with the notion that one’s love is not considered love, and one’s loss is not considered loss? How does one live an unrecognizable life?” (BUTLER, 2009, p.xiii). The trouble with these questions is not that they remain unanswered, but that they need to be asked in the first place. And even more troubling is that, in the case of postcolonial homosexual individuals, they need to be asked more than once.

In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai views “the work of the imagination”, as “neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but [as] a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices” (APPADURAI, 1996). The two novels that will be featured in the following chapters show that literature (“the work of imagination”) may also function effectively as “a space of contestation”.

2 **A SENSE OF (UN)BELONGING: CUBAN-AMERICAN SUBJECTIVITY IN *MEMORY MAMBO***

> History is not impersonal. History doesn't just happen. It's the result of individual stories coming together, of those stories becoming catalytic, and then those survivors telling their versions of what happened… history is a form of testimony. And it always reads differently depending on who is telling it. (OBEJAS, 2010, n.p.)

December 17th 2014 marked a historical moment in Cuban-American relations. After 64 years of much tension that included a commercial embargo on the island, President Barack Obama declared that the U.S. planned to restore full relations with Cuba. According to the American president "[the U.S.A.] will end an outdated approach that for decades has failed to advance [both Cuba's and U.S.'s] interests, and instead [the countries] will begin to normalize relations between [them]" (OBAMA as quoted by BAKER, 2014). For New York Times journalist Peter Baker, "the historic deal broke an enduring stalemate between two countries divided by only 90 miles of water but oceans of mistrust and hostility dating from the days of Theodore Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill and the nuclear brinkmanship of the Cuban missile crisis"[1] (BAKER, 2015).

Yet, the situation is not so uncomplicated. For Jack A. Smith, former editor of the (U.S.) Guardian Newsweekly, the U.S.A.'s intentions are not to benefit Cuban citizens or let Americans enjoy the beauty of the islands by allowing their travels. Instead, it is the last attempt from a Capitalist country to once again hold some sort of control over a Communist government that has (in its own terms) succeeded. As Mr. Smith mentions in an online article, restoring the relations between the two countries "means that efforts to destroy the communist government of Cuba — from a CIA invasion to the imposition of seemingly endless draconian economic and political sanctions — have failed. In this David-Goliath contest, David was seriously wounded, but won". Smith classifies this new approach as "an act of uninvited intervention by a powerful country into the affairs of a small country"[2] (SMITH, 2015).

The U.S. has severely restricted Cuban economy since the 1959 revolution in hopes that the communist regime would eventually fail, granting U.S.'s supremacy over all The Caribbean and Latin American countries. However, Fidel Castro's regime has resisted even

[1]Article written by Peter Baker, published online by The New York Times on December, 17th 2014.

[2]Article written by Jack A. Smith, published by the website Axis of Logics on January 2nd 2015.

after the end of the Cold war, which seriously affected relations between Cuba and its most important “business partner”, the failed U.S.S.R. In this turbulent environment, Cubans living in their home country and Cuban-Americans in the United States still remain divided over whom they support. Although over half a century has elapsed since the Cuban revolution, both in the island and in its northern neighbor, it is possible to find citizens who still dream of living in a politically free country, while others wish for the U.S. to stop interfering in Cuban’s relations, harming a smaller, and more fragile, country.

What is undeniable, though, is the amount of support the U.S. Government gave to the ones who fled Cuba in the years after the revolution. This is due to the fact that “the Cuban golden exiles [the name given to the first wave of Cuban immigrants] were very much considered 'desirable immigrants'; they not only represented the only pro-US elite of Latin America whose loyalty to US interests, but they also shared the determination to defeat communism with the United States” (GARCIA-PEDROSA, 2010, p.4). In other words, the first exiles that entered the U.S. soon after Castro's revolution went to the United States in hopes to be, once again, free. The support given by the United States government soon after their arrival included private and public assistance and the U.S. government was responsible for creating the Cuban Refugee Program which "paid transportation costs from Cuba and offered financial assistance to needy refugees and to state and local public agencies that provided services" (GARCIA-PEDROSA, 2010, p.5).

However, it is very clear that the Cuban exiles have got so many benefits for two main reasons. First, they represented what the American dream was all about, living in a free capitalist state where it is possible to consume any products they might wish. Second, they were not like the other immigrants already present inside U.S. territory. "The first wave of exiles was different from other minorities in the United States. The 'Golden Exiles' were predominantly white, middle to upper class professionals; they were the tops of Cuban society who wanted to flee the socialist revolution" (GARCIA-PEDROSA, 2010, p.5).

This first support given to the Cuban exiles was very important for the thriving of the Cuban society in the U.S. as a whole. The 'Golden Exiles' were able to become once again successful because of the support offered by the U.S. But the “Golden Exiles” were not the only Cuban citizens arriving after 1959. Other waves of exiles, however, were somewhat different from the first ones because instead of fleeing to the U.S. out of dissatisfaction with Cuba’s politics, they had immigrated in search of economic achievements. They were part of the lower-class and moving to the U.S. was their way of fleeing economic struggles in their country.

As Sonia Torres explains in *Nosotros in USA*, published in 2001, in the 1970s, after much pressure from the Cuban population in the United States, Fidel Castro decided to discuss the situation of many Cubans both in the island and in its northern neighbor. One of the consequences of this dialogue was the permission given to many Cuban citizens to visit their family back on the island, for those who had already immigrated, or to visit their family in the U.S., for the ones who stayed in Cuba (, 2001, p.133).

In 1980, after the Mariel Incident, over 100,000 Cubans entered the U.S., including over 3000 political prisoners and 600 ex-convicts released by Fidel Castro. All of them were allowed to leave the island as long as they did so through the Mariel harbor. In the article "Mapping Memory: Achy Obejas Transnational Mambo", Sonia Torres mentions that,

> [u]nlike the 'Golden Exiles', the newer immigrants are not all white; neither do they come from the original white-collar Cuban elite of the 50's; several are from the working class, many are recent dissidents of the Cuban Revolution, and yet others are homosexuals fleeing the homophobic attitude of the Cuban government (TORRES, 2004, p.230)

Thus, the Marielitos, as those immigrants were later called, represented another share of Cubans and were not as homogeneous as the "Golden Exiles" were believed to be. The "Golden Exiles" experience in the U.S. was very different from what immigrants from Puerto Rico, Mexico, and other regions have gone, through, since these other immigrants were seen as merely economic refugees, going to the U.S. in order to have a better life, but without a political agenda that fit U.S. political interests. It is important to observe that the Marielitos did not get as much praise as the white upper-class Cubans of the first waves, not only because their main reason was economic but also because they were not white. The fact that they were distinct from the first waves led the exiles coming from the Mariel harbor to have more contact with other Latino populations inside the United States and to a disruption of the idea of homogeneity professed by the first waves of Cubans.

Yet, even though the "Golden Exiles" had better opportunities to adapt and thrive in American lands, and even with the help of the government and the fact that they were already part of an upper class society, the feeling of exile persisted among the ones arriving right after 1959. Although they were fully welcomed by the country and its community, they were still exiles, dislocated from their home country for reasons that were beyond their control and forced to live, and be a part of, a new and strange culture.

In the essay Reflections on Exile, Edward Said attempts to convey the feelings and struggles of many different peoples that have been and still are part of a large group of exiles all over the world. In a compassionate tone, Said describes exile as

> strangely compelling to think about, but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind for ever (SAID, 2002, p. 137).

Though any diasporic subject, whether he/she moved willingly or not, experience a "sense of dis-location" (HALL, 1999, p.3) connected to the loss of their home country, Said believes that the exile's experience is aggravated by the fact that center to this experience is "the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth" placing them in a situation where "homecoming is out of the question" (SAID, 2002, p.142). That is, while the immigrant may have the power to choose between staying in a foreign land or coming back home, the exiles are in a perpetual state of entrapment, because their return depends on a political change that does not depend on them. Thus, they have no alternative but to continue in their displaced lives, since "exile is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you" (SAID, 2002, p.146).

Exiled subjects, then, will experience a deep sense of nostalgia concerning what they believe to be their true home, and an unstoppable wish of returning to that land, as if this return would grant them the possibility of mending their broken existence. In order to repair this rupture since going back is impossible, exiles subjects will constantly rely on memory to suppress the longing for their true home. This memory, however, is not only found within themselves, but in other individuals placed in the same condition. In this case, the ones put in this position will rely on each other, with open arms, because being close to another exile from their country is somehow, being close to the country itself.

To keep their memory alive, the exiles will create communities that carry the same customs of their land, as if they were part of a huge family. For Stuart Hall, "the extended family – as network and site of memory – is the critical conduit between the two locations" (HALL, 1999, p.2). It is only through this family, and the memory it brings, that home is able to be recreated, even when geographical distance, time, and other factors are obstacles that cannot be overcome. Hall believes that nations "are not only sovereign political entities", and borrows from Benedict Anderson the term "imagined communities". Hall's and Anderson's arguments lead one to wonder how the many diasporic communities around the world are imagined, and how people inside these communities image their true home to be. The

imagining of one's community is, obviously, deeply related to a sense of belonging, and the ability to carry on the beliefs and customs of their home place.

Yet, even when trying to hold on to their own beliefs and customs, the exile feels the loss of their home because of the external pressures they suffer, including the need to conform to new standards, and to fit in the new place they inhabit. The exile, then, "is offered a new set of affiliations and develops new loyalties" (SAID, 2002, p.146), - all contributing to his/her hybrid being.

In the iconic work entitled *Borderlands/La Frontera* Gloria Anzaldúa discusses the condition of individuals placed between two spaces. Addressing specifically Mexico and its divide with the United States (both literal and metaphorical) but applicable to any other boundary, the author delineates the adversities faced by the ones who do not belong in either places, or belong to both at the same time. Because of the social construction that informs that individuals should be one or the other, many have the impression that the ones who are not able to identify themselves entirely with a determined space do not belong in this space. That is, being anything but stable, fixed, and unchangeable condemns the individual to the margin, whether his instability is related to nationality, gender, sexuality and even ethnicity. Anzaldúa believes that those individuals belong in the borderland, and explains the difference between this space and the borders. For the author,

> Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravessados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal" (ANZALDÚA, 1987, p.3).

The ones in the borderland, therefore, are the ones who do not belong to a certain group for the very reason of being who they really are. The borderland, then, is deeply connected to one's identity, and is entirely changeable, which means that a state of belonging or non-belonging will depend on the ones who surround an individual, and how this individual will be perceived by the ones who surround him/her. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin mention on *Post Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, "how people are perceive controls how they are treated, and physical differences are crucial in such constructions" (ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2007, p.166).

Moreover, how the individuals see themselves and their community also plays a very important part in the construction of their identity. Maria de Los Angeles Torres discusses the

definition of identity in the book *In the Land of Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States*. For the critic,

> Identity […] is a social construction that requires ongoing negotiation between the individual and the broader society. Social and political identity consists of at least two important dimensions that act independently of each other and interact as well: the society's construction of an individual or a group's identity; and the individual's or community's self-constructed identity (LOS ANGELES TORRES, 2001, p.26).

That is, personal and collective identities are constructed by a combination between others' perceptions and that individual and/or community's own perceptions. For example, a gay black male may be part of the black community as much as a straight black man, and part of the gay community as much as a gay white man, and he may feel he belongs to both of them equally. But the fact that he is not straight in a black community and is not white in a gay community may lead him to the borderland in both places, generating a sense of non-belonging and loneliness that only the ones in that situation may be able to understand.

Many immigrants inside the United States, especially the ones who were born elsewhere and raised in the country, identify themselves with Anzaldúa's definition of borderland. Foreign in America, and Americans in their home country, these hybrid subjects are often dislocated and marginal. The pressure to assimilate the host country's culture is equally matched only by the wish not to forget about their true origins and national background. When individuals are in the borderland against their own wishes, the situations becomes even more complicated. And this is where many exiled citizens find themselves.

In the article "The Politics of Exile: Class, Power, and the 'Exilic'", Martha E. Gimenez explains the main difference between exiles and immigrants. According to Gimenez, "the latter […] depart[s] voluntarily in search of economic opportunities and upward mobility. Exiles take a critical stand towards their country's politics, economic organization, culture, etc., and given that they can't change them, leave" (GIMENEZ, 2003, n.p.). Of course, some immigrants are also concerned with their country's politics, but the political issues are not the most important factors when deciding whether to stay or to leave. Though the difference between the two groups is permeated by many other issues that constantly overlap, making it sometimes difficult to classify one or the other, what lingers in the exiled subject is the fact that he/she was forced to leave the country for reasons connected to the politics of that country. These politics may have led to an economically unbearable situation, or to a social unrest that were the ultimate cause for leaving; nevertheless, the fundamental impulse remains in the political grounds.

Achy Obejas, the writer of novel *Memory Mambo*, is part of this group of Cubans who arrived in the U.S. soon after the 1959 Cuban revolution. Born in 1956, the author landed in the U.S. with her family at the age of six. Because of this early departure, Cuba has always been present in her stories. In an interview to Gregg Shapiro, she declares:

> I was born in Havana and that single event has pretty much defined the rest of my life. In the U.S., I'm Cuban, Cuban-American, Latina by virtue of being Cuban, a Cuban journalist, a Cuban writer, somebody's Cuban lover, a Cuban dyke, a Cuban girl on a bus, a Cuban exploring Sephardic roots, always and endlessly Cuban. I'm more Cuban here than I am in Cuba, by sheer contrast and repetition. (OBEJAS, 2001)

Obejas has already published eight books, including novels, short story collections, and theoretical criticism. Two of Obejas's novels, *Memory Mambo* and *Days of Awe*, won the Lambda Awards for Lesbian Fiction. In spite of the many autobiographical elements, Obejas considers herself to be a fiction writer. As she mentions in the interview to Shapiro, "though most critics always seem to think [her] books are autobiographical in some way—they're set in Chicago, involve queers and Cubans-; they really are fiction". And she finishes by stating: "I'm not Juani" (OBEJAS, 2001).

Perhaps what may lead critics to think Obejas's works are actually autobiographical is the fact that the need to know, to acknowledge, and to discover the country is part of many of Obejas's characters. Juani Casas, the main character in *Memory Mambo*, is not different. Like the author, the narrator of the novel went from Cuba to the U.S. at the age of six. However, Obejas arrived soon after the revolution while Juani got to the US only in 1978. Obsessed with her own memories, the memories of others, and with the urge to discern which is which, Juani is also in search of her own national identity and of discovering how to deal with being a lesbian living in a Cuban-American environment. The protagonist feels confused because sometimes she does not know if her memories are really hers or someone else's. Actually, the "Cubanidad" of Juani and of all the other characters is the one part that is strictly connected to all other parts of their identity. It is not possible to talk about Juani's sexuality without taking into account the fact that she is a Cuban exile. It is not possible to talk about violence, so present in the book, without talking about Cuban exile. It is not possible to fully understand the patriarchal oppression which the female characters deal with in the novel, without recognizing that this oppression comes from the fact that they belong to a group of Cuban exiles.

