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The Perpetual Search of Identity in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this submission is my work and that, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution.

Date: 12/03/2021

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A handwritten signature in black ink, enclosed within a hand-drawn oval border. The signature is stylized and appears to be the name 'Guerroudj Nour El Houda'.

Dedications

This humble and simple work is dedicated to every member in my family including my sisters, brothers, and parents for their encouragement, support and continuous inspiration.

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Abstract

The West Indian (Caribbean) society represents a clear version of any spot under the tyranny of colonizing powers. However, its people reflect all degrees of physical and psychological torture and enslaving systems that transcend one's imagination. Under the undescribed image of criminality, kidnapping and forced death, inhumane conditions coalesce to define the "oppressed in terms of history". Thus, this research work aims to discover the main traumatic abuses intervened in identifying the West Indian men and women under the loss of lots of human parameters of being. To this effect, the current study entitled "The Perpetual Search of Identity in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* , attempts to unravel the different portrayal of these bodies in their infinite task of the quest for an authentic identity. Moreover, it provides a comparison between the way female and male characters react in different manner during their combat to achieve self-fulfilment. Through the use of the postcolonial feminist literary theory, this dissertation focuses on women's role and contribution in the construction of national identities through writing and renegotiating the colonial histories. This research work will conclude that the female's search for a West-Indian identity is always caught under oppressive, exploitative, patriarchal systems of a colonial or postcolonial hostility. It will reveal also how traumatic abuse disrupts identity question and threatens one's unity and wholeness.

Keywords: Authenticity; Identity; Oppression ,Postcolonial; Trauma; West-Indies .

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General Introduction

Literature continues to enlarge its roots and surfaces over approximately all issues. Postcolonialism appears, thus, to reduce the pain of imposed cultural forces and bears the burden of transmitting the faithful representation of the oppressed reality. At the same vein, postcolonial literature attempts to restore the voices that have been silenced for a remarkable period of time. Additionally, it emerges to justify abnormal brutal actions as well as violence against those who resist colonial rules. Some of these voices take part in the harsh campaigns of endless struggle. They insist on the act of returning to roots, origins and rewriting their own histories from feminist lenses and discourses.

Postcolonial authors “write back” in the sense that they use their words to challenge European representations as universal. Therefore, they move their characters from the centre, where their voice is silenced by Western dominance to the margin, where they possess the power to question and expose colonial practices. In addition, they seek identity in relation to place. Postcolonial theory, then, asserts that the other shares his/her experience from the margin. The margin becomes a point of contention for theorists like Homi K. Bhabha, who argues in *The Location of Culture* that this liminal space actually allows for a merging of cultures and identities; therefore, the margin no longer represents only the other but a great surface for many silenced others and their cultural experience.

Yet, women’s contribution and exploration of postcolonial literature has extremely positive sides that reflect different socio-cultural issues. Either in their languages or the colonialist languages, they win a status in bringing their cultures to the center and widen their battle of voices, change, theories, critics and find ability to flee all sorts of silence and oppression designed for them.

As a master student, my research paper is written to emphasize the main historical realities of the West- Indies. I have focused on the materialist side of the colonizer, which has diverse humane repercussions in the West Indies. Especially under the main changes following the institution of slave trade and the establishment of colonial competition between many European powers. This geographical space reflects all figures of man's greed, desire for supremacy and, therefore, all types of European colonists such as Britain, Spain, Portugal, France and Germany were looking to enlarge their territories by adding new colonies.

In Addition, the title of this research paper, *The Perpetual Search of Identity in Shani Mootoo's Cereus Blooms at Night*, reflects a well-constructed narrative, which treats these issues. Some of readers can be inspired through the degrees of patience, wisdom, and flexibility exhibited by her major characters, mostly the female one as the heroine Mala. She searches for her own identity on a personal, familiar, cultural, and even political level, in a process of self-questioning and self-reconstruction fostered by the geographical distance from the homeland. Indeed, the whole narrative, especially where Mootoo promotes decolonizing choices over western ones, is drawn back from her own private life. Another motivation resides in the heavy and appreciable messages sent to every postcolonial citizen to contribute in challenging the Western paradigms of being.

This research paper focuses on the following aims and points at its centre. First, it emphasizes the role of Caribbean writers in reclaiming the diverse African and Indian heritage born and raised in the Caribbean region, in addition to other white identities. In the same line, this investigation aims to answer many questions related to issues of identity, home, belonging and return, especially for the inhabitants. Next, the writers' displacement from the archipelago also causes them to look back to both the familial island as home and that of their ancestors to seek answers to questions

pertaining to the nature of their complex and multifaceted diasporic identities. In privileging the work of Caribbean women, I seek to investigate the specifically gendered concerns and meanings within the literature they produce in the face of a traumatic Caribbean history.

Shani Mootoo the writer who is characterized by her plurality of belonging. She attempts throughout her prominent work *cereus Blooms at Night* to reveal the powerful image of the West-Indian woman. Moreover, she utilizes all her abilities in fighting against the traditional, colonial, patriarchal images of third world women by creating characters who seek to construct their own spaces and define their individual experiences relative to their distinct homelands.

In this regard, the study will address the following research questions:

1_ What effects and consequences does the colonizer leave during his brutal colonizing act and even during the post-colonial period?

2-What about the West-Indian identity under the veneer of colonialism? Is it coherent, complete or does it submit to a severe alteration as a result of these colonizing forces?

3-What roles do the Caribbean writers assume, and what messages do they convey throughout literature?

3_ Does Shani Mootoo under the light of feminist theory succeed to convince a wider range of western readership to introduce the West Indies identity through her characters, and to what extent does her cross cultural belonging shape her discourses?

In this vein, the aforementioned research questions are hypothesized as follow:

1- Many colonizing powers contribute in the institution of many social changes, traumatic abuses and cultural phenomenon in the area, and trace the main components for that society.

2_ Shani Mootoo by following important postcolonial tropes that of cultural belonging; yet inscribed in a queer framework, might she still be deemed as a postcolonial writer, who challenged forged theories that grow out of western traditions.

3_ The quest of identity in postcolonial societies occurs under a wide disturbing and oppressive systems, which may hinder the construction of this identity or leads to its formation as a complete other.

Since this research paper is based on anecdotal accounts rather than facts, so a qualitative research method has been followed in order to ensure the objective of the study and in an attempt to answer the former questions. From another side, different and varied sources were inserted to collect data in this research work, such as books, articles, journals and internet materials.

This dissertation consists of three chapters. The first chapter entitled *Between the Polarities of Oppression and Suppression* will provide an overview about postcolonialism, postcolonial literature and theory. More attempts will unravel the outstanding issues related to West-Indian feminism, identity and culture.

The second chapter entitled *Between the Historical and Literary Agenda* will provide a historical overview about West Indies in the face of many colonizing powers, especially the British conquest. It aims at exhibiting the colonizer's plans behind slave trade. In addition, it discusses the notion of immigration which contributes to introduce the quest of home, belonging, and exile. It provides a general overview also about migrant literature and the role of these writings in the act of construction/ deconstruction of both knowledge and discourses.

The third chapter entitled, *The Quest for an Authentic Identity*, deals with the novel's analysis and the act of searching an authentic identity for the heroine Mala through a postcolonial feminist

theory. This chapter focuses also on how Shani Mootoo novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* provides a wide relation between the writer and the heroine as this work is basically autobiographical, and represents a huge part from the writer's life.

In fact, the main limitation facing this investigation is the plurality of the cultural contexts and belongings of the writer. Thus, I tried to focus on her West-Indian reference rather than, her Irish, Canadian, Indian culture because the novel's story is based on a West-Indian background. Moreover, though this writer is still alive, I found a difficulty in contacting her.

***CHAPTER ONE:
BETWEEN THE POLARITIES OF SUPPRESSION
AND OPPRESSION.***

CHAPTER ONE: BETWEEN THE POLARITIES OF SUPPRESSION AND OPPRESSION.

1.1 Introduction

Post-colonial literature in general is a kind of response and a way of resistance against the colonizer and all its various criminal practices including brutality, oppression and exploitation. West-Indian literature reveals a long history of struggle and resistance through the harsh experiences of pains, which were witnessed by the dominant colonizer. West-Indian writers do their best, thus, to break the silence of their people, nations and histories, and transmit their heavy messages to the colonizer. Under these circumstances, the settler's aim is always limited between destroying the West Indian culture and identity by different plans and ideologies. Writers such as V.s. Naipaul, Aimé Césaire and George Lamming defend and reflect their national culture through novels, poetry and drama. Women writers also take a place within this struggle. They attack the colonizer by their works through a perpetual search for an authentic identity. And since my research work is entitled *The Perpetual Search of identity in Shani Mootoo's Novel Cereus Blooms at Night*, I devoted the first chapter for theoretical concepts such as post-colonialism, post-colonial literature, identity, West-Indian identity, and West-Indian feminist's role in the cultural upheaval.

1.2 Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism which represents a resistant movement born by the colonized attempts to “reshape cultural codes and structures influenced by the colonizer” (Boyce davies 1994,81).

In the same vein, the term “post-colonial” is explained broadly in *The Empire Writes Back* as a kind of writings that refer to “all the culture affected by imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002: 2).

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Resistance, therefore, is the main feature in front of the dominant fabricated discourses. In this respect, Ngugi has emphasized: “the purpose of post-colonial studies is to assist the total and absolute decolonization of societies in psychological as well as political terms, involving massive and powerful recuperations of the pre-colonial cultures (Ngugi 1986) (Ashcroft et al 2002: 194). However, there is a high disappointment among lots of postcolonial scholars such as Ashcroft, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha over the hyphen " post-colonialism” and without it in "postcolonialism" as it explained:

The consensus in the field is that "post-colonial" (with a hyphen) signifies a period that comes chronologically "after" colonialism. "Postcolonial," on the other hand, signals the persisting impact of colonization across time periods and geographical regions. (Ashcroft Bill et al, 2013: 32-33).

1-3 Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory provides real critics emerging from broken sites and continents to destabilize dominant discourse emerging from the West, challenging "inherent assumptions", and legacies of colonialism (Berlin Chatzi , 2013: 03). Post-colonial theorist gather from multiple places to create a large space for many voices who resist against all kind of oppression and marginalization. These voices have been silenced for so long by a new, racist and dominant ideologies.

In fact, postcolonized people were deprived from a voice to express their existence as human beings, and were called the subalterns,¹ who in their turn have no ability to be heard. Therefore, many postcolonial theorists c

¹ Subaltern: an officer in the British army below the rank of captain especially a second lieutenant.

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ontribute in enriching this field with their ideas and works.

1.3.1 Edward Said

Edward Said (1935-2003) is best known for his book *Orientalism* (1978), which is an essence for examining diverse ways through which the West perceives the orient. And,

therefore, there is wide spot for the other, who is placed in a totally inferior position. The reality of the Orient was forged by European imperialism to the extent that Western scholars were aware of contemporary Orientals or Oriental movements of thought and culture, these were perceived either as silent shadows to be animated by the Orientalist .

1.4 Postcolonial Feminist Theory

Postcolonial feminist theory aims to enhance the status and lives of postcolonial women. It seeks also solutions for marginalized women and gives more importance to gender which was ignored by postcolonial theory. Postcolonial feminist, thus, negotiate political demands under the experience of colonialism.

1.4.1 Ania Loomba

Ania Loomba is an Indian literary scholar, and works as a literature professor at the university of Pennsylvania. She is the author of *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism* book published in (1998), in which, she examines the key features of the ideologies and history of Colonialism, in addition to looking at how sexuality figured in the texts of colonialism. This book shows how contemporary Feminist ideas and concepts intersect with those of Postcolonialist thought.

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1.4.2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Spivak is an Indian scholar, literary theorist, and feminist critic. She is influenced by many figures including Edward Said. She is considered as one of the most influential postcolonial intellectuals. Spivak is best known for her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* She suggested for the Subalterns to remove themselves from this low and peripheral position, in order to come out from their silent position.

1.5 Postcolonial Literature

The term in its broadest terms is related to resistance, struggle and agency as “this category includes works that have a relationship to the subjugating forces of imperialism and colonial expansion. In short, postcolonial literature is that which has arisen primarily since the end of World War II from regions of the world undergoing decolonization” (Audrey Golden, 2015: 01). In addition to the act of decolonization, it also transmits diverse and similar pains in different geographies and contexts through outstanding texts and works, such as Assia Djébar’s *Femme d’Alger dans leur Appartement* (1980), Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1996), and Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). Furthermore, Postcolonial literature is a body of literary writings that reacts to the discourse of colonization and its hidden strategies to forge and fabricate realities. What makes this kind of literature arising in different form in comparison to other kinds of literary production is :

That they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre (Ashcroft et al 2002: 2)

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1.6 Postcolonial Themes

Diverse and relevant themes emerge from postcolonialism, such as: migration, race, gender, hybridity, resistance, slavery and the question of “Who am I?”. Indeed, the question of identity represents the heart of approximately all postcolonial texts. In fact, postcolonial literature is rich of myriads of complicated cultural, historical and religious issues, and the indigenous voice reflects hugely the missing gap which every writer tries to convey and wants to express. Their writings aim to transmit how the indigenous people should see themselves, and what ways they should implement in the process of struggle.

In fact, colonialism refers to all kinds of domination and power control, but also has cultural repercussions, which are strongly difficult to omit from the native’s mind. Though colonialism tools, aims, and strategies differentiate, the psychological effects lead to damaging factors on the individual and the collective side. Ashcroft emphasized that: “more than three quarters of the people living of the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism.” (Ashcroft Bill et al, 1989:01). So, what about the West- Indian identity? Is it complete, united or fragmented?

1.7 Postcolonial Identity

Postcolonialism emerges in its resisting dress to deal with cultural identity as a main component of colonized societies and people. In fact, the colonizing operation left many places in the world without defining references to their cultures and histories. The

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dilemmas of building a real and genuine national identity after a long colonial rule occupy the central aim for many writers and scholars around the world. Indeed, the ways of reclaiming the “self” varies and the tools in which these writers attempt to articulate and celebrate that identity enrich their discourses and bodies of knowledge. Through humble lines, they address good images and values about their environment. In this vein, Kharbe claims:

...the ways in which the knowledge of the colonized (subordinated) people has been generated and used to serve the colonizer's interests; and the ways in which the colonizer's literature has justified colonialism via images of the colonised as a perpetually inferior people, society and culture.(A.s. Kharbe, 2009:425).

Postcolonial writers as representative for Third World people assume ineffable responsibility to reflect their societies' sufferings and histories of struggle. The quest for an independent identity which is very far from the Eurocentric fabrication occupies a larger surface in their literature. It is through different issues and notions such as, hybridity, diaspora, home and otherness that their texts appear fascinating and fruitful for a wide range of audience.