More than just showing the struggles of being a Cuban exile in the U.S., in *Memory Mambo* Obejas was able to include other nationalities and show how intra-Caribbean

prejudice disturbs the lives of displaced characters. By placing a Puerto Rican character, Juani's girlfriend Gina, in close contact with a Cuban family, the author demonstrates the lingering consequences left by the wave of immigration in the 20th century that placed individuals from varied background in the same society and close to one another. In "Cuban Memory, 'American' Mobility, and Achy Obejas's Lesbian Way" Paul Allatson argues that,

> In many ways Memory Mambo attempts to engage with the issue of Cuban privilege that underwrites Juani's intention and against which Gina has always struggled. The novel deromanticizes the idea of a socioeconomically paradisiacal exile Cuba by describing racialized hierarchies, domestic violence perpetuated by heterosexuals and lesbians alike, child abuse, and the confusion and pain experienced by transcultural subjects. (ALLATSON, 2002, p.194)

The aim of this chapter is to analyze the many consequences of exile in the lives of Juani and her family. Taking into consideration the role of memory in the lives of exiled characters, this chapter will attempt to evaluate the role of patriarchy, sexuality, and nationality in the diasporic Cuban community Juani belongs to, concentrating on her search for agency and belonging.

Obejas's novel follows both Juani and her large family, all Cuban exiles who live in Chicago but who arrived there at different times. Focused on how memory affects characters' identities, the novel is permeated by issues related to sexuality, violence, and social class inequality. Obejas's protagonist and narrator is a twenty-four year old woman in search of her own place in the world and, in order to achieve this place, Juani tries to master the history of her family as well as her own by relying on her memory and the memories of others. However, as Juani finds out, memories are not stable, and the many versions of the same story lead her to an unsuccessful search. For Juani, the lack of total recall and reliable memory implies a loss of her own Cuban identity. Not remembering the place she was born is the same as not remembering what has led her to where she is right now, including her own identity. Therefore, recovering the memories, especially the ones connected to her homeland, becomes a rediscover of her Cubanidad and of herself.

Juani's need, then, is not only to remember her past, though that is the question she repeatedly asks. In order to formulate the future and decide who she wants to become, she feels the urge to understand how her present was shaped by her past. Though her journey seems devoted to looking back, it is actually a way of looking ahead. Going back to recover memories is the way she has found best in order to reconnect to her roots, since her dislocation because of exile left gaps both in her history and in her identity. The violence that marks the end of her relationship with Gina was simply the trigger that led Juani to realize

that in order to find herself, she would have to find what happened in her past. Therefore, though it seems like what she wants the most is to understand her failed relationship, what she really needs is to understand how her exilic life was formed, and why it was formed that way.

Kate McCullough, in the article “Marked by Genetics and Exile: Narrativizing Transcultural Sexualities in Memory Mambo”, published in 2000, believes that “Juani obsessively turns to narration to produce and explain both identities and desires, trying through this discursive maneuver to depoliticize love, desire, and sexuality and casting them as separate from, as an escape from, and even, at points, as an antidote to political conflicts” (McCULLOUGH, 2000, p.577). However, though Juani struggles to separate political from sexual issues, she finds that her sexuality is deeply embedded in a political background, and moreover, a political background created while in exile. Her search for accurate memory is even more complicated because of her confusion in relation to which memories are true or false, hers or someone else’s. As Juani states,

> sometimes other lives lived alongside mine interrupt, barge in on my senses, and I no longer know if I really lived through an experience or just heard about it so many times, or so convincingly, that I believed it for myself - became the lens through which it was captured, retold and shaped. (OBEJAS, 1996, p.9)

Her ultimate search is to find out “what *really* happened”, but her condition of exile, added to the inaccuracy of memory, make that goal extremely difficult to achieve.

Lene Johannessen, an associate professor in the University of Bergen, Norway, researches postcolonial literature and its representations of politics and identities. In the book *Considering Class: Essays on the Discourse of the American Dream (Transnational and Transatlantic American Studies)*, editor Johannessen discusses many of the struggles faced by diasporic individuals and their representation of exile in literature. For Johannessen,

> While few migratory passages are unqualifiedly happy, and while some must be undertaken to save lives, the official eviction from one's homeland that marks exile is unique. So, too, is exile's sensibility to the relationship between past and present. "To be displaced", Michael Ugarte writes in connection with Spanish exiled poets, "is to be obsessed with memory". In novels I have explored in this project, the feature is striking. The narrative orientation oscillates between past and present in what at times resembles a schizophrenic dance. (JOHANNESSEN, 2007, p.2)

Though the editor does not specifically analyze Obejas’s *Memory Mambo*, the oscillation between past and present and the obsession with historical truth through memory, are the foundation for Juani’s journey. Far from linear, Juani’s tale goes back and forth, from

the time she was still a child in Cuba, through her recent breakup with Gina, to the present abuse of her niece Rosa.

Obejas's choice of title describes perfectly the predicaments of Juani's journey, since the way the protagonist handles her memory is comparable to her dancing abilities in mambo. The back and forth of Juani's memories is the dance itself. When Juani talks about her cousin Caridad's ability in dancing, she mentions that Caridad is "one hell of a dancer" because she "actually learned to dance in Cuba". Patricia however, "was born in New York, which we joke is the reason she can't dance worth a damn". One's ability in dancing, then, is strictly related to one's connection to the homeland, much like memory is in Juani's opinion. Thus, mastering the memory (much like mastering the dance) of one's homeland, is a way of achieving full identification with the home country. The ones who were displaced early in their lives (especially Juani and Jimmy) do not understand the dance moves, much like they do not understand their true identity. Juani does with her memory what someone would do with dance choreography; she practices it and writes down the exact steps she has taken in order not to forget where she is going. Remembering becomes the mambo itself, which has to be rehearsed over and over in order to make sense.

What triggers the narrator's memory and leads her to her search is her breakup with girlfriend Gina. Juani's relationship with Gina is marked with arguments and misunderstandings that lead the women to gradually separate from one another. However, their relationship, which reaches its final demise in an act of extreme violence, does not end because of personal issues, or because of the women's inability to get along with each other. Socially constructed ideas put both women in opposite sides concerning nationality and sexuality.

Gina is a Puerto Rican *independista* who runs a local office concerned with political issues that include Puerto Rico's liberation from U.S. imperialism. To Gina, who has seen her country being controlled by the U.S., the Cuban revolution is a dream that she wishes may come true for her own people. Castro's regime, the communist government that defies the United States, is the political path she hopes her own country would take. Therefore, for Gina, the Cuban exiles that fled the communist revolution are nothing but *gusanos*, worms, who left their country because they were too worried about their own economic future and did not care about the well-being of the Cuban nation. Katherine Sugg explains the importance of Gina's presence in the novel by stating that her anger towards Cubans "exposes the various differences that mark intra-Caribbean politics in the Hispanic Caribbean diaspora, particularly the general understanding of the politically conservative, and upwardly mobile, nature of

Cubans who left the socialist revolution" (SUGG, 2003, p.472). Therefore, Gina serves as a destabilizing character who critiques (though also envies) the privileges received by the Cuban exiles soon after the revolution.

Juani, who came to the U.S. too young to be able to make her own choice, is caught in the middle of confrontations between her Cuban family and her Puerto Rican girlfriend. In one of the occasions her cousin Jimmy jokes and says that "Cubans are Puerto Ricans with jobs", which leaves Gina infuriated but unable to respond since she was in a Cuban household. Both Jimmy's jokes and Gina's friend's question of whether Juani was a "good" or a "bad" Cuban reflect "the politics of intra-Caribbean relations that assume certain stereotypes regarding the markers of class, race, and political ideology that separate Cubans and Puerto Ricans, as well as their linked experiences of racism and economic and social opportunities in the United States as diasporic Latinas." (SUGG, 2003, p.467)

Gina's prejudice towards Juani is also expressed when the women are talking about their sexuality. While the latter wishes to be more open about herself, the first still feels the need to hide their relationship. Gina says:

> I'm not interested in being a *lesbian*, in separating politically from my people. [...] What are we talking about? Issues of sexual identity? While Puerto Rico is a colony? While Puerto Rican apologists are trying to ram statehood down our throats with legislative tricks and sleights of hand? You think I'm going to sit around and discuss *sexual identity*? Nah, Juani, you can do that - you can have that navel-gazing discussion. (OBEJAS, 1996, p.77)

Gina insists on separating gender and political issues and believes that national identity should prevail over sexual orientation. Thus, she "refuses to be [a lesbian] because she regards that identity as inimical to her leftist politics, and to her mulatto identity as well" (ALLATSON, 2002, p. 170). In other words, Gina believes that if she recognizes her lesbian identity, she will automatically deny her Caribbean one, without acknowledging that both traits are not exclusionary, but two distinct, yet complementary parts of her self. Therefore,

> Gina clearly regards a queer identity and a political-activist identity as mutually exclusive in the way Juani recognizes. But her rejection of a queer identity also suggests a refusal to accede to U.S. cultural logics that run counter to a widespread belief in Latin America that identity *per se* does not have a sexual core. (ALLATSON, 2002, p.171)

Since sexuality is recognized as a part of one's identity inside the United States, while being thought of as separate from it in the Caribbean, Gina once again shows that she "prefers" being a Caribbean than a lesbian. In some sense, she actually stands for what she believes in, though not recognizing part of her own self. Thus, Gina's denial of her sexuality has its roots in the fact that her identity as Puerto Rican is the one that is governing her, giving

her direction and a sense of belonging. Gina's way of prioritizing one trait of her identity over the other is not hers alone. It is common knowledge that in the wake of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, many groups considered ethnicity to be more important than gender or sexuality while other groups, such as the feminist movement, focused on gender but failed to discuss ethnicity.

Gina also believes that "that's so white, this whole business of *sexual identity"* (OBEJAS, 1996, p.78,) which, according to McCullough, "echoes a disavowal of homosexuality within U.S. communities of color, according to which homosexual desire is a product of privileged white decadence", which is constantly repeated in Gina's discourse. At the same time, "it speaks to well-justified critiques by lesbians and gays of color of the rampant racism in the U.S. gay and lesbian movement" (McCullough, 2000, p.593). Moreover, since Gina also tells Juani that "you Cubans, you think you're white", she underscores once again the prejudice inserted between two diasporic communities, and the resentment against Cuban citizens because of the benefits they received from the U.S. government.

Deepika Bahri comments in her chapter entitled "Feminism in/and post colonialism" from *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* that "identity is […] not a predetermined quality but one that must be adopted" (BAHRI, 2008, p.207). Taking into consideration her interpretation of identity and Gina's behavior, it is possible to make a parallel and say that, when it comes to identity issues, Gina decided to adopt her Puerto Rican identity, and not her lesbian one. Even though they are utterly intertwined, she chooses to let one take priority, since her main concern at the moment is the freedom of her country and not sexual identity issues.

Bernie, Juani's brother-in-law, offers a further comment as to why "the *independista* movement doesn't do well with gay and lesbian issues." For Bernie, the *independistas* "think homosexuality is a product of a capitalist society. As soon as the revolution comes, men will stop being narcissistic, which will put an end to male homosexuality. And they'll stop being sexists, which will dampen lesbian ardor" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.171). This puts Gina's choice even further in the political and national category. Not only is she Puerto Rican but she is also against a capitalist government in general, and the United States government in particular, since her home country is still under U.S.'s domination.

However, for Juani, who is still trying to find herself within both sexual and national background, Gina's resolution is not so easily understandable, and she still wonders if "lesbians weren't her people too? And all this about sexual identity – if it was that

meaningless then why did it have to be such a big deal?" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.78). What Gina fails to understand, and Juani tries to interpret, is that the varied traits of one's identity are interconnected. Therefore, by denying her sexual identity over her national one, Gina is actually denying herself entirely, since it is not possible to separate parts of oneself. Denying her sexuality is, then, a deconstruction of her whole self, and a rather violent one.

Gina's attitudes can be compared to those of many Cuban homosexuals soon after the 1959 revolution. Though Gina is from Puerto Rico, her choice of nationality over sexuality is similar to that made by those Cuban homosexuals who remained on the island and decided to become a part of society in spite of the tight regime against homosexuality. In an online article entitled "Why Many Cuban Gay Men and Lesbians Left After 1959", Leslie Feinberg uses Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich's article "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes Towards an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experience" and states that, especially for the ones who decided to stay in Cuba even when homophobia was at its peak, "class and class interests were perceived as more elemental aspects of their identity than homosexual behavior" (FEINBERG, 2007, n.p.). In Gina's case, the same happens. Being Puerto Rican is more important than being a lesbian.

In the first chapter of *Mapping: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter,* Susan Stanford Friedman remarks that

> Identity is constructed relationally through difference from the other; identification with a group based on gender, race, sexuality, for example, depends mostly on binary systems of "us" versus "them," where difference from the other defines the group to which one belongs. Conversely, identity also suggests sameness, as in the world identical; an identity affirms some form of commonality, some shared ground (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p.19).

Gina sees the queered US as "them", while interpreting the desexed Caribbean as "us". On one hand, Gina is part of a group of Puerto Rican citizens who came to the U.S., but still sees their country's needs as priority. On the other, she is a lesbian who believes that being a lesbian is part of a capitalist, American environment. Therefore, in order to proclaim her identity as a Puerto Rican, without any kind of American "contamination", Gina decides to conceal her sexuality, to avoid being perceived as a sell-out to the American system and as less Puerto Rican. Yet, the connection between sexuality and nationality cannot be severed, since "Obejas insistently represents individual erotic subjectivity as emerging from political categories" (McCULLOUGH, 200, p.577), especially through Juani's body.

Though repeatedly trying to separate her sexuality from nationality, while deciphering both of them, Juani constantly compares Gina to Cuba's landscape when thinking

about their relationship and its aftermath. For Juani, Gina "was like the purest, blackest earth – that rich, sweet soil in which sugar cane grows. I always imagined her as hills in which I would roll around, happy and dirty, as if I were back in Cuba, or perhaps in Puerto Rico" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.119). A reconciliation with Gina's eroticism, then, would be a reconciliation with her own sexual identity that is tied to Cuban imaginary. Moreover, the image of Cuba "underscores the degree to which Juani's desire remains unselfconsciously enmeshed in her family's production of Cuban identity" (McCULLOUGH, 2000, p.598), since her comparison of Gina to the country finds its source in her own family history, specifically her Tio Raul's experience during the revolution. Juani finishes her comparison by mentioning that "[she] always forgot how sugarcane sucks the earth, makes it barren and dry, how it made [her] Tio Raul rich but drove him insane first" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.119).

More than just Juani's comparisons, the presence of lesbian cousin Titi in Cuba also shows how sexuality is embedded in a nationalist background, with no chance of separation. Since it is undeniable that the politics in Caribbean countries deeming homosexuality as a disease imported from the US affect Gina's behavior, Obejas includes the character of Titi in order to expose the fact that homosexuality is present across territories, and is not an American commodity.

Through Titi, Obejas not only shows the close connection between sexuality and nationality, but also creates a contrast with Gina, once again disrupting the idea of homogeneity. Obejas also highlights Gina's location in relation to the matter since Gina's political speech that claims homosexuality is unimportant comes from a geographical place in which homosexuality is not judged as much as it is on the Caribbean, though the prejudice is still present. Titi, however, is still trapped in Cuba, where the mere suspicion of her homosexual tendencies may lead her to physical harm.