Postcolonial literature, on another side, through diverse elements of placement, displacements and belonging explores important features in designing the identity of the silenced people under ambiguous circumstances. So, through genuine and attractive writings emerging from existing stories, they attempt to narrow the postcolonial subjects and his/ her area of interests. Leonard Orr refers to the issue that the “Question of national identity affects anyone brought up in the shadow of imperialism” (Leonard, 2008:77).

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1.8 The West- Indian Identity

First, the West Indian identity is linked to the existence of the indigenous inhabitants “Arwaks” in different areas such as Jamaica and Trinidad. Then, it is associated to the white identity linked to the European powers because of the high rivalry of the colonizers. In reality, the diverse European powers contribute highly in the institution of the plurality of people inside the West-Indies through the establishment of the severe system of slavery and slave trade. After that, the migration of the Africans registered as representatives of the black identity. This region, thus, was marked by undescribed amalgamation.

Finally, this identity emerge ‘Out of many one people’ (Catherine Hall, 2018: 34). Under the circumstances of exile, diaspora, migration and the plurality of hi/stories a new West-Indian identity was formed accompanied with all sorts of the “unknown”.

The sense of identity grows under diverse complicated circumstances, such as indentured labour, sugar plantation, and the harsh system of slavery. All these issues require a new data, such as immigration, displacement, home and dispora. However, the newly born individual in the West Indies reflect what Isajiw indicated, a sense of belonging and to the community a sense of solidarity (Isajiw, 1990: 35) .

Under this plurality of people, voices and cultures, blackness is highly devalued. The West-Indian man, thus, reflects a new person who is always in quest of personal identity. As a newly Caribbean’s body suffers a real clash between the old homeland which

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represents the place of roots and origins and the host land which is a place of exile and a new belonging. So, this identity is always caught in-between the old spheres and new metropolitan residences. And under all these diversities, there is a common question between people "is there a west Indian culture?".

1.9 West- Indian Culture:

The West Indies contains a different groups of people which leads to a diversity of identities and cultural components such as ,music,arts, dance ...ect , it is important to go through culture definition:

1.9.1 Culture Definition

A simple definition for the notion of culture is the way of life , but it may be defined in different ways according to different scholars , (i.e culture enlightened among many academic definitions), in which, Alfred Mayer (1952) has shown that the culture concept emerged in Germany and Russia as " a typical ideological expression of the rise of backwards societies against encroachment of the west on their traditional culture" (112). After several decades, Sir Edward Taylor adopted the term culture to denote its complexity on the whole. So, culture can be defined as an umbrella term encompasses the social behaviour and norms such as : knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, capabilities ,and habits of the individual in certain society. Fifty years later, English-speaking Anthropologists, such as A.L.kroeber and C. Kluchhohn concludes that culture refers

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to a product, which includes ideas, patterns, values, and is an abstraction from behaviour and products of behaviour .

1.9.2. West-Indian's Culture:

West Indian culture includes diverse cultural components which participate to some extent in the representation of the West-Indian body. Elements such as music, dance, arts, literature, languages, and religious are the major defining features of this culture. This diversity emerges from the contact of myriads of people from different regions in the world. The African culture dominates the region because of their hugely brought oral traditions. East Indian culture from another hand and other immigrant groups contribute to leave their touch and weight in this society. Songs, poetry, proverbs, tales, and legends shape the main symbol of what is a West-Indian. The Caribbean man succeed, thus, to make various changes in his culture and adapt it to the new society by creating new forms of expressions, such as reggae, Calypso and Dub poetry.

1.10 Trauma and Identity:

Trauma is what makes disturbance and disorder completely possible at the level of identity. It destroys breaks and creates a fragment to every part in one's body or mind.

In fact, trauma can create all sorts of disorder which itself can result in a speechless fright. Trauma also contributes to divide one's self, the I and identity. This serves as the basis for a larger argument that suggests that identity is formed by the intergenerational transmission of trauma.

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Traumas emerge under different agents, such as violence, serious injury, torture, and sexual violence as the case of Mala in *Cereus Blooms at Night*.

Traumatic events, however, can disrupt these plans and alter people's lives in unpredictable and sometimes permanent ways. The main results that may appear as a consequence of exposure to traumatic events is mental disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), stress, anxiety, fear and psychological vulnerability. All these consequences lead to troubles at the level of one's memory, self-knowledge, lack of control, flashbacks, silence, belatedness and the lack of power and the possibility to remember. Generally speaking, trauma violates one's schemata, and therefore, it is hard for this survivor to narrate what happens to him or her because identity 'takes the form of a story' (McAdams, 2001:p101). So, one needs to tell his stories to recover and relax.

In fact, one's identity can also participate in viewing and perceiving things differently. In this way, according to the nature of identity, individuals can either recover or hinder recovery from traumas. Positive and negative views of the self also intervene to create changes at the level of recovery effects.

1.11 Indo-Caribbean Feminism

Indo-Caribbean feminism emerges from the context of European colonialism, the history of Indian indenture, transatlantic migration, and the negotiation of estate labor in the Caribbean. In fact, Indian diaspora takes place in the Caribbean after the abolition of

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African slave trade on 1838. Indian women aims ,thus, to escape the Hindu patriarchal systems, they find diaspora as a refugee to escape the forced and rigid hierarchy of the caste system, poverty and a wider circle of familial and communal traditions (Brinda Mehta, 2015:01). However, this attempt to create a change was faced by the brutality of plantation life, racialized stereotypes of sexual promiscuity, intransigent Hindu, Muslim, and Christian moral and cultural codes, and racial tension (Brinda J. Mehta 2015:2). Women writers such as Ramabai Espinet, Shani Mooto, and Lakshmi Persaud find literature expressed through diverse forms, such as novels, short stories, plays, and poetry as revolutionary act to represent their statues and redefine their Indo-Caribbean's identities and unravel the difficult aspects of the Indo-Caribbean (Brinda Mehta, 2015:4).

1.12 Conclusion:

Postcolonialism involved a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects. Postcolonial theory and literature from another side involve the discussion over diverse experiences emerging from the act of colonizing, and give a high value to the colonized in his own surface.

This chapter deals also with the West-Indian identity which emerges from from hostile acts such as slavery, migration, suppression, resistance, difference, race, gender and place.

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The second chapter, therefore, will be devoted, thus, to expose these brutal acts for the West-Indian body in parallel with the main responsibilities of West –Indian writers in dealing with important issues, such as identity, culture, traditions, home and belonging.

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OPPRESSION.**

***CHAPTER TWO: BETWEEN THE
HISTORICAL AND LITERARY AGENDA***

Chapter Two: Between the Historical and Literary Agenda

2.1 Introduction

Postcolonialism emerged from a solid engagement with the experience of colonialism and reflects the shared pain of people, nations and histories. It extended from a terrible past until the present of nowadays, as it seems that postcolonial nations are living a horrifying “colonial present”. Multiple societies, such as India, Nigeria, South Africa, Algeria, China and numerous parts of the Caribbean are still struggling with the actual status quo at all levels. All these circumstances refer to the issue that the after-effects of empire have not disappeared yet.

Postcolonial literature is that which has arisen primarily since the end of World War II from regions of the world undergoing decolonization. It grows explicitly as a raising voice by torn-halves novelist, writers and poets, whose aim is to re-establish discourses of cultural identity, repair the broken self and express all figures of resistance for the colonised people, who faced different issues such as slavery, slave trade, immigration and diaspora.

The West-Indies as an example of the colonized witnessed the same criminality, disempowerment, and discourses of othering and fragmenting. Thus, in this chapter, great responsibility is invested for discussing many issues related to the west indies/Caribbean’s history and literature, and is addressed especially for those, who have a narrow knowledge concerning the people of this region.

This chapter therefore concentrates on the emergence of a resistant Caribbean literature that has helped in raising the voice of the Caribbean peoples.

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2.2 The West Indies and British Conquest

The West-Indies has known diverse conquests, such as Spain, France, Germany, and Britain. However, the British's conquest which began in 1609, with Bermuda and continued to include Barbados in 1625 represents the last and the powerful settlement to the region. The indigenous peoples included two tribes of Arawak and Caribs. These two minorities were approximately depopulated and destroyed through using undescribed colonial machine. In reality, the destruction to the first inhabitants was led by the Spanish explorers. (Eros Mungal , 2019:108)

Though Britain was the last power in terms of its arrival to the islands, it succeeded to gain lots of colonies and to exploit many wealth and natural resources. In addition to that, it competed the other European powers in transporting more African slaves and continued inserting all sorts of criminality through the aggravating numbers of sugar's plantation and creating maximum percentage of indentured labour. (Ibid:108)

Under this milieu which lacked all the humane factors, the West Indian islands provided high profits. Britain went further with large-scale production of tobacco, coffee, cotton and sugar cane. (Ibid:109)

2.3 Labour for the Plantations:

The Europeans activity in the West-Indies was not easy at all because of the hardships of work at the level of plantations. Additionally, the responsibility of doing lots of function was highly difficult and demanded more agency and patience. In the beginning, the European settlers tried to employ numbers of White servants. However, the results proved that these people were inadequate for this kind of activity which required strong people,

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such as enslaved Africans. In fact, black Africans contributed to create crucial economic and materialist flourishing as opposite to the whites who proved high mortality rate of labourers. (Eros Mungal, 2019:109)

Later on, African slaves were exposed to all figures and sorts of torture, forced death, little hours for relaxing and the absence of decision in the simplest jobs they did. Harsh circumstances and hostile conditions were witnessed by every black African under the infinite greed of the plantation owners. In fact, the life of the blacks was very cheap and surrounded with careless masters to the humane side. All these terrible facts coincided and coupled with huge attempts of revolt and resistance by the Africans. For the sake of emancipation, indentured labourers from the Indian subcontinent replaced the enslaved. (Ibid:110)

Between 1702 and 1808, millions of Africans were shipped to the West-Indies, especially Jamaica which represented the leading spot of sugar production. The number of enslaved Africans coerced and transported forcibly to the region across the Atlantic between the 15th and late 19th centuries was unbelievable. Indeed, the uncalculated percentages of Africans who were brought by European traders during the horrifying and bloody journeys received hot debates. Terrible conditions were lived and the majority of them were naked and chained inside the ships. Many of them also died before the end of this voyage which answered the European's desire for supremacy and for other journeys.

Since the work was very hard, this means a high price for slaves was demanded. Many parameters were taken into consideration depending on gender, strength, manual skills, age, and state of health. However, black Africans witnessed bad treatment, and very

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low prices. They were seen as animals or mere commodities, without any value in the market though British sugar industry reached its peak in the mid-18th century and sugar was an expensive item on the shopping list.

These types of mal-treatment which included burning, branding and tarring revealed all sorts of the inhumane factors faced by these slaves who were bought cheaper than bread. The plantation owners were unconcerned about their living conditions, but highly interested in the amounts of profits.

2.4 Women Slaves:

At first, mainly men were seen as the main source of economic power and supremacy in the West-Indies since they could work all the day and sometimes to death. Later, European traders changed their views concerning who is the source of production, and they concluded that women's role in giving birth to the next generation of slaves could be more productive than men themselves.

The historian Verene Shepherd (1999:32) referred to the fact that in Barbados during 1801, women started to represent a prominent power in the eye of traders instead of men, and they surpassed 53.5% of the enslaved population. A high concentration of female slaves was not limited only to the British territories, but places, such as St Kitts, Nevis and St Vincent and even the French territory proved that the fruitfulness of the idea .

2.5 Exploitation and Abuse

Many Legislative Assemblies of human rights passed laws called 'slave codes' which emphasized the duties of enslaved people. These codes demanded that slaves were not to be exploited and abused. They had their right to live freely as human beings. However, such

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provisions were not rigidly implemented and were often ignored. Cesaire (2000) indicated that:

the colonial activity is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt . . . consequently the colonizer gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal [and] accustoms himself to treating him like an animal (41).

Both men and women were open to all types of humiliation, oppression and exploitation. Women were often seen as mere sexual objects who had to satisfy their masters' desires. In fact, after a long, heavy and exhausting day, these women had no power and right to reject their home services or the sexual ones to their owners. In fact, sexual violence transcends one's imagination, and included all figures of brutality. Many enslaved women and girls, even those who were pregnant, did not escape being branded, chained or beaten. (Neyera Mohammed Hassan,2020: 176)

2.6 Exile and Belonging:

The arrival of diverse European settlers and traders to the West-Indies complicated not only the historical institution of the islands, but even its cultural components. The clash between the colonizer and the colonized shaped the wide miscegenation at all levels of the Caribbean from the early days of slavery. The two act of colonizing and enslaving reconfigured diverse data and circulating assumptions in the region. Moreover, new born cultures were inserted and forced to assimilate the cultures of the colonizers. Diaspora for those who lost multiple ingredients of the homeland, meant to displace also their personal stories, historical events and their solid experiences. Additionally, language, religion,

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culture, history and memories were not very far from displacement. Diasporic subjects, thus, mirrored all images of up rootedness, longing, unbelonging, homelessness, deprivation, and nostalgia to the past (Neyera Mohammed Hassan, 2019:177). Under such circumstances, it was completely hard to identify the borders of home inside the corners of the Caribbean. Carew (1978) confirmed that:

The history of our exile is a dismal one of ethnocide, slavery, indentured labour, racism, colonialism and more recently neo-colonialism. Everywhere that we touch the earth in this hemisphere and seek to establish roots, the roots are bound to invade the graves of the innocent dead (p. 460).

Being in a nation which held the burden of a traumatic past, colonial discourses, and uncontrolled dislocation, meant that self-definition, self-discovery and representation were completely difficult to be defined. Carew stresses the wide possibility of creating an identity crisis under these defining agents for the West-Indian society. In addition to that, seeking home occurred under the difficulties of co-habitation between different races and an uprooting process. Junea (1996) quoted the words of Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister of Trinidad when he says:

All these other victims of imperialism have had decisive advantages over the West Indies. They had a language of their own, a culture of their own...as in India, a family structure of their own as in Ghana, a sense of values of their own which they could oppose to Western Imperialism. We in the West Indies have nothing of our own (3-4).

Eric Williams, thus, revealed the difficulties degrees of shaping a history suffering from alienating factors and predominated by colonial dictionaries for defining its cultural and societal endeavours.

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2.7 West- Indian Literature:

The West –Indies witnessed bleak journeys of repeated criminality and the total absence of human's dignity. The region was highly defined with saddening experiences of slavery, colonialism, diaspora, and the continuous attempts of emancipation.

West-Indian writers' hopes to thrive their nation and people were an optimistic beginning for the whole islands. Their aim, thus, was to embed a revolutionary culture and art in the face of many mal-treatments and bad practices by the colonizers who were numerous. However, this humble beginning was very slow, and witnessed the absence of real written texts. More emphasis was based on the exploration of oral traditions brought, especially from Africa.