Juani imagines Titi as having a "need to be loved in daylight – to walk down the street arm in arm with her lover without the pretense of a mere friendship, to be utterly and ordinarily in love" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.76). Titi, then, has no option except hiding her sexuality. She is not even able to choose between a national and a sexual identity, even though they are not opposite, since her sexuality is denied in the first place. However, Juani's presumption concerning Titi's behavior is a reflection of her own feeling. The protagonist states:

> Even though I'm here, in what is supposed to be the land of the free, I share this desire with my cousin Titi. Every lover I've ever had has been closeted, has always instantly looked over her shoulder when we've kissed on a street corner or train station platform. This was especially, and most painfully, true of Gina (OBEJAS, 1996, p.76)

In Juani's opinion, Gina is presented with a choice, regardless of its complexity, between displaying her sexual identity or not, while Titi is denied that right. The narrator believes that Titi is constantly forced to keep her sexuality hidden in order to protect herself from physical harm. Without regarding the financial impositions that may have led Titi to believe the US would be a better place to live, Juani characterizes Titi's desire to escape as resultant from a feeling that "once she is here [in the US], she might be free to be queer" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.76). Therefore, Titi's only option is to remain secretive about who she really is, while constantly trying to escape, which is seen by the family as a trait of madness, developed because of the constraints that the revolutionary regime has established. Instead of acknowledging Titi's sexuality, they believe that her constant attempts to leave the island are "because she doesn't know any better, because communism has made her crazy" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.76).

Kate McCullough believes that "the Casas family's erasure of Titi's lesbianism and of homophobia as sources of her desire to leave enacts a long-standing, transnational erasure of homosexuality" (McCULLOUGH, 2000, p.588). This erasure, which also appears when the family deals with Juani's sexuality, has its sources connected to what Gina believes, the idea that homosexuality is not part of postcolonial societies, but created against an American background. Therefore, Titi's lesbianism is not even considered a possibility, given the fact that she has never left Cuba.

In previously mentioned *Borderland/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa addresses the subject of displaying one's sexuality close to their home. Anzaldúa defines homophobia as

> Fear of going home. And of not being taken in. We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza*, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us. To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadows. Which leaves only one fear – that we will be found out and that the Shadow-Beast will break out of its cage (ANZALDÚA, 1987, p.20)

In *Memory Mambo*, the fear of being discovered as anything other than heterosexual leads Titi to an endless quest for escape, and keeps Gina in a perpetual closet. Both of them are products of an unfounded belief that homosexuality cannot be connected to nationalism, though their reaction to the matter is opposite. By placing lesbian characters in a nationalist background, whether they are understood as lesbians or not, Obejas engages in a much needed discussion of the connection between sexuality and nationality while, as McCullough puts it,

she also “criticizes a tendency in contemporary U.S. lesbian fiction to represent an ‘insular community’ of lesbians operating in a solely lesbian context” (McCULLOUGH, 2000, p.583). The lesbians in *Memory Mambo*, therefore, are not isolated and untouched by the political pressures of their country, quite the opposite, the political pressures are the forces that shape, though not define, their sexuality, and how it is expressed.

Actually, nationalism is the biggest force that defines individuals desire, be it homosexual or not, in the whole novel. Not only Juani, Gina, and Titi draw their sexuality from a national source, but Caridad’s relationship with abusive husband Jimmy is also presented as a consequence of exile’s subjectivity.

Born and raised in Cuba, Caridad moved to the U.S. when she was seventeen years old, which, as Patricia estates, is a time of sexual awakening. Upon arriving in the barrio, and without speaking any English, Caridad experienced the feeling of displacement that is very common among exiled characters. Since she was still maturing sexually, this feeling has shaped how her desire would surface, leading her to look for a male model that would resemble the one she knew existed at home. For Paul Allatson, “preferring not to discuss the socioeconomic constraints that may be at work for Caridad, her cousins instead trace Caridad’s loyalty back to the trauma of displacement from Cuba” (ALLATSON, 2002, p.179). That is, for the cousins, her interest in Jimmy developed from a need to reconnect to her Cuban roots. Patricia even mentions that “there’s something disgustingly Cuban about him, and [she] think[s], in a way, that appeals to her, like a primordial memory” (OBEJAS, 1996, p.60). More than just Caridad’s behavior, “they also explain Jimmy’s violence as similarly modulated by the psychic damages and bodily deculturation inflicted on him in childhood by enforced removal from his ‘true’ familial and national Cuban home” ((ALLATSON, 2002, p.179). That is, the cousins interpret her acceptance of violence as pity for Jimmy and his displacement, since he moved from Cuba with no family and was placed in a foster home. What no one takes into account, however, is the fact that Caridad’s relationship with Jimmy mirrors her mother’s relationship with her father.

Devoted to her philanderer husband Pepe, Juani’s aunt was completely ruled by her husband’s desires, so much so that she even abdicated from eating her adored citric fruits because Tio Pepe was allergic and could not be near them. Juani informs the reader that her uncle’s cheatings were frequent and that he made no effort to try to hide them, causing much sadness to the wife who pretended nothing really happened.

Tio Pepe’s behavior, his unfaithfulness and constant drinking, leaves its consequences in his two daughters. Caridad and younger sister Pauli, however, react differently towards

their father. While the former resembles her mother in terms of acceptance and caring, the latter is thoroughly indifferent to her father's behavior, not because she did not care, but because she was aware of the harm it caused her mother. While Caridad is described as "Tio Pepe's comfort", being the one who sought him when she had trouble, and helping him during his hangovers, Pauli is "something to fear in many ways", since her reaction towards her father would not be anger, but complete disdain, leading her to receive the nickname of "Fortress of Solitude" by her cousins. The power of patriarchal pressure is so strong that both Tia Celia and Caridad blame Pauli for being insensitive towards her father, instead of understanding the reasons for her indifference. Caridad feels that "the sin lay in Pauli's detachment, not her father's addiction" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.64) while Tia Celia believes that "what Pauli doesn't realize is her father's pain, or how hard he works. The girl takes it for granted that there's a roof over her head and food on the table every night" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.64). It is very clear that the behavior of the two daughters towards Tio Pepe is an effect of cultural constructions. For Pauli, who was raised in the United States, accepting her father's behavior would be endorsing his attitudes, while for Caridad, who came to the US on her late teens, regardless of her father's conduct, being a daughter meant respecting both parents no matter what their attitudes were. According to Juani, "in American terms, Pauli refused to enable her father, in Cuban terms, she was an ingrate" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.63).

However, soon after Tio Pepe's death, Tia Celia changes into a completely different woman. For Juani "Tia Celia emerged from her haze" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.92). The woman that had been cheated and humiliated by her husband, now comes alive and gains her independence. Previously supporting Caridad's abusive marriage, while condemning Pauli for her independence, Tia Celia transforms herself after her husband's passing away. Nevertheless, while the mother is able to break free, the older daughter remains victim of an abusive relationship. For Kate McCullough, Caridad and Jimmy's relationship "emerges from the violent dislocations of exile and enacts a physical violence that is the micro practice of the larger colonial model" (McCULLOUGH, 2000, p.586), situating her body experiences as deeply embedded in postcolonial, patriarchal practices.

While portraying Caridad as repeating the history of both her mother and her country, Obejas acknowledges the continuity of patriarchy in the Cuban society but simultaneously disassembles the stereotype of the physically abusive husband, since Tio Pepe's abuses were psychological, but never physical. With this strategy, Obejas places domestic violence as emanating from the US background, not in the Cuban male body, since it is the very fact that Jimmy was not raised in Cuba that has led him to violence. McCullough believes that "while

the novel implies that the traumatic disruption of Jimmy's childhood and his consequent alienation are the reasons for his violence, other evidence in the novel codes his wife beating as one of his specifically American traits" (McCULLOUGH, 200, p.587).

Actually, Jimmy is so in need to prove his Cubanidad that he is portrayed as almost a caricature of the Cuban male model, inflicting his violence not only towards his wife, but also towards Juani, whom he is not able to decode. Threatened and confused by her lesbianism, "he is figured as the machista who perceives himself to be in direct competition with another woman for male honor and who, as a consequence, must rearm his body's machista significations in order to structure the power relations between himself and a woman" (ALLATSON, 2002, p.174). Confused by the difference between gender and sexuality, Jimmy believes that Juani envies him, and fears that her presence will somehow contaminate his wife, whom he orders to be away from Juani. Jimmy's condition as an exile and his need to prove his Cubanidad (maleness) may be factors that contribute to his violence, but they cannot be generalized as applying to all exiled Cuban males. As a character, Jimmy is a literary representation of one out of many experiences

In *Gender Trouble*, published in 2006, Judith Butler discusses the construction of gender in western society. One of Butler's beliefs is that "the presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it" (BUTLER, 2006, p.10). In the novel, Jimmy illustrates Butler's assumptions in the following dialogue with Juani:

> "You ever want one of these?" He asked me. He rested his head on the back of the couch, his cheeks all flushed. His penis pushed at his loose dress pants as if trying to erect a tent. "Not inside you, but like one of your own?"
> […] I could see how, in his ignorance, he'd gotten confused. Still, I really should have been ticked off, or maybe scared. […] Yet, when he talked to me like that, instead of telling him what a dumb question that was, or how homophobic and insecure he sounded, I just laughed and told him no, that I didn't need one of those.
> "I get what I want, you know what I mean?" I said to him, all cocky (OBEJAS, 1996, p.20)

Since Juani does not have a penis, and with Jimmy's assumption that she might need one, he believes to have some sort of control over her, since he possesses something she could only wish to have. Control, or the attempt to gain it, permeates Jimmy and Juani's relationship, both in relation to Caridad, to whom Juani is covertly attracted, and in relation to the narrative, in the sense that Juani and Jimmy compete for the power to tell the story when it comes to the incident that marks the end of Juani and Gina's relationship and the abuse of Pauli's daughter Rosa.

In Adrianne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality", she states that

> it seems more probable that men really fear not that they will have women's sexual appetites forced on them or that women want to smother and devour them, but that women could be indifferent to them altogether, that men could be allowed sexual and emotional - therefore economic - access to women *only* on women's terms, otherwise being left on the periphery of the matrix. (RICH, 1996, p.134)

In Jimmy's case, his fear towards Juani and Caridad is that his role as a husband will be stolen by the lesbian subject, leaving him with no control over his wife's sexuality. He believes that, if given the chance to be near Juani, Caridad will be attracted to her cousin and will not depend on him anymore. Juani's hidden desire towards her cousin, expressed by the way she describes Caridad as having "the blackest eyes, skin like butter, lips as juicy as a *mamey*, and the sexiest way about her of everybody I've ever met" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.42) also highlights Jimmy and Juani's shared desire and their confrontational position in relation to Caridad. Yet, Juani and Jimmy's similarities are not only illustrated by their desire, but also, and more explicitly, by the violent impulse that both of them share, which in Juani's case, culminates in the ultimate violence against Gina.

The physical violence perpetrated by Juani leads both women to the hospital where Jimmy works as a janitor. He, then, seizes the opportunity to once again try to control her. In the hospital, Jimmy "covers" for Juani by convincing Gina and the police not to press charges. Later, he creates an elaborate lie in order to hide the true facts even to their family. By saying that Gina's political opponents broke into her apartment and hit them, he erases Juani's true story, and substitutes it by his own narrative, thus regaining the narrative control that grants him command over Juani's life and story.

In Kate McCullough's view, "Jimmy's assertion of narrative control here parallels his physical control of Caridad and initiates a further rivalry between him and Juani, rivalry over control of the explanatory narrative of the event" (McCULLOUGH, 2000, p.586). That is, by lying for Juani, he takes control over her story while gaining leverage if she ever criticizes him for the violence he inflicts in his wife. What Jimmy does not expect is that it is the very repression he creates in Juani that will trigger her need to understand her own memories and lead her to a journey to find agency.

In Juani's diary, Jimmy's version intrudes in her own version of the events involving her fight with Gina. She explains:

> In the last month, my journal had become a nightmare. Not writing about "the incident" right away had been a terrible mistake. Now, every time I began to jolt down my story, it got confused with Jimmy's mess. I'd be right at the place where I hit Gina, when suddenly, I'd look down at the page in horror: *And then the guy grabbed the chair and hit Gina on the back, like on a TV show. And the chair broke into pieces, so I grabbed a leg to depend*

> *myself and sparred with the guy*. But I knew that wasn't what happened! *Or was it?* (OBEJAS, 1996, p. 173)

Concerning the erasure of one's pain, Sara Ahmed believes that "forgetting would be a repetition of the violence or injury. To forget would be to repeat the forgetting that is already implicated in the fetishisation of the wound". She also concludes that one's "task might instead be to 'remember' how the surfaces of the bodies came to be wounded in the first place" (AHMED, 2004, p.33), so that the subject can be healed from the violence inflicted on him/her.

Based on Ahmed's theory, one understands that Juani needs to remember the wounds in order to heal, but both the remembering and the healing are prevented by Jimmy's interference. Jimmy's suppression, however, is not the only one suffered by Juani, since her family's response to her sexuality also keeps her silenced, especially during her stay in the hospital. Obejas's protagonist says that her father, Alberto, "never mentioned Gina or retribution for her wounds. He never expressed an interest in talking to [them]. To hear [her] father tell it, she didn't exist" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.140).

Even earlier in the novel, Juani thoroughly describes her father's attitudes concerning her sexuality:

> My father knows too but we don't talk about it. This doesn't mean there are any pretenses between us. To the contrary: My father is as aware as anyone could ever be. He avoids not just the topic of my sexuality, but any subject that could inadvertently lead us there. My father's worst fear, I think, is that'll I'll say something to him about it. Because he can think of nothing worse than having to look into the eye and making a decision about whether to accept or reject me, my father creates an illusion of normalcy about the emptiness of our interactions, our meaningless chats. If anyone at a family gathering or party starts in on when I'm going to find the right man and get married, I can always count on my father to rescue me with a quick comment on women's liberation, or there being no man alive good enough for his daughter. His motivation isn't to spare me discomfort but to save himself. Because he's afraid I won't lie, it's vital to him that I not be provoked into the truth (OBEJAS, 1996, p.80)

The violence of silence, then, had always been present in the family, which constantly increases Juani's pain and isolation. Obejas's protagonist believes that "[her] lesbianism is not the cause of [her] alienation, but it is part of it" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.79). Discourse, and the lack of it, becomes a means through which violence is inflicted, whether this violence is deliberate or not. Although ther is a distinction between Jimmy and Alberto since the former wishes to control Juani's narrative, while the latter wishes to keep himself

away from the implications of having a lesbian daughter, both inflict different types of violence upon her.

The perpetual state of silence is also the reason why Juani shares such a strong connection with cousin Titi, whom she has never met in person. Both women suffer the consequences of being silenced regarding who they really are. Maria Celina Bartolotto, in the first chapter of her PhD dissertation entitled "Blushing to Be: Shame and the Narration of Subjectivity in Contemporary U.S. - Caribbean Fiction", states that

> [s]hame and secrets are intimately related. The dichotomy of visibility vs. invisibility is always at play in this relationship. Shame is always a disapproving gaze, even if it is our own. Therefore, in shame, the motion is to cover, to protect, and to hide away. Invisibility, though, also provokes shame. It is the condemning gaze, again, only this time it refuses to grant presence, substance, or existence. The shame of exposure is, consequently, always negotiated against the shameful fear of non–being. (BARTOLOTTO, 2008, p. 21)

Therefore, Juani is surrounded by people who keep secrets in order to protect themselves from shame. Her father does not mention she is a lesbian because he may be ashamed of having a lesbian daughter, Gina is ashamed of coming out and fears not being considered equal to her compatriots, Titi is also ashamed of her gay identity, which may lead to physical violence. It is only through silence that these shameful situations can be prevented. Drawing from Eve Sedgwick's famous "Epistemology of the Closed", Bartolotto believes that "silence is deployed as a power tactic for the implementation of the closet, asserting the prevalence of normative sexuality" (BARTOLOTTO, 2008, p.31). Juani does try to escape this closet but is unable to do so because of the impositions that keep her in it. Though Juani says that it is her lovers (especially Gina) that prevent her from being totally open in public, the maintenance of the closet is done by her entire family, especially her father.