Later on, between 1930s and the late 50s, a high explosion was remarked, and huge numbers of topics at that time were an anti-colonial existence and perspective. Many writers emerged to check new definitions, values, and an authentic voice for those who were completely silenced. However, the West Indian literature showed more commitment and struggle through its rich variety in poetry, prose, fiction and drama.

The poetry of the early 70ths represented a fruitful site of resistance, and was motivated by the Black Power movement. Oral poetry occupied a wide range of audience since it dealt with political adjustments and inspired many of the inhabitants for radical revolution (Dabydeen David & Wilson-Tagoe, Nana. 1997 :13). Caribbean writers, therefore, were a great part from their nation's fight. They opposed the colonialist's plans to destroy the West-Indian identity, and responded to diverse historical, social and political issues on their islands.(Friederike Börner , 2014:212)

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2.8 Immigration:

The two processes of colonialism and imperialism created lots of changes in the whole world. Indeed, under this wide alteration in different aspects, notions, and perspectives, migration became an inevitable process. Since many European powers were changing their destination to industry as a solution for progress and an

inevitable ending to economic crisis, the migration of people of colour into the industrialized countries was highly demanded.

In fact, diaspora for large numbers of Caribbean people was born under diverse reasons, such as, economic, political, or professional. Since 1940, many of them have left their homelands to check a sense of being, belonging, a voice and a place. Therefore, their destination was towards Britain as the mother country through creating large diasporas of people. This led Dabydeen (1989) to say; "that at the end of the twentieth century, Britain was the third largest Caribbean Island, after Jamaica and Trinidad, with about half a million West Indian citizens" (133).

These migrants' aim was to seize the opportunity of creating a new working class in Britain. Struggling for a home and a real place inside Britain was a moral belief. However, they were surprised by the high degrees of all forms of racism, always marginalized, troubled and abused (John, 2005: 179).

In this way, it seems that the Caribbean people's destiny was strongly associated with diaspora, otherness, leaving home, and cultural alienation. Therefore, the idealistic

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notion of 'Britishness' held by West Indian immigrants was quickly being tainted by an overwhelming lack of belonging. (Neyera Moahmmed Hassan, 2019:182)

2.8.1 West- Indian Immigrant Writers

Migrations of West-Indian people were joined by writers whose ambitions surpassed imagination. Among these writers: George Lamming, and Edward Kamau Braithwaite, Samuel Selvon, C. L. R. James, and V. S. Naipaul. Though their objectives differentiated, the aim to write about their land and transmit their pains was similar, common, and a sacred duty. Lamming considered this migration as an inevitable direction in which aspirant writers would move (Lamming, 1960: 182).

The main reason of migration for these writers was to avoid poverty, raise economic motives, the possibility of widening their audiences and readership. Additionally, Britain included major publishing houses which were absent in the West-Indies, and most important publishers were in London. Hence, migration meant to develop their art, texts, perspectives, and status. They had to resist for winning respect and validation, especially of their literary peers (Ledent, 2007: 78-79).

In addition, these writers were intensified by colonial education, and were familiar with English manners, language, religion, and culture. They were highly influenced and inspired by the works of Shakespeare, William Blake, Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, and others. They tried to raise their dreams and expectations. Moreover, their aim was also to create better opportunities for their children. (Neyera Mohammed Hassan, 2020:182)

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However, all these hopes and dreams were soon lost inside a nation which is obsessed with racism and discrimination. For these immigrant writers, reality appeared to be very different from the myth. Ledent stated that:

it was true enough that there were jobs to be found at least up to the end of the 1960s. But the pay was low, and many West Indians were underemployed. They were put up in rundown accommodation, for which they were charged high prices. Discrimination in employment and housing made them realize that, before being British, they were blacks. (2007: 2)

2.8.2 West-Indian Writers and Exile:

The main result born behind the migration of the West-Indian writers was to create a literature of exile. This literature emphasized the experiences of placement and displacement, and projecting the West-Indian community living between two distinct cultures. Identity question remained a special concern for these writers. Ethnicity, home, language and diaspora questions also emerged out of the Caribbean historical experience. George (1999) stated that, “the form of some of the fiction in English by writers from the colonies relies heavily on English literary traditions; this does not extend to the contents of the fiction. To raise his or her voice, a formerly colonized writer changes the contents of the English novel, even if the utterances are in the “master's voice” (5). These writers who reflected the birth of this literature of exile, and discovered their home are referred to as the first-generation of Caribbean writers. They did their best to end their expatriation. Carew summarized the situation of this generation saying:

The Caribbean writer.... is a creature balanced between exile abroad and homelessness at home, between the people on the one hand and the Creole and the colonizer on the other. Exile can be voluntary or it can be imposed by stress of circumstances; it can be

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a punishment or a pleasure. The exile can leave home for a short time or he can be expelled forever (1978:453).

Immigrant Fictions as well as writers inside the West-Indies assumed great responsibility to address the experiences of immigration from Anglophone and Francophone territories, and from others once colonized by different imperial powers. Mardorossian (2002) claimed that “migrant art offers a transnational, cosmopolitan, multilingual, and hybrid map that re-draws boundaries by building bridges between Third and First worlds” (15). Naficy (1993) refers to the same idea by saying that "this new migrancy is about ambivalence, resistance....doubling, and even subversion of the cultural codes of both the home and host societies" (37).

Migrant writers of the second generation also were the main representatives of their nation’s dilemmas and sent the same issues of identity, location, and origin.

2.8.3 Migrant Literature:

Migrant Literature emerged from the heart of Britain and re-configured the notion of home from being a symbol of stability. Identity crisis, ambivalence, plurality, and fragmentation stood through diverse short stories, novels and poetry .The Caribbean writers in Britain tried to break up boundaries and encouraged internationalism. This kind of literature had more ability to transmit all types of horrors, fear, oppression and the unjustified practices perpetuated by the colonizers whether in the French or the British Caribbean. George Lamming (1999) explained, saying that home in the immigrant genre is a fiction that "one can move beyond or recreate at will" (200).

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2.9 Conclusion:

This chapter focussed on the Caribbean's traumas born behind all figures of exploitation, slavery, oppression and racism. Also, attempts were made to reveal the hard experiences of the Caribbean's people who were abused by all sorts of domination and exploitation. Therefore, this chapter focused on historical hostilities and its repercussions on the social, cultural, and the humane side.

West-Indian literature from another side, especially that emerging from migrant writers explored all these harsh conditions accompanied by bitter socio-cultural and linguistic realities over the whole region. Throughout their experiences of slavery and slave trade which led to immigration, home and identity questions emerged at the heart of West-Indian literature. Chapter three, thus, will focus on the analysis of the main characters, themes, and other issues related to the novel.

CHAPTER THREE:
THE QUEST OF AN AUTHENTIC IDENTITY

Chapter Three: The Quest of an Authentic Identity

3.1 Introduction:

Cereus Blooms at Night (1996) was the first outstanding and prominent work published by the West-Indian, Irish, Canadian author, and multimedia artist Shani Mootoo. She has become a powerful voice in the postcolonial literary scene. In all her works, Mootoo describes the phenomenon of otherness as a part of the negotiating process of the protagonists' selves and the quest of identity. Mootoo's novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* highlights the violence at the heart of both sexual politics and colonization through the story of Mala Ramchandin. Her creative work traces the representation of different themes such as love, gender and national identities. This chapter will discuss some beneficial themes and their relation to the act of searching coherence and self-representation throughout the analysis of the novel.

3.2 Shani Mootoo's Artistic Talents:

Shani Mootoo is known for her work as an artist and writer. She was born in Ireland in 1957, grew up in Trinidad, and has lived in Canada since the early 1980s. Next, Mootoo studied fine arts at the University of Western Ontario where she began to paint and produce video works. In addition to her gifted talents of writing poems, she earned a master of fine arts equivalent at the Emily Carr College of Art and Design in Vancouver in 1982. (Carine Burger, 2008:02).

Mootoo's works vary between collection of short stories, such as *Out on Main Street* (1993) and novels. Her first novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, was published (1996) in fourteen countries. It won lots of awards, such as a finalist for the Giller Prize, the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize, and the Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award.

In 2001, Mootoo published a collection of poetry, *The Predicament of Or* and her second novel, *He Drown She in the Sea* (2005). Mootoo has been a writer in residence at the University of Alberta, at Mills College in Oakland, California, and at the Varuna Writers' Residency program in Australia. She has taught writing at the University of Alberta, Capilano College in North Vancouver. Her visual art and video productions have been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Queens Museum, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the Venice Biennale (Karine Burger 2008: 02).

Mootoo's experience as an immigrant, unsettling character and her cross cultural belonging is central to her works. Her ancestry can be traced back to India and her present to Canada; however, she is very much rooted in Caribbean culture, literature and life. (Karine Burger 2008: 02).

3.3 Echoes from *Cereus Blooms at Night*:

Cereus Blooms at Night is the partially told story set on the fictional Caribbean Island of Lantanacamara, in a town called Paradise. It is about a woman's life named Mala, who admitted to an Alms House, suspected for murdering her father Chandin Ramchandin. Her story was narrated by a nurse named Tyler who is neither a man nor a woman, helping the protagonist to get rid from her silence. She faced a terrible traumatic experience because of her father's rape and sexual violence. Chandin Ramechandin used to rape his two daughters because of being left by his wife Sarah when she ran away with her friend Lavinia. The same experience of rape happened for her sister Asha. However, escape was a suitable solution for her. The novel is unique in

its portrayal of characters whose sexual identity is unclear, exploring hybridity and sexual minorities within a cultural context, in an intriguing, accepting way.

3.3.1 The *Cereus as a Title*

The novel's title takes its name from a native plant called the *Cereus* plant. It grows and blooms under warmer climates more precisely, parts of the American continent and surrounding areas including the Bahamas and Trinidad. What makes this plant as a distinct one is that it blooms at night at one particular time during the whole year. During midsummer is usually described as a 'gangly' and 'unruly' plant and some people have said that it resembles a dead bush. As stated by Liepmann (2012) "the cereus plant serves as a symbol for the main characters of the novel, who are united by their mutual exclusion from the rest of the society". In other words, Mootoo probably chooses to focus on the category of people, who are set in the periphery. On the other side, this known plant reflects a metaphorical trope to highlight all marginalised and unnamed identities in this diasporic society of the West-Indies, such as Mala and Tyler. This plant blooms rarely; one day during summer at night, and this feature symbolizes all sorts of human's sadness and powerlessness. However, the act of blooming itself means a beautiful light after darkness, and hope after despair.

3.3.2 The Setting and the Trope of Settling:

In addition to the cereus plant which is highly a critical element, the setting of *Cereus Blooms at Night* is the Paradise Alms House. The name of the setting has different meanings. Paradise is situated in Lantanacalara, a fictional town in a fictional

place. The writer is characterized by her rich and invincible imagination. The name, Paradise, is deceiving and ironic including the horrific events that actually happen there. The name is used to describe the perfect natural place, and should have been a paradise for its inhabitants. However, like Paradise in The Bible, evil plays its role through the characters of the Thoroughly, the colonizers, who do their efforts to cause harm and sadness in the island. Paradise, Lantanacamara, is not just a metaphorical trope and fictional representation to be portrayed as a "pretty place" and then dismissed. (Rhonda A. Kaleel , 2005: 2).

The setting of the novel itself has different meaning and benefits according to Condé and Marshall (2001: 98); “they see an imaginary space as offering opportunities to remember identities and histories differently, while also providing room to imagine different futures”. However, through this setting, the sense of moving, dislocation and migration are a solid feature related to many issues and questions for the writer. Carole Boyce Davies identifies this critical capacity in her own mother’s life and explains the importance of her mother’s ability to cross, continually, geographies of belonging:

My mother’s journeys redefine space. Her annual migrations between the Caribbean and the United States are ones of persistent re-membering and re-connection.... Hers is a deliberate and fundamental migration that defies the sense of specific location that even her children would want to force on her. (1994:98)

Focusing on migration between spaces, real and imagined, can be a means of highlighting and further understanding forms of persistent defiance, like that of Davies’s mother, which are often overlooked or appear innocuous. I therefore want to

suggest that Mootoo's fictional island space, a non-specific location, is particularly useful when writing about the conjoined histories of trauma and exile in diasporic contexts. Davies further contends that: "in the same way as diaspora assumes expansiveness and elsewhere-ness, migrations of the Black female subject pursue the path of movement outside the terms of dominant discourses".(1994:98)

In other words, the fictional Lantanacalara is a place outside the terms of "real" geographies and maps, spaces named by colonial rulers and mapped by colonial cartographers. Stacey Floyd-Thomas and Laura Gillman describe how "Black women's radical subjectivity shatters the boundaries of geopolitical spaces traditionally defined through citizenship while creating alternative social imaginaries" (2002: 528-56)

The seemingly minor decision to create a fictional island setting allows Mootoo to break all sorts and the constraints of dominant discourse or of mirroring "reality." Moreover, it suggests that *Cereus* has larger political implications and social meaning, that it is, as Paule Marshall suggests about her own writing, more allegorical in nature. Using the fictional setting and indeterminate, multiple timeframes creates an opportunity to reflect back up the "real," to critique it, to push beyond what is already known, usually perceived. Thus, Mootoo's Lantanacalara immediately signifies to readers that the novel will ask us to "migrate," to move, like Davies's mother, "outside the terms of dominant discourses"(Davies, Carole Boyce 1994:98), and to connect on different terms as we engage with the characters and their stories.(vivian.May, 2004:99)

3.4 Characters

In her novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), Shani Mootoo infuses characters, whose endless struggle creates a huge disorder and places every individual between the centre and margins of her text. As part of the colonised nation of Lantanacalara, both Tyler and Mala are supposed to be homeless at the start of the novel. They are alienated by its inhabitants. Mala, because of her madness and Tyler because of his gender and sexual ambiguity.

Similarly, despite the centrality of their narratives, at first glance, the personal voices of these characters seem difficult to locate within the larger context of the novel. Tyler has consciously placed himself into the margins of the text, while Mala reflects the heroine who is unable to speak, left completely voiceless, silenced and a fighting her complete psychological order.

As colonised people, the characters in Mootoo's novel find themselves homeless, dispossessed and marginalised upon their native soil. Chandin, the father of Mala deliberately chooses to build himself a house in Lantanacalara. However, he becomes a colonized who hold the flag of the coloniser in his own right at all levels.