Sara Ahmed argues that "queer subjects may […] be asked not to make heterosexuals uncomfortable by avoiding the display of signs of queer intimacy" (AHMED, 2004, p.148). In the novel, Juani, according to Patricia, "[does] pretty well walking that weird line between not being in the closet and not being in people's faces" (OBEJAS, 1996, p.124), mostly because of her family's attitude towards her sexuality. However, for Juani this "line" represents what Ahmed describes as, "an uncomfortable feeling, a restriction on what one can do with one's body, and another's body, in social space" (AHMED, 2004, p.148). Thus, the restriction that comes over Juani is both concerning her sexuality, her nationality and her narrative. As Sonia Torres suggests, "in spite of her desire for a centering narrative, the narrator is inexorably decentered, for her desire will always be deferred, or denied" (TORRES, 2004, p.236).

Memory Mambo, then, problematizes not only how sexuality is connected to national identity, but also discusses how national identity shapes the way people express their sexuality, or better yet, how people are allowed to express this sexuality. In the case of Cuban exiles, being homosexual may mean being forbidden to express this identity both inside and outside their home country. And even when individuals think they might be, as Juani puts it, "free to be queer", other impositions may stop them from achieving this freedom.

Sonia Torres believes that "*Memory Mambo,* rather than presenting a fixed or idyllic national memory, displays a series of elements in transit, creating a network of inter-American connections through characters that come and go" (TORRES, 2004, p.245). More interestingly, though Obejas is Cuban-American and highly concerned with issues related to her country, she is able to question other nationalities and their relationship with Cubans inside and outside the United States. By placing the lesbian body inside a nationalistic background, Obejas deals with issues that are relevant for many individuals who are told their sexuality is incompatible with their nationality, but still struggle to have both their national identity and their sexuality recognized as inseparable parts of themselves. In *Memory Mambo*, they can finally see themselves represented in the characters of Juani, Gina, and Titi.

3 **“IT'S ALWAYS A MEANS TO AN END”*: QUEER INVISIBILITY IN *VALMIKI’S DAUGHTER***

> To deal with sex, power employs nothing more than a law of prohibition. Its objective: that sex renounce itself. Its instrument: the threat of a punishment that is nothing other than the suppression of sex. Renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed; do not appear if you do not want to disappear. Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification. (FOUCAULT, 1990, p. 84)

The islands of the Caribbean have always been seen as a getaway place for tourists that come from all over the world to enjoy its beautiful nature and friendly people. Perceived by the white West as a more open environment, the islands are the place where many tourists hope to find easier access to sexual pleasure. Sex tourism is one of the biggest industries in the region and unauthorized agencies already have “advertisements in European magazines announcing ‘package deals’ including the service of a local male or female” (GIBBINGS, 1997, n.p.). Ian Boxill examines the link between the spread of the HIV virus and sex tourism in the islands in his book *Tourism and HIV/AIDS in Jamaica and The Bahamas*. For the author, sex tourists choose Caribbean countries as their destiny, with no fear of legal consequences, because “the tourist industry is founded on the idea of providing a place free from normal social constraints, a relaxed, often times hedonistic atmosphere, where consequences do not exist. For the tourist, it serves to satisfy those desires that are ‘forbidden fruit’ at home” (BOXILL, 2005 p.23).

But for some individuals living inside the islands, the situation is neither safe nor satisfying. If not conforming to heteronormative rules is already a complicated issue for individuals living in countries where violence against LGBT is forbidden by law, when talking about countries that offer no legal protection whatsoever, and even criminalize homosexuality, the situation becomes even more delicate. And that is a terrifying position in which Caribbean LGBT citizens find themselves.

Toni Holness, who has recently graduated from Beasley School of Law, and is already a respected name concerning the studies of LGBT laws in the Caribbean, has written the article called “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Rights in the Caribbean: Using Regional Bodies to Advance Culturally Charged Human Rights", published by the Brooklyn Journal of International Law in 2013. For Holness, who carefully evaluates the situation of LGBT citizens on the islands, many of the obstacles concerning the creation of protective laws stem from the fact that "the Caribbean’s apprehension to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans,

and Intersex rights advocacy is deeply rooted in the region's tragically oppressive colonial experience, and often advocates disparage this cultural resistance as a cumbersome and irritating barrier to ensuring human rights." (HOLNESS, 2013, p.926). In other words, Caribbean countries oppose the creation of human rights laws in order to sustain a recently acquired autonomy from their previous colonizers, as if the creation of such laws would somehow imply a continued dependence on colonial policies. Proving their autonomy is obviously not the only reason why Caribbean countries do not criminalize homophobia, but it is necessary to acknowledge that

> At least thirteen of the Caribbean Community's ("CARICOM") fifteen states continue to criminalize same-sex conduct under anti-sodomy statutes, and the region shows particular resistance to any foreign suggestions to repeal these laws. In addition to clinging to its homophobic laws, the Caribbean continues to resist any social or cultural human rights advocacy (HOLNESS, 2013, p.928).

Moreover, "the LGBTI norms being advanced through international direct advocacy are categorally rejected as foreign norms, alien to the local population" (HOLNESS, 2013, p.935), as if homosexual citizens did not even exist in the region. LGBT individuals, therefore, become easy prey to unjustified acts of violence and live in a constant state of fear for their own lives and physical integrity.

But more than just maintaining autonomy from their previous colonizers, the lack of LGBT protective laws and of discussions concerning the existence of LGBT citizens also find its roots on the idea that homosexuality itself is a product of a white (as American/European) society. Therefore, acknowledging the existence of LGBT citizens would be accepting one more aspect of the culture that has for so long oppressed their country. Alison Donnell, in the book *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History*, analyzes the consequences of oppressions towards sexually diverse individuals inside the Caribbean using the island's literature as representation.

Donnell says that "there is a […] widespread belief that [homosexuality] is a European export or contamination" (DONNELL, 2006, p.201), and offers yet another explanation as to why heteronormativity has become the norm inside the Caribbean community. The critic argues that "Caribbean heterosexual identities are rooted in constructions of reproductive sexuality bequeathed by slavery and deployed post-emancipation by both men and women as a way of claiming social entitlements" (DONNELL, 2006, p.201). That is, in order to solidify the newly acquired freedom, and in hopes of getting social and economic consolidation, Caribbean individuals needed to be seen as good

procreators, which would be achieved only by affirming their heterosexuality, while despising same-sex relations.

Donnell, then, echoes the thoughts of acclaimed writer Makeda Silvera concerning the close connection between slavery and homophobia. In Silvera's point of view, as stated in the article "Man Royal and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians", first published in 1992,

> To be male was to be the stud, the procreator; to be female was to be fecund, and one's femininity was measured by the ability to attract and hold a man, and to bear children. In this way, slavery and the post-emancipated colonial order defined the structures of patriarchy and heterosexuality as necessary for social mobility and acceptance (SILVERA, 2008, p.352)

Ironically, what many Caribbean nations fail to account is the fact that their own anti-sodomy laws and prejudice against homosexuality have their origins in the British Empire. Section 377 of the British Code "became a model penal code for the British territories, influencing […] almost all former British colonial territories" (HOLNESS, 2013, p.942), and dictated that any form of sodomy was prohibited, and that punishment could as severe as the death penalty.

Donnell argues that both LGBT and postcolonial individuals have been constantly fighting for equality and numeral civil rights campaigns have been organized aiming to oppose oppression towards both groups. Nonetheless, though sharing a background of injustice, silence, and violence, homosexuality and postcoloniality are still treated as distinct issues, and "the campaign for gay rights is perhaps the one major international liberation or civil rights movement that has not been attached to the wider anti-imperial struggle in postcolonial accounts"((DONNELL, 2006, p.202).

Another obstacle that prevents discussion and acceptance of LGBT issues is the imposition brought by language. Terms such as "queer", "gay", "lesbian", and "homosexual" were coined inside an imperial framework that neither classifies nor represents the diversity of sexual identities located inside the islands. For this reason, "Caribbean writers do not adopt the terminology of the West in order to name this experience or desire. Their writings are rather characterised by an un-naming of this desire and sexual practice" (DONNELL, 2006, p.184)

This chapter focuses on the consequences of imposed gender binaries and homophobia affecting the characters of Shani Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter*. From physical harm to psychological injuries, from a wish to break free to an impossibility of doing so, characters in Mootoo's novel dramatize different dilemmas faced by Caribbean individuals

living in the Caribbean country of Trinidad, a British colony until 1962 (KANGAL, 2004), member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and subjected to its heteronormative politics.

The absence of protective laws together with heteronormative structures make fiction and non-fiction works, written by Caribbean authors that deal with divergent sexualities of individuals within the geographical region of the islands, extremely difficult to come by. Editor Thomas Glave took a necessary step towards the gathering of works, be it fiction or non-fiction, written by Caribbean authors that discussed the hidden topic of LGBT Caribbeans in and out of the island. According to the author, his collection entitled *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles* "is a book that [he] and others have been waiting for and have wanted for all [their] lives" since it "originated as an idea born out of the most extreme longing: the desire to know finally, and with complete certainty, that a book such as [that] one actually existed and could exist" (GLAVE, 2008, p.1). Glave had many difficulties in publishing his collection since multiple editors and agents believed the book would be too "narrow", focusing on "a slice of a slice", reinforcing once more the idea of Caribbean LGBTs as virtually inexistent. In the book, Glave says that

> Through all the hours of [the book's] more groggy, wobbly-keed state, it wanted to know the same thing as I did: things about the people like me whom I longed so much to know (and who, it seemed, were so often impossible to find) in Jamaica, Martinique, St. Lucia, Trinidad. People whose eyes would say something recognizable, friendly even, in the Dominican Republic, Sint Maarten, Guyane Française. People "out there" who also gazed across that water that simultaneously divided and united us all who dreamed - yearned their way through those emotions and all that desire: women for women, men for men, women and men for women-men. That erotic-emotional desire for people of our own gender that it seemed no one - no one at all - ever spoke about, much less wished to hear about unless in the realm of "scandal" and "disgrace" (GLAVE, 2008, p.3)

Shani Mootoo is one of the authors present in Glave's collection. She was born in Ireland from Hindu-Trinidadian parents who moved and took her, when she was three months old, to the Caribbean islands of Trinidad, where she lived until the age of nineteen. She then moved to Canada to pursue her college education. Having graduated in Fine Arts from the University of Western Ontario, Mootoo has built an impressive artistic career and has had many of her paintings and videos exhibited. In the literary field, the author published her first book in 1993: *Out on Main Street* is a short story collection that gathers nine pieces by the author. The narrative included in *Our Caribbean* is one of these nine short stories, and has the same title as the book. The collection is classified by Donnell as "one of the few texts by a Caribbean woman writer to depict same-sex loving between women with range, humour, and confidence" (DONNELL, 2006, p.217). In spite of the characters' wit and courage, Mootoo's

gives evidence to the idea that “being a lesbian makes the rules all the more fraught and the stakes even higher” (DONNELL, 2006, p.219), for the characters still undergo never ending discrimination.

Mootoo published her first novel in 1996. *Cereus Blooms at Night* has received much literary appraisal and granted the author a place among the finalists for the Giller Prize, the Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award and the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize. Donna McCormack analyzes *Cereus Blooms at Night* in the article “Dreaming Across the Sea: Queer Postcolonial Belonging in Shani Mootoo’s Novels”, and classifies it as

> […] 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 labor; 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. (McCORMACK, 2006, p.5)

The novel, therefore, incorporates issues of homo-eroticism, transexuality, diaspora, and violence inside a Caribbean background, where questions connected to gender, race, class, and sexuality are constantly discussed and deconstructed. *Cereus Blooms at Night*, then, can be classified as “a text that […] represents the troubling consequences of the heterosexual imperatives which operate in the Caribbean” while it can also be read as an illustration to understand “a new social contract through which sexual difference can be mapped onto the identity matrix of Caribbeaness” (DONNELL, 2006, p.9).

Mootoo has also published three other novels: *He Drown She at Sea* (2005), *Valmiki’s Daughter* (2009), and *Moving Forward Like a Crab* (2014), and a collection of poems, *The Predicament of Or* (2001). All of her stories take place in the Caribbean and deal with families that struggle with some sort of sexual identity matter. A more thorough explanation of Mootoo's characters comes from Sissy Helff and Sanghamitra Dalal in their article “The Quest for an Identity in Shani Mootoo's V*almiki's Daughter*”, where they state that “many of Mootoo’s protagonists struggle with the strictly normative order set by the closely knit Indo-Caribbean society since the space dedicated here to homosexual and bisexual people is rather limited”. For these characters, therefore, “leaving seems [to be] the only option left” (HELFF; DALAL, 2012, p. 78). Mootoo’s characters, then, are not only situated within a sexual minority group in Trinidad, but also within a global ethnic minority, since they are part of the Hindu community.

Hindu immigration to the Caribbean, and specifically to Trinidad and Tobago, started in the middle of the 19th century. Because of the abolishing of slavery, land owners all over

the country needed cheap labor to work in their cane and cocoa fields. The solution was to bring immigrants from the East Indies as indentured workers. The treatment received by those immigrants was similar to that given to people of Africans origins; however, “their situation differed from slavery in one essential respect, namely, that the duration of their contracts was temporary and it did not connote life-long bondage” (THE INDIAN DIASPORA, p.203).

Between 1854 and 1917, “India contributed approximately 134,183 indentured labourers to Trinidad and Tobago” (THE INDIAN DIASPORA, p.203). Their contract varied from one to five years, but many of these workers decided to remain on the island even after its end. This is due to the fact that many land owners, not wanting to lose their workers, offered a piece of land (with the same value as their return tickets to India) to the ones that decided to remain on the fields. Seeing the opportunity to grow their own products, and in hopes of financial development, many stayed.

Slowly, the ones who had previously been indentured workers were able to save money that granted them the opportunity to buy more and more land, leading them to acquire bigger estates. With this, “the Indian Diaspora in Trinidad began to scale the daunting economic heights of their new county and, in time, it became a viable economic force” (THE INDIAN DIASPORA, p.204), leading the Hindu population towards achieving the economic status they had wished.

Valmiki's Daughter, Shani Mootoo's third novel, combines identity issues affecting Hindu-Trinidadians both inside and outside their country, including the previously discussed silencing and discrimination towards LGBT citizens in the Caribbean. It discloses not only the matter of sexual prejudice in Caribbean countries but also the way in which part of the society still faces non-conforming sexual orientations as a disease. The novel deals with the delicate issue of male sexuality and the pressure suffered by homosexual individuals to conform to the idea of the "real man". It also offers a clear view on the idea that fleeing a place may be the only option left to those who are not allowed to be themselves in their own homes. Moreover, it depicts how class and ethnic issues are utterly intertwined, and how they still dictate how individuals will be perceived by others.