3.4.1 Mala as the Heart of Homelessness

Mala is doubly homeless because the reality of home does not exist for this traumatised body either culturally or personally, she must imagine and create this notion in other ways. In fact, the death of her father Chandin redefines what home means to her. The garden spaces and the cereus plant is what make her body recuperate its energies,

and ultimately by relocating it within her own imagination and memory. Furthermore, because Mala misses the ability and the ways to tell her own story and pains, she must find other voices to transmit the internal wounds to other people such as Tyler. Thus, in the same way her home is decentralised, so too is her story, for it is the interweaving of her story, along with the stories of several other characters that creates a narrative that not only lacks 'a centre' but ultimately defies it. (Anna Royal, 2014:01).

3.4.2 The Shared Status of the Periphery and Ambiguity

Mootoo's characters must "move beyond a fixation of those traumas and beyond the trap of entering into discourses of comparative victimages...". Mala reflects all sorts of loneliness, humiliation, mental and psyche disorder. Pohpoh, represents the nickname that her parents used for calling her during her childhood. In Mootoo's text, the two names are used as a sort of "doubleness" to her devastated other self, and refusal to speak. After her repeated sexual abuse by her father, her life was turned into hell. The confines and the boundaries of her house are no longer helpful to define the notion of home. On another side, Shani Mootoo emphasized on projecting silence that haunts especially the Indian women, who are a part of the "subalterns" (Spivak 120). Mala's speechlessness reflects the weight of silence in the West-Indian history as whole and the collective dramas of rape and colonization it holds through a deactivated memory. Patricia claims that:

The main protagonist endorses the function of being the body on which the pain is inflicted. Beaten, raped, humiliated, and finally dehumanized by her father's irreparable sin against her innocence, the young girl gathers in one

person the silent pain of generations of women (Patricia DONATIEN-YSSA, 2008:97)

She moves to the garden and “immures herself alive” because the house is too “intimately related to the violated space of domesticity and to her raped body” (Donatien-Yssa, 2008: 99). In the familial house, Mala is dead at all levels. The garden, a natural space, exists to allow her to begin to use her fragmentation as a means to survive. So that, Mala is the victim of decades of forced isolation and society’s criminal silence. Her sexual oppression, just like her mother’s within the confines of a community whose rules demand that women submit to male desire and control, places her on the periphery, an outsider literally muted by a system that would rather not look upon the victims it produces and abandons. But, As Donatien-Yssa (2008:101) asserts ~~that~~, unlike her father who was unable to fight back against the oppressive system of colonialism and consequently, self-destructed, Mala figures out how to survive, even in the most inhuman circumstances. It makes sense, then, that Mala’s strength – on some level, stored up for all these years of her muted existence – ultimately helps Tyler become the person he wants to be.

Tyler’s function throughout the text is to make Mala emerge from her state of silence and speechlessness by voicing her story. Therefore, the narrator, Tyler and the protagonist Mala (Pohpoh) connect through a “shared queerness,” (Mootoo 48); a space within the periphery of the fictional island of Lantanacamara that allows for their otherness to claim a home. Their shared pain – Tyler’s shrouded secret as a transvestite and Mala’s desperate past steeped in sexual violence – allows for a sort of revelation of

truths between the two, particularly because they have finally located a safe space in one another's midst. The larger society of Lantanacamara proves dangerous for both of them, as its Indian and colonial traditions and unwritten laws allow for unchecked misogyny and homophobia to wreck devastation. (Alisun Morguson 2012: 56-57)

3.4.3 Chandin Ramchandin as a Coin of a Colonized/Colonizer:

The character of Chandin Ramchandin, Mala's father, illustrates the dangers of this kind of society. His abuses against his daughters often warrant the kind of silence that Mootoo works to deconstruct. They are utterly horrifying – but his childhood experiences as an outsider in a white home seem to have helped shape him into a monster. As a young boy, Ramchandin moves from his Lantanacamaran Indian family to live with the Reverend Thoroughly, a white man who uses his colonial power to teach Ramchandin that European history is the only history worth knowing and Christianity is the only religion to which one should devote oneself. Ramchandin's Indian culture becomes irrelevant. He also is shamed into humiliation for falling in love with his stepsister Lavinia, whom the Thoroughlys would never allow to marry a “short and darkly brown Indian-Lantanacamaran” (Cereus 34). Because of his loss of identity, he suffers a mental break (Alisun Morguson 2012:60).

Chandin reflects all features of a colonized who abandons his roots, origins, education and culture because of melting into the colonial values and education. He represents also the colonizer whose role is not only to mimic the white family in its values and religion, but his sexual violence and the act of raping his daughter denotes all

meaning of colonialism. In fact, sexual violence occurs in parallel with the process of colonizing. Mala's body here refers to the land's virginity and Chandin refers to the colonized who becomes a colonizer and invades the land's purity. Ania Loomba says:

Thus, from the beginning of the colonial period till its end(and beyond), female bodies symbolise the conquered land. this metaphoric use of the female body varies in accordance with the exigencies and histories of colonial situations(1998:129)

3.5 The Subalterns' Attempts of Checking a Voice :

Mootoo's Novel " *Cereus Blooms at Night* " holds different themes to convey various messages to the reader.

3.5.1 Migrating Subjects:

Cereus Blooms at Night mirrors multiple examples of exile, dislocation and escape. For example, there is Mala's psychological exile from trauma: her psychic split into two axes; the adult Mala who cares for the child Mala (Pohpoh). Mala as a child was repeatedly sexually assaulted by her father, this fact figures all symptoms of trauma. She finds no ability to bring her story of sexual violence into to the world of speaking. Trauma is what silences her and disturbs her memory.

In-betweeness in gender coincides with lots of examples of exile and escape. For example, Ambrose, who is Mala's suitor, escapes from femininity into masculinity and grows up as a boy. Ambrose chooses to act as a man and migrates into gender ambiguity as Otoh.

Nurse Tyler, who plays the role of Mala's narrator, is a homosexual and in-between man and woman. He is a Lantanacamara who completed his education abroad. He was born a boy. However, his dissatisfaction of his gender leads him to the borders of femininity. The novel reflects so many examples of exile and migration, for "exile and expatriation shaped West Indian culture and literature" (Kaup 1995: 93-171).

Mootoo makes a solid connection between the ravages of histories, and the degrees of ambiguity emerging at the level of her characters' identities. Mootoo examines questions of rape, sexual violence and family incest as great part of the colonialist strategies to invade bodies and minds. She exposes the immorality of empire and connects its consequences through the decay of the body of Mala's father after his death on her hand within Paradise's garden. (Vivian M. May, 2004: 101-102)

3.5.2 Garden of Paradise:

There is no mistake that Mala's garden of "belonging" or "nonbelonging" is located in the town of Paradise. Mala refuses to forget the years of violation and her rape though everyone would prefer she forgets. Though her sister's escape, which represents a wide void in her life. Rekindling her love for her sister leads her to shelter Asha in her memory long after she runs away. Mala creates a new relationship with the land around her while simultaneously refusing to silence or forget the social relations others would like to ignore. So that, Mala's garden can be understood to be not simply a "separatist strategy" (Hoagland, 127: 50-125) but, rather, a more subversive method of politicized resistance.

3.5.3 Search of Identity:

The most unique aspect the novelist inserts in this precious novel is the authentic search of identity. The narration of Mala's story is in the first person by Tyler, who himself is struggling with his identity and self-image. Mala's suffering aggravates because of the pain inflicted on her by her father explains the reasons of violence as an epistemology for the colonizer. Spivak explains; "...the clearest available example of such epistemic violence was the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other."(1993:35).