Mootoo mentioned in a 2011 interview to STAN magazine, a publication from The University of the West Indies, that "[her] tendency is to want to pile a great deal into a single sentence so that the world is created in the sentence" (RAMPAUL, 2011, p. 22). With *Valmiki's Daughter*, she has certainly succeeded. Brimming with accurate details about Trinidadian streets, smells, and habits as well as social stratification, the novel leads the reader through the streets of San Fernando and into the homes of its inhabitants. It is a fully

sensory trip, since Mootoo's ability in description gives the reader a sense of being placed in the middle of the chaos of a town in a third world country, filled with noises and sights some readers may not be prepared for.

Mootoo painstakingly describes the landscape of San Fernando while guiding the readers through its streets. Asking the readers to imagine themselves as "tourist[s] let down from the sky", she describes how their senses would be "bombarded at once" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.7) by the different sounds and smells of the island. But together with the geographical description of Trinidad's largest town, Mootoo is skillfully able to describe the many classes, ethnicities, and sexualities of her home country. Unlike her previous works, *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *He Drown She at Sea*, that were set in fictional islands in the Caribbean, Mootoo chose the very real location of San Fernando as the background for *Valmiki's Daughter*. The literary strategy of putting the characters in an actual location is interpreted by Sissy Helff and Sanghamitra Dalal, in the article "And She Wrote Backwards: Same-Sex Love, Gender and Identity in Shani Mootoo's Work and her Recent *Valmiki's Daughter*", as "a creative endevour to think in plain and simple terms in order to get closer to the real world" (HELFF; DALAL, p.54). Yet, it is this original scene of San Fernando, described through Mootoo's eyes, that "triggers chains of thoughts and images […] that fuels the reader's imagination" (HELFF; DALAL p.56).

The readers start their journey close to the San Fernando General Hospital, where they would be able to have a vast view of the town. It is from this spot that they will notice the many side streets that branch out from this central location, though "not one is ever straight for long". They may or may not realize "depending on where [they] have dropped from, that people on the streets are mostly from Indian or African origins" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.10).

In Luminada Heights, where the "residences of the city's more prosperous citizens" are located together with some "not rich, but white" citizens' houses, it is possible to see architect designed houses, some facing the gulf. The journey continues through Broadway Avenue where common workers such as nurses, teachers, and taxi drivers live in "two-story concrete houses, all set behind walls whose paint has long washed, or been peeled, away". Hidden from view there are some other, smaller houses, but a curious passerby would be "unable to see clearly the shape and nature of all that lies there" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.14).

While exploring the right side of Harris Promenade, the tourists will see groups of police officers, and although the traffic is hectic, the cops will be just standing "waiting for something, anything, to happen, and so to be called for an assignment, but they do not act

unless ordered by their superiors" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.15). They will also notice the many Churches, Anglican and Catholic, and different kinds of buildings, such as the Town Hall, and "some other government buildings in the colonial style, but these are not open to the public, and no one knows what really goes on inside them" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.15).

On the left side, more buildings, and a variety of offices whose entrances are too narrow and crowded, and where the lack of running water obliges the "lawyers and their modest staff […] to walk to the updated law courts to use the facilities there" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.15). The police station is there too, and the scene "of three prisoners hand-cuffed together, being led barefoot along the scorching asphalt by eight police officers carrying guns, is not uncommon" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.16). Many people watch the scene, and if the tourist gets past them they will see the law courts building and the lands of the Sisters of The Immaculate Conception, where the school and the convent are located. The latter "shares a wall, but only that, with an Indian movie theatre" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.16).

Noticing the pedestrians on the street, the tourists will see an officer, of African origins, looking upon a homeless man sleeping on a "no trespassing" zone. The officer will carefully evaluate whether to wake the man or not, but will leave him unbothered, since waking him might bring the officer even more trouble. They will also see an Indian man wandering around with his head bent. The man was a Literature teacher in one of the schools, and comes to that place every day since he lost his job. Interested in poetry when he was younger, the former teacher had even published some poems for a foreign magazine. He wished to become a writer, but "the other teachers in the school ridiculed him, his family teased him, and his students lost respect for him" because they believe he was a "mansy-pamsy writer of flowery lines" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.17). Having left his teaching job to pursue a poet's career, he was soon left by his family, who did not approve of his choice.

If attentive, the tourist will smell but not see The Victory Hotel and its Golden Dragon restaurant. It is in this hotel where many visitors will stay, though "it is known to be available on occasion to certain businessmen and professionals who are willing to pay the daily double-room rate for privacy of their illicit pleasures" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.18). They will also smell the many street vendors, who have been preparing their food to be served during the schools' lunch break. It is during these lunch breaks that boys and girls, coming from their gender separate schools, will meet for a short time. Though not longer than ten minutes, these meetings "will be the stuff that keeps them from hearing anything that goes on in class that afternoon" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.21).

From this thorough description of a few streets in the heart of San Fernando, Mootoo deeply engages the readers in the story to be narrated. For Helff and Dalal, the mastery of Mootoo's writing comes from the fact that the author

> […] seeks to craft out a space to belong, belonging in the sense of wholehearted embracing of humanity which is commonly denied to non-normative individuals. All her work is indulged in a sensuousness which evokes myriad tastes, smells, colours, textures and voices. It is her way to fix the imperfection of everyday life, to beautify the primness of social constructions, and to rejoice in one's being in the world (HELFF; DALAL, 2008, p.56)

This detailed introduction of the streets of San Fernando, therefore, do not serve the only purpose of engaging the readers in the story. By describing the different people and structures (social, racial, and geographical) of the region, Mootoo manages to highlight the cultural richness of the country, the distinctions that next-door neighbor have from each other, while conveying the sense of ordinariness. According to Allison Donnel,

> [i]t is no coincidence that [the] initial orientation as readers is to Trinidadian streets that refuse a straight journey and lead, rather, to a maze of entangled routes, for this too is the human landscape of the novel once [they] venture beyond the façades of its seemingly socially well-coordinated lives (DONNELL, 2012, p.215).

Thus, with this strategy, Mootoo creates in the readers a sense of normalcy, by showing that anything and everything that happens from this moment on is not uncommon, though it might be unnoticed most of time.

From this introduction, the novel proceeds to follow the lives of two Hindu families, the Krishnu and the Prakash, focusing its main story on the former. Patriarch Valmiki Krishnu, his wife Devika and their two daughters Viveka and Vashti are apparently a common upper-middle class family of Hindu origins, and play an important social role in their community. However, things may not be as simple as they may seem for Dr. Valmiki Krishnu is actually a closeted homosexual who engages in casual yet frequent intercourse with women in order to flaunt his masculinity while hiding his desire towards men[3]. His wife is aware of his affairs as well as of his homosexual inclinations, though she chooses to ignore any deviation in his conduct. The older daughter Viveka is a college student in search of her own experiences, who does not abide by the rules of the house, while the younger daughter Vashti is fully conforming to the social and familial norms.

[3] Mootoo's choice of name seems ironical since the name Valmiki means "one born out of ant-hill", for the one who served bravely all his penatance, which is the opposite of Valmiki Krishnu, who refuses to be true to himself. (SURESH, Sandra Encyclopaedia of Hindu gods and goddesses. Sarup & Sons. pp. 262–3)

Less prominent, though not less important, is the Prakash family. Ram and Minty Prakash, and their son Nayan, are part of the same social circle as the Krishnus. Upon returning from Canada, newly-married Nayan presents his French wife, Anick, to the Trinidadian society and to the Krishnu family. Though from a rich background, it is clear that Nayan had struggled in order to maintain his status in Canada, since his skin color dictated how he would be perceived by others. His marriage to a white woman, though originated from a genuine interest, serves as a way to uphold his social status, both in Canada and in Trinidad. However, upon arriving on the island, Anick feels lonely and isolated, and develops a close relationship with Viveka Krishnu, destabilizing the couple's lives and Viveka's sexual identity.

Yet, perhaps one of the most important characters of the novel is not a member of either family just described. Presented in the first chapter of the novel, Merle Bedi is introduced by Vashti, who sees her wandering the streets next to her school. According to Vashti,

> [Merle] appears to be old and haggard, but Vashti knows she is only a handful of years older than she is. The woman is, in fact, the exact age of Viveka, Vashti's sister. The woman is thin, with the depleted meagreness of the alcoholic. Her long black hair is oily and clumped. She wears what was once a white shirt, a school shirt from not too long ago, but it is yellowed and soiled, and the trousers she wears, men's trousers, are covered in dirt, dust, urine. They are several sizes too big for her, held high above her waist with a belt and, as if that were not enough, a length of heavy rope. She is barefoot (MOOTOO, 2008, p.22).

Now a prostitute on the streets of Trinidad, Merle is, in fact, a former high school friend of Viveka's who often haunts her thoughts. The young woman is now homeless because she decided to disclose her sexual preferences and was promptly cast away from her family and society. Now, she is obliged to live on the streets while prostituting herself in order to survive.

In the famous article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", first published in 1973, Adrienne Rich discusses the many ways in which heterosexuality has been imposed on women throughout the centuries. Rich mentions that "heterosexuality has been both forcibly and subliminally imposed on women. Yet everywhere women have resisted it, often at the cost of physical torture, imprisonment, psycho surgery, social ostracism, and extreme poverty" (RICH, 1996, p.138).

In the novel, Merle represents how the impositions discussed by Rich may affect the life of the character. Merle is one of those women. Forced to live on the streets, with no family or home to go back to, Merle Bedi looks for a friendly face that could help her and

maybe “spare some money”. Though Merle had previously been a part of the same social circle as Vashti, the only thoughts on the latter's mind, however, are not to be seen talking to a woman who uses her body for money. Yet, Vashti ponders to herself that being a prostitute is not the worst, since

> [...] if she is doing this sort of thing, what they say about her can’t be true then. It can’t be so that she is a buller. If is woman she like, how come she doing it with man? Well, maybe is not a bad thing, then. That might cure her. And from such a family, too. It is killing her parents. No wonder they put she out the house (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 23).

Vashti's feelings reflect the general opinion of Trinidadian society concerning the idea of homosexuality: it is a form of behavior, perhaps a disease that can be corrected or cured by the individual’s engaging in a heterosexual relationship. Therefore, it does not present itself as part of the character or his/her identity. It is an action that needs to be disciplined, even if that discipline is achieved through the also frowned upon action of prostitution, which although condemned by society, is considered less harmful than homosexuality. In the novel, Trinidadian society, or at least the part of society Vashti and her family belong to, think that heterosexuality is the normal path for women, completely erasing the possibility of their having feelings that differ from the heteronormative rule. And if women have any of those feelings and decide to take responsibility over them, those women are considered unnatural. In Rich’s article, she states that "if we think of heterosexuality as the natural emotional and sensual inclination for women, lives as these are seen as deviant, as pathological, or as emotionally and sensually deprived” (RICH, 1996, p. 137). In the novel, Merle Bedi suffers endlessly the consequences of showing who she is, and is sentenced to a life on the streets, with no family or home whatsoever. Discrimination inside the family, therefore, is the very reason why she is without a family in the first place.

Discussing prejudice inside the family in the chapter called “Queer Feelings” from the book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed points out that, "such forms of discrimination can have negative effects, involving pain, anxiety, fear, depression and shame, all of which can restrict bodily and social mobility" (AHMED, 2004, p.154). Ahmed’s theory is clearly depicted in Mootoo’s novel, since Merle becomes a disgrace for the ones around her, who are ashamed of being from her social circle, because they think it is shameful to be anything but heterosexual. In Rich’s article, she develops her argument by saying that “the lie” of compulsory heterosexuality imposed on women “keeps numberless women psychologically trapped, trying to fit mind, spirit, and sexuality into a prescribed script because they cannot look beyond the parameters of the acceptable” (RICH, 1996, p.140).

This need “to fit mind, spirit, and sexuality into a prescribed script” is also illustrated by Merle's friend Viveka, Valmiki's older daughter. Because of the consequences endured by her friend, she has a constant need to check herself and to avoid transgressing norms society has drawn for women. Inside her house these norms are enforced through her parents. Her mom, Devika, especially yearns to control the way Viveka dresses and behaves in order to make her more “ladylike”.

The first time an altercation about Viveka’s behavior comes up is at dinner table, when Viveka insists to get her parents’ permission to play volleyball in a court near her college. Devika is completely against her daughter’s playing any kind of sports because, in her opinion, “Viveka already lacked a certain finesse one wanted in a girl, engaging in a team sports and competition might only make her that much more ungainly. And whatever polish she, Devika, had tried so hard to impart would certainly be erased” (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 49).

This “polish” regards not only the way she looks but also how she presents herself in front of other people. Devika’s constant need to see Viveka wearing dresses and make-up is a consequence of the mother’s belief that “playing sports is just going to make [Viveka] even more unladylike than [she] already [is]” (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 64). However, Viveka mentions that she cannot help how she looks, which sounds more like an excuse for not saying that she cannot help being who she is and feeling how she feels.

Devika's objection is also related to the fact that sports are seen as a male activity, pertaining to a male environment, and therefore should not be practiced by "ladies". Linden Lewis, Professor of Sociology at Bucknell University, develops the topic of women and sports in his article "Man talk, Masculinity, and a Changing Social Environment" when he mentions that "hegemonic notions of the feminine conspire to suppress the masculine in women because of similar fears of being viewed as too aggressive, unladylike, masculine or lesbian. Here again, the spectre of homosexuality looms large" (LEWIS, 2007, p.6). In Mootoo’s narrative, Viveka is the one being viewed as more masculine than she should, especially by her mother, because of the young woman’s wish to play volleyball. Though gender expression differs from sexual orientation, and neither depends on the other, the general idea that they are interchangeable still remains.

Fear concerning homosexual behavior while playing sports are also present in Valmiki, for he recalls his own experience as a young man, and thinks that,

> while team sports involved various kinds of camaraderie and, yes-yes, all that important exercise, it had the potential to involve something else: complicated kinds of physical contact. He knew something of this; he had played soccer with boys from his high school and, later, soccer and cricket at university. And even as he sensed the foolishiness and futility of trying to protect her, he couldn’t bear to give

> his daughter, this one in particular, permission to enter an arena that could stir within her, like it had in him, a confusion she would absolutley have to keep to herself. He wasn't entirely sure that this would happen, but it nagged at him that it could (MOOTOO, 2008, p.50)

Viveka's parents cannot see that playing a sport is not what would change Viveka, since in the end, "all that distinguishes Viveka from Merle is her style of living, not her style of loving" (DONNEL, 2012, p. 228), for Viveka already shares the same feelings her former friend has. When they were both in school, Viveka was one of the first people to know about the way Merle felt towards a teacher. Viveka then insisted that the latter not tell her story to anyone because it was "insane" to have those kinds of feelings. However, Viveka was also attracted to one of her teachers, Miss Sally Russel, but Merle, after her expulsion from home, becomes a constant reminder to Viveka of the life she is bound to have if she ever talks about her own feelings. From then on, every time Valmiki´s daughter has any feelings or inclinations that would put her in trouble, the image of Merle comes to her mind, because "Merle Bedi's fate was indeed very real" (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 262) and Viveka does not wish to end up like her.

Viveka's fears regarding Merle and what has happened to her are so strong that when Vashti meets the girl on the streets and tells her sister, the latter pretends not to be interested even though "the state of her old friend distressed her". In Viveka´s opinion "she couldn't bear the thought of being judged unfairly through association" (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 90). Even if the association were not actually unfair or inaccurate. In the article "Representations of Homophobic Violence in Anglophone Caribbean Literature", author Geraldine Skeete examines different works that deal with the topic of homosexuality inside the Caribbean. For the author, "merely the suspicion of an alternative sexual orientation can make an individual, male or female, vulnerable to homophobic violence" (SKEETE, 2010, p.5). Though Skeete does not include *Valmiki's Daughter* in the analysis, her statement applies to Viveka's behavior when dealing with Merle.

The old high school friend comes to Viveka's mind even when she has already gotten involved with a woman. Because of a society's script that does not allow homosexual behavior and because of the consequences she has seen in Merle´s life, Viveka keeps herself attentive as to not display any sort of attitude that would lead others to even think she has a relationship with another woman.

Valmiki's daughter's love interest is Anick and the two women start getting involved when Nayan, an old family friend, moves back from Canada to Trinidad with his new wife

and introduces her to the Krishnus. Anick, a beautiful French woman, especially gets Viveka´s attention, partly because both women share some of the same interests, partly because Anick feels lonely in a country where she does not have many friends.

In one of their first meetings, and after already having developed an interest in Viveka, Anick confesses that she is just like many other French girls, and that she likes both (women and men). However, Viveka cannot bear to let her feelings come to surface. As time goes by

> Viveka oscillated between two poles. She decided one minute to still whatever thoughts and feelings Anick Prakash had stirred in her. Such thoughts and feelings were dangerous tricksters out to trip her up and land her, like Merle, out on her own, family-less. And Anick Prakash, being the root of such thought, was even more dangerous (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 261).

Again, the influence of Merle is important in dictating how Viveka decides to lead her life and her feelings. Though from a loving family and not imagining that they could ever do to her what Merle's family has done, fear still lingers inside Viveka, and the doubt that anything could happen if she decides to show her true inclinations still prevails. Even though Viveka feels lost inside her own house, there is a feeling of loyalty and duty towards her family. In the article “The Quest for an Identity in Shani Mootoo’s *Valmiki’s Daughter*”, authors Sissy Helff's and Sanghamitra Dalal believe that Viveka has a "sense of loyalty or responsibility towards her family and to the society at large" (HELLF; DALAL, 2012, p. 80), which explains her fear and silence towards the subject of her sexuality.

Viveka, then, faces the arduous decision between a so-called honor and her true desires. She realizes that in Anick's arms she was able to feel whole for the first time. However,

> with this ephemeral knowledge came another thought: the dreadful possibility of losing her family. Which was greater, she wondered — to be all that you were, to be true to yourself, or to honour one’s family, one’s society, one’s country? Her family, despite everything, was her life. She could never be without them. She could never do to them what Merle Bedi had done to her family. She wondered if her family could do to her what Merle Bedi’s family had done to Merle. Again she felt an urge to go and find Merle, to talk to her. Take her away. But away to where? (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 326)

In the quote above, and in several other instances, Viveka expresses an intention to flee Trinidad, believing that it is the place in which she will not be able to express herself. Nevertheless, even though the idea of homosexuality as something problematic is much stronger within the Hindu-Trinidadian enclave, such prejudice is not limited to that particular group or country. An illustration of the struggle many go through in order to accept

homosexual behavior is given by Anick, after Viveka's constant insistence to know why the French woman cannot be open about her identity. Anick remarks that

> Everybody think the French, they so enlightened. They think French and enlightenment go together. But that is so simple, no? The French, especially outside of the city, they like everybody else. My parents, they are the same. French does not equal enlightenment, Vik. It does not mean freedom. Get that into your head. It would be easier for my parents if I marry a man from Morocco, Algeria, or from Senegal or Trinidad, than if I choose to live with a woman. (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 346)

This quote comes to show that prejudice towards sexual minorities is a reality not only in places like the Caribbean, but also in developed countries like France. Anick´s fear is that she will not be accepted by her family for having a relationship with a woman. It is the same feeling Viveka shares, albeit in a lessened degree.

Judith Butler, who has worked for several years in the field of gender studies, discusses why homosexuality is still frowned upon. She believes that in order to overcome society's boundaries it is necessary to understand that it is that very same society that is imposing the rules it believes should be followed. Therefore, the feeling some have that homosexuality is unnatural is not inherent inside a certain group, but constructed through intense discourse and politics that arise in that very group.

Another topic highly present in Butler's works concerns gender identity, which is illustrated in Mootoo's novel by Viveka. The young woman repeatedly states that she feels inside her the presence of her younger brother, who passed away when still a child.

> The idea that Anand's spirit lived inside of her, was pushing himself upwards, through her, taking over her body, her mind, her manners, had seemed lately more plausible than ever. It was as if he insisted on living again through her — a thought she cherished at times, particularly when alone in her bedroom or the bathroom, flexing her biceps, sucking in her cheeks to make her face more angular, slipping her thumbs into the loops of her jeans and commanding a cowboy-leans-back-on-the-fence pose. She certainly often felt as if she knew what it would be like to be him, and as if she knew, too, the kinds of women he would be drawn to. He would be drawn to Anick (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 286).

Kamala Kempaddo, in the article "Caribbean Sexuality: Mapping the Field" believes that "sex folds into gender, and masculinity and femininity are viewed as complements to each other: two parts of a whole" (KAMPADOO, 2009, p. 9). What Viveka feels about her brother Anand living inside her could be seen as an example of Kempaddo's theory, since she feels an abstract male presence inside her concrete female body. Judith Butler, in her famous book *Gender Trouble* goes one step further when she asserts that it is a general belief that "one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair" (BUTLER, 2006,

p. 30) Yet, for Viveka, fitting in one category of gender is not possible because there are traits associated with femininity and masculinity within her, and together they form who she really is.

Another example that shows Viveka's feelings is expressed by her after the first time she sleeps with Anick. If before she was unaware of the gender she would evolve to, during their night together, she admits that both women and men are present within her by saying that "during the initial moments of their lovemaking, [she felt] a sense of having taken on the form of a young man's body. Her body had become, albeit briefly, Vince's body, and in other moments Anand's" (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 322). Vince is the code name for invincible, the blond haired boy that Viveka imagined lived inside of her when she was younger.

Even though she imagines herself as a man, she realizes that "she knew now more than ever that her feelings and her way with Anick were hers and hers alone. Not a boy's. Not a man's. Whatever she was, these feelings were hers" (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 323). In this moment, masculinity and femininity become, through Viveka, two halves of what composes her true gender identity, and choosing to act more "feminine" or more "masculine" will be a performance that will depend on the situation in which she is placed. Butler mentions that "if the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (BUTLER, 1990, p.186). In the novel, since Viveka does not abide to the gender fantasy, and is still trying to find her own gender identity, she feels that both masculinity and femininity belong to her. As Viveka mentions, there´s still a sense of evolving. And that evolving comes to an end when she first makes love to Anick.

This feeling of evolution becomes stronger after receiving an invitation from Nayan and Anick to have dinner in their house, and the young woman is left alone with her hostess when Nayan has to leave. Even though she knows what will happen and is afraid of the consequences, she cannot help the pull Anick has over her, and decides to give in to her overwhelming desires of being with the other woman. It is after their sexual relations that Viveka´s evolution, if it is possible to call it that, reaches its highest point and she realizes that "perhaps she could be finished with Anand now. And with Vince" (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 323).

Viveka then changes completely; it is an important moment of her growth. Instead of asking again for permission to play on the volleyball team, she simply decides to join it. Instead of asking her parents to have her appearance changed, she just has her hair cut short.

Even her mother, though not surprised by the fact, is shocked by the way she changed so fast and “now Devika, too, saw the ghost of Anand in their daughter” (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 340).

Comparisons between Viveka and Anand happen incessantly through the novel, coming from Viveka, Devika and Valmiki. She stops being a teenager, and evolves into a full woman.

> She felt invincible and grinned wide like a grouper to realize that, even so, she felt like herself, not like Vince her imagined boy, and that she hadn’t felt like him in a good while now — and she suddenly charged, heading harder and faster than was necessary for a play that was not hers to take.(MOOTOO, 2008, p. 332)

Though she may still look like her younger brother, she feels like the woman she is, now more confident and self-assured of what she wants to go through. But society's chains still hold a strong grip over her, because it is still in the back of Viveka´s mind that she may find freedom if she goes to a place more “enlightened”, and though her choice is not France, it is Canada. After her relationship with Anick has ended, because of Anick's unexpected pregnancy, Viveka decides to try going out with Trevor, a man who has been courting her for a while.

Trevor is a friend of Helen, Viveka’s volleyball teammate, and he develops an interest in her since they first meet. Viveka is reluctant towards his invitation because she is aware of the fact that she is not able to feel complete in the hands of a man, as her previous relationship with classmate Elliot has showed. However, by getting to know Trevor a little better, she starts changing her mind because she realizes he may be a way out of the place she wants so much to flee. He is also the only person that is comfortable talking about Viveka's relationship with Anick. He is the only one that realizes the women’s small touches in the volleyball court, and asks unashamedly about Viveka’s relations with the woman. Although reluctant at first, she ends up by confessing that they really had a romantic affair.

Viveka and Trevor, then, decide to marry. She, in order to go somewhere else and experience with her new sexual awareness, he, for reasons not clearly expressed in the novel, but that do not seem so different from Viveka's, for he too displays non-conforming behaviors related to sexuality. His marriage proposal does not come from a heartfelt wish to marry, but he says it is a “means to an end”. That confuses Viveka, who realizes how true his words were, at least for her. Aside from the confusing reasons for the proposal, Trevor does not display any sexual desire towards Viveka, even when she, much to her surprise, feels desire towards him. Finally, in the last page of the novel, Trevor and Viveka have the following dialogue:

> “How long do you think we’ll last, Trevor?”

> […]
> Trevor took a drink of his beer before he looked at her. “Five years, give or take, I suppose. How long do you think?”
> “I would say two.”
> “Two! Oh, come on, Vik. Show a little courage! I am exhibiting a mountain of it, wouldn’t you say?” (MOOTOO, 2008, p.395)

Not only is the dialogue strange coming from two people who are recently engaged and about to get married, but Trevor’s “courage” leaves little to no doubt that his intentions in marrying also come from a need to conform, as a way to escape from previously set society norms, much like it is for Viveka.

It would seem then a return to the old ways, in which women (and, in this case, a man) would have to get married in order to prove their normalcy to the world around them. However, in *Valmiki's Daughter*, this marriage is not seen as a forced act. Instead, it is Viveka's choice, and hers alone, to become engaged to Trevor and embark with him on a journey to Canada. Shani Mootoo mentions in the interview to STAN Magazine that "in fact, the marriage is an escape for [Viveka]. Not an escape *into* that marriage, but marriage is an escape out of her situation to another thing from which she can get *out* of the marriage itself" (RAMPAUL, 2011, p. 25). Therefore, though it may not seem so, Viveka is actually using marriage as a way to achieve the freedom she has wished for so long.

Nonetheless, even if it is not the case with Viveka, marriage does act as a way to conform and “perform” normalcy for some individuals. While the young woman sees marriage as a geographical escape from the island, and as a way to finally be able to express her true sexual identity, young Valmiki, Viveka’s father, wished to escape from the lifestyle he had while studying abroad but could not pursue once he returned to Trinidad. His marriage then can be configured as a reverse escape. That is, in order to be free from society's stigmatization he chose to marry Devika, therefore, putting his own life into imprisonment, since from that moment on, he would not be able to express himself, at least publicly. His marriage to Devika was carried out because of expectations of a society that sees heteronormativity as the only road to take. Valmiki uses his marriage as a shield, one that protects him from prying eyes, and renders him able to perform his "deviant" sexual activities in hiding.

At different moments, the narrator makes clear that Valmiki lives a double life. Right from the start, it is possible to interpret Valmiki as a nostalgic man, still trapped in the events that took place in a distant past. Those events involve his marriage, a homosexual relationship he had had when in college, and also an incident that goes further back to a time when

Valmiki was still a child and had his first sexual experimentations. It is necessary to understand the background in which to place the sources of those nostalgic feelings, which have more than just a personal reason, but were initiated because of society's pressure.

In a society such as the Trinidadian, though not restricted to it, there is a high expectation of how a "real man" should behave. Though it is not the present intention to analyze the reasons for those expectations, it is necessary to acknowledge them in order to understand their consequences in Valmiki's behavior. Some of those reasons are connected to the idea developed by Linden Lewis in the previously mentioned article "Man Talk, Masculinity, and a Changing Social Environment", published by the Caribbean Review of Gender Studies. As reported by the author, "to deviate from notions of how real men are supposed to act and what real men are supposed to represent, often leads to feminization – hence the tendency to conform to ideals of normative masculinity" (LEWIS, 2007, p.6). In other words, not acting according to the expectations of society, and to what society considers to be pertaining to masculinity, means displaying traces of femininity, especially considering the gender binary in which individuals are placed. Lewis also points out that

> Consciousness of one's masculinity then, emerges out of a constellation of social practices or behaviours of men. It is also connected to an ideology that orients men to an understanding of themselves as gendered subjects for whom society has devised specific roles and expectations. Men are not born with this awareness of themselves. Society must impose this understanding on them. It is very commonly said these days that masculinity is socially constructed, and by this it is meant that not only does the society play a determining role in shaping the general contours of this subjectivity but also that it proceeds through sanctions and rewards to police the boundaries of the identities it establishes (LEWIS, 2007, p.6).

In Mootoo's work, Valmiki suffers deeply because of this male ideal created, and encouraged, by the group he belongs. In childhood, young Valmiki had been subjected to his peers' scrutiny that often included his being called by bad names. Because he did not behave as other boys his age did, he was considered the "boss's too-soft, mamsy-pamsy son", so he did as much as he could to change the other boys' impressions on him. More than just the peers, "Valmiki was perplexed at the softness his parents saw in him, and from then on he pondered how he might fix that" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.39). This thought by twelve-year-old Valmiki depicts the roots, which would grow much deeper, of his need to prove himself as a real man.

In the already mentioned article "Representation of Homophobic Violence in Anglophone Caribbean Literature" Geraldine Skeete analyzes different novels written by Caribbean writers. Though, as previously stated, she does not mention *Valmiki's Daughter*, her analysis of gay men in the Caribbean area applies to Valmiki's character. The critic argues

that "the gay youth faces extreme pressure to adhere to a compulsory masculinity in preparation for manhood [and] face emotional, psychological and public pressure to conform to male, heterosexual standards". To Skeete, this pressure leads those gay men towards an excessive need to display their maleness "by engaging in performances of hypermasculinity, compulsory masculinity and heterosexuality" (SKEETE, 2010, p.11) These types of behaviors are very similar to the ones Valmiki portrays throughout the novel. Therefore, adult Valmiki feels the need to engage in conducts that are regarded as traits common to males, in an attempt to prove his manliness to society, his family, and himself.