Tyler who is neither a man nor a woman has similar problem as well as Mala. Her problem is in trying to reclaim her own self-image, especially after being traumatized by her father, who himself is a colonizer. Each of the characters seem to have his or her own secrets concerning their respective identities, whether religious, sexual or native colonised identities: Mala's abusive and secretive childhood, her mother Sarah's love affair with her best friend Lavinia, and Tyler's sexual identity.

Mootoo uses this book to focus on the marginalised people in society, sexual abuse (specifically incest) and the 'proper' gender roles in society. The narrative mainly utilises a first-person point of view via the narrator, Tyler. This in-between person is fond of dressing up in clothes which show his inclination to act like a woman. As his relationship with his patient Mala becomes closer, we sense that Mala is beginning to understand certain aspects of his implied identity. Tyler's sexual identity, which is never clearly mentioned in the novel but only implied, suggests society's taboo about certain sexual

terms. The issue with uncertain gender identity is also evident in the scene where Otoh comes home from an outing with a girl.

Otoh, who was born female, but has perfected the art of looking like a man. The lack of a specific term used for taboo issues pertaining to sex in the narrative is further shown in the community's description of what Chandin did to his daughter.

Chandin's identity has indeed taken a complete turn from being a respected preacher to an incestuous father. Despite the towns people's common knowledge of what happened, they seem to be more comfortable with a statement like 'Chandin pick up with the older daughter' instead of using a clear statement such as 'Chandin rapes Mala'. This example shows the towns people's silence when it comes to taboo issues such as incest. (Tirzah Zachariah , 2012: 1-7).

All these characters are struggling either with themselves or external forces such as colonialism to check self-identification, identity, unity and coherence. All of them reflect what Spivak refers as "an object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency...If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (1993:31).

3.6 Narration as a Mode of Fighting:

Like her garden, which is viewed by outsiders as disorderly, Mala too can be, and is, seen as a dismissed and disordered- "mad as a brainless bird" (Mootoo ,1996: 107). Yet her torn-halves body, psychic state and linguistic splitting, is reminiscent of what

Vévé Clark (1991) describes as: “an imagination out of mind” and signifying a severe “toll on consciousness at the level of the oppressor’s language” (45).

The emerging question, then, is how to use the oppressor’s language and narrative models to demonstrate Mala’s double awareness and consciousness as a powerful and resistant, Mootoo’s challenge in writing *Cereus Blooms at Night* is to “narrate ... in terms other than those prescribed by a colonial archive” (Premesh 2000: 45). Taking into consideration Shepherd’s, Premesh’s, and Clark’s observations about the potential oppressiveness of narrative models and historical methods, it is interesting that we don’t read Mala’s story through her eyes/I’s but, rather, through Tyler’s eye. As Tyler tells us, “I had become her witness”. In which mootoo utilises the same technique in the way Arundhati Roy deliberately uses flashbacks and a non linear narrative for *The God of Small Things*, in order to reconcile certain characters with each other.

3.7 Symbols

In her novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Shani Mootoo illustrates natural symbols contributing in the process of her heroine’s healing, such as the town of paradise, the garden, the birds, and the cat. These symbols represent diverse meaning of survival for the characters and the island. I have chosen, thus, nature and birds as two important motives of the character’s healing

3.7.1 Nature:

Nature is an important symbol in Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*. So, colours, plants, trees, insects and different attractive sounds cohere to offer healing, hope

and relax. Throughout this novel, nature has played a critical role in representing characters, situations and values, and the plot moves through the natural cycles of life of both the wild and the human species represented. Nature is synonymous to resilience, flexibility, recovery and potentiality. Every component of nature serves as a cure to Mala's mental disorder. Nature, thus, reflects belonging, home and safe space for the traumatized heroine.

3.7.2 The Birds of Freedom:

The birds which are also a great part of nature and plants reflects another cure for Mala's disturbed self. They symbolize the element of freedom and emancipation from her father who himself is a colonizer. Birds bring relief and alleviate trauma through breaking her imprisonment. The birds like the plants and the insects reveal the sense of transparency and represent Mala's inner. Her desire for freedom thrives through endless attempts of fleeing sadness, trauma and the lack of agency. So, the birds were necessary to the soul of the child, the young woman, and the older woman to rebuild her spirit. (Rhonda A. Kaleel , 2005: 53-58)

3.8 Conclusion:

The postcolonial writer Shani Mootoo through her novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* discusses many issues related to identity question for many of her characters, especially Mala. The writer reclaims all sorts of sadness and powerlessness resulting from diverse colonial oppressive system such as, her heroine's sexual abuse. Shani Mootoo through

her novel reflects the infinite quest of identity for many of her characters, and illustrates the symbols of nature, plants, birds as a solution for their fragmentation.

This chapter, thus, reveals how Mootoo breaks one's acceptance to imposed acts of brutality, disorder and the belief of treating women as marginal figures. Her characters and the fictional island of Lantanacamara allow the reader to discover the possibility for the other to claim a home and identity. This connection allows also her heroine to reflect her native Trinidad.

General Conclusion

Throughout history, colonialism surpasses the boundaries of wealth exploitation to include diverse sorts of torture, criminality and enslaving systems. The West Indies, thus, reflects a clear example about all types of oppressive systems, such as the institution of severe inhumane systems of slave trade and slavery.

The competition of these colonizing powers results in redefining the West Indies as a nation, and gives birth to postcolonial writings and texts to respond that painful history and geography. Diverse issues of diaspora, longing, belonging, exile, stand as an inspiring dilemmas to answer identity questions and problematics.

This research work's attempts to discuss a post-colonial novel that expresses a deep analysis of various important ideas, in which post-colonial discourse was obviously crucial for the recognition of artistic creation as well as the expression of independent identities .Shani Mootoo through her cross-cultural belonging assumes huge responsibilities to fight Eurocentric discourses, strategies and attempts to embed colonial heritage.

Mootoo, through her work *Cereus Blooms at Night*, designs a wider relation between colonialism and sexual violence as being an act through which women's oppression is extended.

Mootoo has fabricated imaginary islands such as Lantanamera in *Cereus Blooms at Night* to fictionalize histories of exile and trauma in diasporic settings, and negotiate the self in the light of memories through self-representation and discovery. Mootoo explores through her heroine Mala the double colonization of the West –Indian woman , the

oppressive and enslaving systems which contribute in the destruction of her body, mind and spirit. The quest of identity, thus, occurs under diverse strategies of fighting the colonial agenda.

The analysis of this research paper reveals that the woman writer chooses a female heroine and explores her struggle to show the feminist role in deconstructing the colonizing strategies. In the same line, she insists through her piece of writing on the role of the West-Indian women in defining the self, checking home and gathering the pieces of her identity.

Though being sidelined, marginalized and othered, the quest of cultural identity remains a sacred act, and faces lots of barriers and obstacles of diverse colonizing powers for many of characters, especially Mala.

Additionally, both the search of identity and the reconstruction of history are highly linked to an attentive reading of a resurging past. Therefore, Shani Mootoo succeeds to some extent in revising histories which can be according to her only through reactivating resistance, memory and finding a voice and an authentic identity for the traumatized and silenced body by repetitive colonial violence.

Moreover, the quests of cultural identity, and the reconstruction of history, are highly linked to an attentive reading of the past. Through her feminist mind, she inserts deconstructive dimensions to Eurocentric ideologies, which doubles cultural and religious domination on the Trinidadian society.

At last, a recommendation for further research may lie in the study of the influence of the West-Indian female writers on the audibility and visibility of their writings against the politics of identity exercised by the Caribbean's government against the lesbian writers.

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