Marriage was the first step Valmiki took towards conforming to heterosexuality. Even though Valmiki had developed an intense relationship with the young tutor Tony when still a college student in Scotland, the patriarch of the Krishnu family "had known that upon qualifying he would return home — to Trinidad, that is — and marry. He had known that was what he had to do" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.66). Marrying was what he had to do because having a relationship with another man, though his wish, was not considered a possibility. The only option left for him was to conform to a heteronormative lifestyle his family and society systematically imposed. Valmiki, then, "fully accepts the limitations and restrictions placed upon him by the social expectations of acting like a “true man” and the family patriarch" ((HELFF; DALAL, 2012, p. 79).

Valmiki's wife, Devika, acknowledges her husband's need to prove himself around the house by doing common male activities. Even though the family could easily afford paying a worker to fix small things around the house, Valmiki is the one who insists on performing the jobs. Though others may have doubt as to the reason he chooses to do so, Devika knows that "he wanted to be the man about the house for his daughters." (MOOTOO, 2008, p.128) However, this extremely constricting life of having to prove himself did not lead to happiness, and Valmiki found a way to breakout, if only sporadically, from the pressures placed upon him. This escape was found in Saul, an African-American low-class worker with whom Valmiki developed a relationship.

Saul had been one of Valmiki's patients, and the doctor became fond of him rather quickly. According to Valmiki "Saul would look directly at [him] with those eyes as if he could see through Valmiki. He was not like other men, not afraid of long, insistent eye contact" (MOOTOO, 2007, p.56). Upon receiving an invitation from the patient, Valmiki decides to join him and his friends in hunting. From this moment, hunting becomes an activity Valmiki thoroughly enjoys for varied reasons. First, the sport becomes a means through which

Valmiki is able to enjoy male company and feel a sense of belonging that had not been previously experienced.

> Such camaraderie made Valmiki bristle with life in a way that not even the practice of surgery had ever done for him. In the forest with the men he might have been duty bound, but he was not weighed down by it. He was no one's father, husband, employer, or healer. He was one with them. They were one with each other. (MOOTOO, 2007, p.57)

Secondly, beyond relieving him from the pressures of family and society, hunting is also a way to state and prove Valmiki's male status. Since the sport requires abilities generally associated with males, such as strength, concentration, and precision, it is a further alibi Valmiki uses to hide his homosexuality, and it can be classified as the hypermasculine performance Skeete has mentioned. Beyond that, as Valmiki and Saul's relationship goes from friendly to sexual, the excuse of hunting becomes a way to meet each other without raising suspicions of their true involvement.

Yet, hunting is not the only trick Viveka's father plays in order to display hetenormativity. He also engages in frequent, not so hidden affairs with a fair number of women. His involvements were often with "foreign white women, all beautiful in the way that men commonly — or common men — liked their women" (MOOTOO, 2008 p.41). By stating that the women were the ones desired by common men, the narrator may be suggesting Valmiki's own wish of being a common man himself or implies that he does not see himself as a common man.

But even more than acting like a common man, who undertakes common male activities and relationships, Valmiki's ultimate wish still remains to break free.

> [...]he sometimes wished, though, that stories of his philandering would leak — no, rather explode — throughout the town, and cause such a scandal that his family would toss him out like a piece of used tissue or flush him from their lives, and he would be forced to leave the country. He would be freed. He revised his thought: perhaps he, forever concerned about appearances and doing the praiseworthy thing, would never really be free. (MOOTOO, 2007, p. 42)

Although Valmiki regards breaking free as his ultimate wish, he realizes this endeavor is not possible for a man such as he. Moreover, though there remains a wish to be part of that society, he does not hold himself from judging that same society for its wrongdoings. According to him

> If philandering had been for him a sword, it was the double-edged kind. On the one hand, it was a suggestion of his more-than-okay status with the ladies (not one, but many) and so worked against suspicions of who and what he was at heart. A man was certainly admired by men and by women for a show of his virility, even by the ones he hurt. On the other hand, since philandering had never been a shame in Trinidad — a badge it was, rather — for a man who wanted to be caught, broken, and expelled, it was a problem. (MOOTOO, 2007, p.42)

Sexual freedom, therefore, is not so easy to achieve, especially when subjects are placed in constricting and oppressive environments, such as the one Valmiki belongs to. Moreover, in a heterocentric society that sees cheating and lying as acceptable behavior while perceiving homoerotic desire as a disease, there is not much space for an individual to act as his true self. However, there is an intense distortion of the meaning of loyalty, since being loyal to the family does not mean being honest, but being able to maintain appearances and a good reputation in front of society. Mootoo comments on these contradictions in *Connect* magazine interview by saying that "they are lies - they are not white lies - they are lies that hurt wives, they are lies that hurt children" (RAMPAUL 2011, p.22). Either way, those individuals keep lying because they still feel the need to maintain their reputation, a reputation that would immediately be ruined once those same individuals were perceived as homosexuals.

Once again, homosexuality is recognized as a reason for shame, and as a dishonorable action towards one’s country and towards loved ones. In this sense, Viveka's and Valmiki's attitudes intersect once more, since both feel the weight of duty towards the ones they love. The claim of shame as a sharing constant in both their lives is also sustained by Evelyn O'Callaghan in the previously mentioned *Contemporary Women's Writing*. In the article entitled "Sex, Secrets, and Shani Mootoo's *Queer Families*", the critic mentions that "the shame of hurting the family, of disgracing the family name, prevents them from loving as they wish" (O'CALLAGHAN, 2012, p.245). When those characters are placed in a hostile background such as Trinidad, where loyalty and duty towards family is interpreted in particular manners, and homoeroticism needs to be covered, "to own the identity is to compromise one's legitimacy as Caribbean" (O'CALLAGHAN, 2012, p.246).

Another consequence that surfaces when dealing with shame is that in order to prevent oneself from feeling ashamed by what he/she really is, there comes a need to hide even more one’s real feelings. Not only in a behavioral way, as not displaying publicly one’s inclinations, but also by not speaking about them, and even by denying them as much as possible. Valmiki is not comfortable with himself, and Devika is uncomfortable with the fact her husband is gay. This discomfort is partial consequence of what being comfortable would bring, which refers back to the idea of being ashamed of who you are.

Such discomfort is illustrated by the fact that neither he nor she is able to verbally express Valmiki's true identity. When in a fight, Devika argues with her husband and says: "you knew what you were, you knew you were...", but is unable to finish her sentence, since

verbalizing the word homosexual would make the assumption shameful. Valmiki cannot mention it to his wife either, and though he sometimes tries to say it, he cannot even admit it to himself. Actually, the word homosexual is only mentioned twice in the whole novel, once by Devika and once by Nayan. The first expresses it in a thought that she, again, cannot verbalize. When Valmiki mentions he might be willing to take a job as Health Minister "the words that pooled in her head were: 'Wife of the homosexual Minister of Health, you mean.' The words she let fly were: 'What? You're not serious?'" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.129). Once again, there is an intrinsic denial of homosexuality since it is seen as a shameful behavior. The words "gay" or "lesbian" do not appear even once in the novel.

Devika also believes that "aberrations were not to be encouraged, but very smart, busy people with heavy responsibilities should be allowed an aberration once in a while, and all that should be asked of them is that they do not flaunt it" (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 120). That is, the problem itself does not lie in the "aberration" her husband is committing, but in people finding out about it. Displaying it, putting in the public eye, is what would bring people the ultimate shame of being discovered, of being recognized as "other", making them marginal to the society they belong. Mrs. Krishnu, "sacrifice[s] happiness only to uphold an elite status" (HELFF; DALAL, 2012, p.79), since the fear of being cast away and of losing the social status, if only metaphorically, are the main reasons for Devika's silences and acceptance of her husband's infidelities.

Curiously, Devika's behavior greatly differs from the one portrayed by Saul's wife, since while the first acts as if her husband's homosexuality is inexistent, the latter shows acceptance towards her husband's practices. Upon meeting Devika in a street market, Saul's wife introduces herself to the former. At first, Mrs. Krishnu believes that the woman "didn't encourage or approve of the kind of man her husband was" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.124), and decides to act politely. But Mrs. Saul Joseph starts a conversation that surprises and embarrasses Devika, because she touches on the very subject Devika has tried to avoid for so long: her husband's sexuality. Mrs. Joseph says: "Well, what to do? Just look at our crosses, na. You and me, we in this thing together. You know what I am talking about, eh?"(MOOTOO, 2008, p.124). Devika agrees by nodding her head, not because she wishes to acknowledge the situation and believes them to be equal, but because denying her understanding would probably lead the other woman to attempt a further explanation that was not at all desired.

Mrs. Joseph's acceptance, however, has distinct roots from Devika's silences. The fact that she endures her husband's so-called deviances is not to uphold her social status in an

upper middle-class neighborhood, but to maintain the basic necessities for survival. As a way of explaining her reasons to Devika, Saul's wife states:

> I know women living right on my street — my short street have two of them — who don't come out they house for days because they don't want nobody to see how they eye black or they lip bust. Me? I don't have a mark on my body. I am not starving and I have a roof over my head. I have plenty to be ashamed of and to hide but I also have much to be grateful for. Life is a blessing itself. How you managing?" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.125)

Yet, Mrs. Krishnu does not consider herself to be equal to a woman such as Mrs. Joseph. Although recognizing that she also has a lot to be thankful for, Devika believes that, no matter the gravity of one's burden, a public market, where others can hear, is not the ideal place to discuss such circumstances. She is aware of women from her own social circle who suffer from violence inside their homes, but feels that "this sort of thing was not something people chatted about so unabashedly, and especially in a public place such as the Mucurapo Street Market" (MOOTOO, 2008, p.125). Still, Mrs. Joseph's words touch Devika, and she realizes that, though not happy, she should be thankful for what she had, even if it included her husband and daughter.

A daughter that actually has the same inclinations as her husband, inclinations that Devika is also aware of, but once again, is unable to talk about openly

> There were moments, Devika admitted — to herself only — when she was relieved that Viveka didn't show herself. She made hardly any effort to make herself attractive, and after what had happened with that Bedi girl, living like a street person on the promenade, Devika worried about her own daughter. She would not form a sentence even in the recesses of her mind to say what it was, exactly, that worried her or why. The only words that come to her mind were, *Wives know what their husbands won't tell them, and there isn't a thing that a mother does not already know about her child*. (MOOTOO, 2008, p.126)

Devika, then, does not verbalize her thoughts, for doing so would be validating Valmiki's and Viveka's homosexuality. By keeping silence she keeps homosexuality hidden, and prevents herself and her family from suffering the shameful and uncomfortable consequences of such behavior.

Wishing to be free yet afraid to bring shame upon the family become, then, two aspects in which father and daughter share a common ground, but not the only aspects. As a matter of fact, their struggles intersect throughout the novel. And although father and daughter's relationship does look turbulent, they share a lot more than just a wish, successful or not, to escape. This connection is made even clearer when talking about the space both of them inhabit. Not a metaphorical social space, but an actual geographical space inside their

society which is characterized by the forest, where Valmiki and Viveka enjoy momentary freedom and protection from shame.

This choosing of space by Mootoo was certainly not accidental. As homosexual individuals are seen as inhabiting the margin of society, their meetings need to be not only hidden, but hidden away. Therefore, engaging in homosexuality in the woods is a proof of how distinct sexual options need to be experienced further away from the eyes of society at large, and as a consequence, become even more marginalized. For O'Callaghan,

> The forest is where Valmiki is allowed cross-class homosocial bonding with other man who like hunting, and where he allows himself to act on his desires for the beautiful Saul. The forest is the site where Viveka crosses the threshold of respectability and becomes physically intimate with Anick (O'CALLAGHAN, 2012, p.247).

The lives of homosexual individuals, then, are restricted to two distinctive poles. On one hand there is the forever hurting need to break free, to be one's true self. A real need of being acknowledged authentically for who one is and of being respected. On the other, the constant fear of bringing shame to loved ones, the fear of not being recognized as a real part of one’s your own family and country because of inherent same-sex desire. Both desire and fear find their solution in the secluded space of wooded areas.

And though it might be the aspect in which father and daughter most show similarity, it is also where their destiny becomes opposite. It is clear that both of them turn their backs to the space they so long wish to inhabit, a free space to display their sexual preferences, but while Viveka turns her back and runs to another place she believes will fulfill her dreams, Valmiki is not so lucky, and falls into the ultimate pressure and so-called duties society has imposed on him. He, then, goes back to the old way, and decides to interrupt any kind of relationship with Saul or any other man.

Given the ways the destinies of the two main characters play out, Mootoo implicitly acknowledges the lack of space for non-conforming individuals in the Caribbean, and the impossibility of sexually diverse living. The fact that women and men only have two options, to leave or to suffer, is a statement of how prejudicial politics in the region still harm thousands of its individuals.

Alison Donnel mentions in yet another article of the same issue of *Women's Contemporary Writing* that

> the many complicated lives the novel represents suggest that our sexual desires and encounters are not organized around the given primacy of heterosexuality but rather that this is a socially enforced habit, both historically and culturally situated, which subjects endorse in order to protect their fragile status inside the barely holding framework of the socially expected. (DONNEL, 2012, p.223)

Valmiki's Daughter, then, underscores the diversity of lives of many individuals situated inside a region that has been perceived as primarily heterosexual, a perception that needs to be deconstructed. Mootoo's tale is open-ended, Viveka has not reached her destiny yet, but it is clear that she is on the right path. At the same time, Valmiki realizes he will be forever trapped in the literal and metaphorical territory society has delineated for him. Ultimately he is as trapped and defenseless as the prey he hunted.

Nevertheless, even when leaving is seen as the only option for Viveka, her journey is certainly not far from over. Upon arriving in Canada she will have to face yet another kind of prejudice that she has never faced before: being a Hindu-Caribbean in a first world country. Though whatever will happen to her specifically is only a presumption, since the novel ends before her departure, Mootoo clearly illustrates that the lives of Trinidadians in Canada is not as free as it may seem. Nayan Prakash, Anick's husband, highlights how prejudice towards someone's race also harms third world citizens, even if those citizens are heterosexual and upper class.

In a conversation with Viveka, Nayan confesses that during his stay in Canada, he struggled to acquire recognition from his peers. Because of his skin color, Nayan tried to compensate in other ways, using his wealth to gain the respect of the ones around him. He also suffers from a "broken" identity. Nayan is born from Indian descent, but his family has already been in Trinidad for generations. Though they still live according to the practices of Hinduism, especially concerning food and the tradition of marriage, a lot has been lost from the time his family arrived in the country and a lot has been assimilated from the Brittish Empire's colonization. Nayan and his family are, then, located in a hybridized situation that is unknown even to him, but that reaches its surface once he arrives in Canada. The fact that he is hybrid disturbs his thoughts, since he wants to be acknowledged as Indian Trinidadian, but is still unaware of what that means.

Nayan, then, feels unauthentic because he does not realize that his true and authentic origin is a hybridized one. Stuart Hall, who has studied the process of diaspora and its consequences in postcolonial subjects, states that "the closed conception of diaspora rests on a binary conception of difference. It is founded on the construction of an exclusionary frontier and depends on the construction of an "Other" and a fixed opposition between inside and outside." (HALL, 1999, p7). In the case of Nayan, he is on the outside of the Canadian society, but also outside of the Indian one, which at times causes extreme distress, because it leaves him with no place of true belonging.

As he mentions to Viveka:

> When I returned here I watched my friends and saw — I still see it — how they all think that because they are men — just because of that single fact — that they are special. Little do they know that among other men of the world, we are practically not visible. Not just in the white world, you know. […] With the Indians from India we can bond over cricket, but other than that they — even they, who share our ancestors — dismiss us. As if we are poor, poor, poor copies of an original that no longer exists (MOOTOO, 2008, p. 307).

Hall comments in relation to the specific diaspora of Caribbeans and says that "Caribbean culture is essentially driven by a diasporic aesthetic. In anthropological terms, its cultures are irretrievably 'impure'. This impurity, so often constructed as burden and loss, is itself a necessary condition of their modernity" (HALL, 1999, p.8). When applying Hall's theory to Nayan's behavior, it is possible to understand his discomfort, locating its origins in the very foundation that identifies Caribbean culture, that is, its diverse origins. What Nayan fails to understand is that the 'impurity' of the Caribbean does not connote a contamination, but an enrichment of the culture itself.

Without a formal closure, the novel drives the readers to reach their own conclusion and highlights the many possibilities of life inside the country of Trinidad. Mootoo, then, debunks previously established thoughts of homogeneity both inside the Caribbean community and the Hindu family that inhabits it. Moreover, the novel merges feminist criticism with sexual issues and places queer theory in a postcolonial background that is in much need of a discussion encompassing both topics. It also proves that heterosexuality is a constructed theory, since diverse sexual identities are portrayed as a natural part of the characters' personalities.

As Thomas Glave states, "it is so important for us each to know that we are not, no matter what anyone tells us, throughout the archipelago and beyond it, alone" (GLAVE, 2008, p.4). Shani Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter* proves that no matter where queer Caribbeans are, they certainly are not alone.

CONCLUSION

> So we are told by our own people, by our journalists and elected officials, by our religious leaders, by our own families.
> Caribbean lesbians do not exist – so we are told in newspaper articles, on radio shows, and to our faces.
> *Caribbean lesbians do not exist*: so it is implied by historians, sociologists, and other scholars, and by our singers and writers who overwhelmingly choose to portray the lives of "straight" men and women, and occasionally gay men's lives and realities, leaving the rest of us out (KING, 2008, 191).

Adrienne Rich's masterpiece article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" has been extensively used in this thesis, but it is crucial to restate its influence in the discussion of patriarchy and women's oppression. Many acclaimed critics have used Rich's work as a starting point to develop new theories, engage in new analysis and ask new questions concerning the situation of the female body in a male dominated world. Some of those critics, such as Judith Butler, Sara Ahmed, and many others, have expressively contributed to the visibility of lesbian experience.

One of Rich's claims concerning compulsory heterosexuality is that "one of the many ways of enforcement [of heterosexuality] is, of course, the rendering invisible of the lesbian possibility," transforming it into "an engulfed continent which rises fragmentally into view from time to time only to become submerged again" (RICH, 1996, p. 135). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, to engulf means "to surround or to cover something completely; to affect something very strongly." No other word could be better used to describe the lesbian experience throughout the centuries. Though it is undeniable that any kind of sexual diversity has been obscured by history, including the gay male experience, "to equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatized is to erase female reality once again" (RICH, 1996, p. 136), for the lesbian is not only discriminated because she is a lesbian, but first because she is a woman.

Lillian Faderman, in the introduction of *Chloe Plus Olivia*, an anthology dedicated to short stories that show love between women, believes that until the end of the 19th century, female homosexuality was not perceived as negative, not because men believed it to be a normal path for women, but because "it posed little threat to heterosexual institutions" (FADERMAN, 1994, p. 4). Faderman mentions that,

> Most men would not have felt threatened by such relationships because common wisdom had it, at various times, that well-brought-up middle- and upper-class

> women had no autonomous sexuality, that they were sexual only to fulfill connubial duties or for the sake of procreation, or that anything two women might do together was *faute de mieux* or insignificant, that without penetration by a penis nothing "sexual" could take place (FADERMAN, 1994, p. 4).

Faderman's sentence not only explains why relationships between women were somewhat acceptable before the 20th century, but also clarifies how the sole figure of the woman was perceived. First of all, there is the matter of talking about "well-brought-up middle- and upper-class women", as if they were the only women that existed. That is, lower-class women were disregarded completely as simply non-important. Second, the fact that women had "no autonomous sexuality" carries with it a history that objectifies women as property of men, to be used as they pleased since men, contrary to women, did have an autonomous, sometimes uncontrollable, sexuality. The belief that women only carried out sexual acts in order to please men or procreate is an idea embedded in the figure of women, and one that restates not only compulsory heterosexuality but also women's tendency to frigidity, a widespread idea in literature. Last, Faderman mentions the belief that equates "no penis" to "no sex" which, up to the present, is one of the most used justifications to erase the lesbian possibility. Therefore, an analysis of how the figure of the lesbian has been erased needs to be carried out bearing in mind the varied, unfunded justification used not only to control homosexual urge, but also to control the sexual urge of women altogether.

With the different waves of feminism and the civil rights movements of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, some ideas concerning the role of women have been put into question, deconstructed and constructed again as a clear consequence of globalization and postmodernity. However, even when minorities acquired voice, and women, gays, immigrants, and ethnic minorities spoke up more and more for their rights, the multiple marginalized position of individuals that belong to two or more of these groups is still not widely discussed.

Third-world women then, even though being part of the constructed class of woman and the constructed class of immigrant or ethnic minority, were still voiceless since issues of feminism and postcoloniality were discussed as two separate institutions. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains in "Can the Subaltern Speak?",

> Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly faced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence'. It is, rather, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow (SPIVAK, 1988, p.82).

Thus, if the subaltern woman is doubly marginalized, the subaltern lesbian is even more excluded from mainstream society. She suffers not only because of her gender or her nationality, but also because of her sexual desire. In other words, while the woman suffers from sexism, the immigrant suffers from xenophobia, and the homosexual suffers from homophobia, the subaltern lesbian is target of prejudice from all sides.

After the civil rights movement, and especially after the 1980s, many literary works that dealt with the subaltern subject started gaining space in mainstream publications. Yet, even when feminist or postcolonial works were published, not many of them dealt with both topics simultaneously. As Deepika Bahri explains in "Feminism in/and postcolonialism",

> Feminist studies and postcolonial studies sometimes find themselves in a mutually investigative and interactive relation with each other, especially when either becomes too narrowly focused, i.e., when feminist perspectives are blind to issues pertaining to colonialism and the international division of labor and when postcolonial studies fails to include gender in its analysis (BAHRI, 20008, p.201).

Perhaps the biggest progress concerning the visibility of marginalized subjects was made in the 1980s and 1990s. Due to globalization and a deeper interest in minority groups, there was a newly found space for subaltern women that wished to discuss female sexuality in a multicultural, transnational, non-normative approach. Françoise Lionnet explains the role of these women in the book *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*, where she investigates the development of postcolonial women's literature. Lionnet believes that,

> What the writings of all these [third world] authors suggest is that the old dichotomies are no longer tenable, that the local and the global are increasingly interrelated, and that one cannot be fully understood without reference to the other. But at the same time it becomes clear that universality would be an empty proposition without the gendered specificities offered by particular writers representing different cultural configurations. Postcolonial women novelists offer us rich and varied means of understanding the contemporary dialectic – and the ways it reweaves the problematics of classical European humanism into a new tapestry in which there can be no room for normative approaches of the past (LIONNET, 1995, p.21).

That is, instead of analyzing the postcolonial, the female, and the homosexual as separate, there needs to be an integration of studies on these subjects that can fairly portray the lives of thousands of individuals.

However, if works by white lesbian writers are hard to come by, the ones by subaltern lesbians are even more difficult. A prominent group that certainly engaged in discussions of gender, nationality, ethnicity and sexuality was composed by the many Caribbean writers that published their work in the end of the 20th century. Names such as Audre Lorde, Achy Obejas, Dionne Brand, Makeda Silvera, Michelle Cliff, Shani Mootoo, and other female writers, were able to break with previously established normative constructions. They were

able to prove, once and for all, that Caribbean lesbians do exist, though they have remained in the shadows for decades, centuries, erased by the heteronormative rule, by compulsory heterosexuality, by so-called male supremacy.

In the article "More Notes on the Invisibility of Caribbean Lesbians", first published in 2005, critic and poet Rosamund King argues that when a Caribbean woman is open about her sexuality, she is immediately judged by her people. King observes that,

> Of course, Caribbean lesbians do exist. As soon as I write this – as soon as I say it – I am attacked and dismissed: not my existence, but my authenticity as a Caribbean person and whether or not I have a legitimate claim on that identity. For instance, people might insist that I must not have been raised with "Caribbean values", must not have spent enough time in the region, or must have been "contaminated" by the U.S.A. And if the speakers do not convince themselves, they will move to attack my lesbianness, insist that I am "confused" or "scorned", that I was "interfered with" at some point, or that I "just need a good man" (KING, 2008, p.191).

King's statement reiterates many assumptions already discussed in this dissertation. First of all, it implies that as soon as an individual is perceived as homosexual, his/her identity as Caribbean is put into question because of a historical belief that homosexuality is part only of a purely American or European culture. Moreover, it also suggests that, much like in the U.S., same-sex desires in the Caribbean are seen as a way to take revenge on or to mourn a lost lover, as if the lesbian existence were dependent on hate towards men, not a desire towards women.

Both of the works that have been discussed in this thesis engage in an important discussion of how non-conforming sexualities are present in the Caribbean. Cuban-American Achy Obejas and Trinidadian-Canadian Shani Mootoo show, through their novels, the diversity of Caribbean sexualities both inside and outside the islands. Still, Juani Casas and Viveka Krishnu, the protagonists of *Memory Mambo* and *Valmiki's Daughter*, come from different countries, so it is important to acknowledge this difference in order to understand that even the term Caribbean lesbian may be too broad a category when dealing with the diversity of the islands.

Juani is, like Obejas, Cuban-American. Her immediate family has arrived in the U.S. after a revolution that left many citizens unsatisfied with the country's politics. The Casas family was against Fidel Castro's regime and moved to the United States as exiles fleeing the political situation of their country. As many other middle to upper class Cubans, their adaptation in America was eased by various programs created by the U.S. government in order to facilitate their assimilation to the new norms and culture.

Juani's family's economic situation also helped them thrive in a business that somewhat sustains the lifestyle they were used to in Cuba. Juani's light skin also plays an important part in how she is perceived by others since, though she is an immigrant, she is not immediately seen as ethnic minority, at least not as much as the mixed race and black Cubans.

Viveka, on the other hand, is a Trinidadian with Indian origins, so her position as a Third-World woman is emphasized both by her skin color and by her geographical location inside the Caribbean. Since she does not leave Trinidad during the course of the novel, one can only suppose how she will be perceived and what kind of oppression she will be subjected to. In the novel, Nayan, a straight Indo-Caribbean male recalls how he was treated and how he reacted to discrimination while living in Canada. It is likely, then, that Viveka will face varied oppressions upon migrating to Canada. Yet, even though skin color plays an important role on how the subject will be seen by others, Viveka comes from a respected family that has a lot of prestige in Trinidadian society and that has the financial means to provide a comfortable life for her, even in Canada.

As Helen Scott mentions in the introduction to *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization,*

> While gender-based oppression, like racism and like heterosexism, cuts across class to the extent that sexism impacts all women, as racism impacts all people of color, and homophobia all those who sexual orientation or identity falls outside the sanctioned 'norm', the experience of oppression varies qualitatively and quantitatively with class (SCOTT, 2006, p.8).

In other words, Juani and Viveka certainly suffer oppression because of their postcolonial/woman/queer condition, but this oppression is felt more lightly due to their economic status in society. That is not to say, obviously, that their experience as subaltern individual is any less painful than the experience of anyone else, since sexism, homophobia, and racism still affect their everyday lives and influence their identity formation and expressions.

Still, both Juani's and Viveka's experiences with silence and oppression illustrate the thoughts of Rosamund King concerning sexually conforming Caribbeans and the white-normative United States and Europe. King directs her speech to those individuals and mentions:

> Ironically, your denial, your scorn, your disgust, your hate, and violence, prove our existence and your fear of difference. You use us to confirm your own 'normality', even while – and partly because – those with more money and power spit in all our dark faces, our 'small island' faces. You deny us and yet we are still here, screaming in our silence, ever present in our invisibility (KING, 2008, p.194).

Though King's statement is directed towards female invisibility, it is important to emphasize that Shani Mootoo's novel also problematizes the plight of gay men living in the Caribbean. Even the title of the work points at Viveka, the daughter in question, and Valmiki, the father. While, in general, male homosexuality is more visible and more accepted, in the Caribbean, as I have discussed previously, it is clearly stigmatized and affects male homosexuals who often try to conform to the heteronormative rule. This stigmatization may be consequence of a binary gender system. That is, men are expected to have specific types of behavior that include relationships with women while same-sex relations between males are recognized as deviant. Though homosexual relations between females carry a double oppression of both gender and sexuality, the sexual prejudice suffered by gay males should not be taken lightly, since it affects thousands of individuals. In Mootoo's novel, the predicament of Viveka's father is vividly dramatized. On one hand he is a successful physician and a member of the upper class, on the other he feels trapped and unhappy most of the time.

The so-called "real" man needs not only to engage in sexual relationships solely with women, but also to display traits seen as exclusively male. Mootoo's Valmiki and Obejas's Jimmy have a few traits in common. Though Valmiki does not physically abuse his wife, he constantly engages in extra marital affairs in order to appear manly in front of others. While Jimmy does not cheat on his wife Caridad, he frequently mistreats her in order to prove his dominance. Again, the imposed norms of gender play a decisive role in individuals' behavior and in the way these individuals want to be perceived by others. As Judith Butler states in the article "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics", "[g]ender norms have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space" (BUTLER, 2009, p.ii). Appearing as anything other than the dominant male implies a deviance that may affect individuals in many ways, including physical and psychological violence. Jimmy's violent behavior cannot be justified as a mere consequence of the ways in which norms have been imposed and should never be compared to the struggles of a homosexual man such as the ones illustrated by Valmiki. Yet, Jimmy is another example of how sexual politics leave different marks on different people, and how male stereotypes influence how these individuals will present themselves in front of society.

While Obejas is able to negotiate diverse identities of Caribbean individuals that may surface from exile and compulsory heterosexuality, Mootoo delineates the many sexualities emerging from an essentially Caribbean background and how both male and female characters deal with gender impositions. In the previously mentioned anthology, *Our*

Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writings from the Antilles, editor Thomas Glave repeatedly questions the lack of portrayal of Caribbean homosexual subjects. When talking about his loneliness when realizing people like him were not illustrated in novels and other forms of art he asks: “were there others immobilized and cowed by silence and mired in the same shame that colluded with that silence and its creeping shadows?” (GLAVE, 2008, p.2). *Memory Mambo*, by Achy Obejas, and *Valmiki’s Daughter*, by Shani Mootoo are able to answer the question asked by Glave and by many other Caribbeans that have struggled for so long with the constant silence towards homosexuality in the region. Yes, there are many Caribbeans who wish for same-sex relationships, many Caribbeans that still struggle to find a safe space in which to display their sexuality freely, many who suffer severely from sexual politics based on extreme prejudice and homophobia. It is not possible to say if or when the situation in the region will change, but it is possible to affirm that wherever the many gay, lesbians, bisexual, transgender, or queer Caribbean individuals are, they are certainly not alone in their silence.

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