PLACE, SPACE AND IDENTITY IN HE DROWN SHE IN THE SEA

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A dissertation submitted to
the School of Graduate Studies
Memorial University of Newfoundland
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts
25 January 2010
St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

"All good things are wild and free"

-Thoreau

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Introduction

Canadian author, visual artist and filmmaker, Shani Mootoo was born in Ireland in 1957 and spent her formative years in Trinidad before settling in Vancouver at the age of 19. Mootoo published a collection of short fiction *Out on Main Street* in 1993 and a collection of poetry *The Predicament of Or* in 2001, but she is best known for her first novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night* ("*Cereus*"). First published in 1996, *Cereus* was a finalist for the Giller Prize, and was shortlisted for the British Columbia Book Prize, Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award and the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize. With much critical acclaim, *Cereus* has generated a modest, but notable, amount of academic criticism, while Mootoo's 2005 follow-up, *He Drown She in the Sea* ("*He Drown She*") has elicited virtually none; this lack of criticism is surprising due the many narrative qualities *Cereus Blooms and Night* and *He Drown She in the Sea* share. Both novels take place, in part, in fictitious, imagined, island communities (Lantanacamara and Guanagaspar, respectively), suggestive of Trinidad, and both explore these postcolonial communities in terms of place, displacement, race, class and nationalism. In both *Cereus* and *He Drown She*, Mootoo explores gender and sexuality with lesbian and transgendered couples, including gendered oppression, sexual violence and adultery. The presence of environmental and ecological factors in the novels cannot be ignored: while these factors may signify different values in the novels, both *Cereus* and *He Drown She* employ the elements of earth, air, fire and water; animals such as birds and fish; pastoral and sublime settings; and flora, fauna and produce. By contrast, Mootoo's third novel *Valmiki's Daughter*, which was released in October of 2009 is expressly set in Trinidad,

and while the novel continues Mootoo's exploration of identity, it provides more explicit focus on gender and sexuality issues.

This paper aims to fill a piece of the critical void surrounding Mootoo's *He Drown She in the Sea*. Like the works of other Caribbean-Canadian writers, such as Lillian Allen, Neil Bissondath, Dionne Brand, Austin Clarke, Cyril Dabydeen, Claire Harris, Samuel Selvon and Olive Senior, Shani Mootoo's work deals at length with the ambiguous identities constructed for those of the Caribbean diaspora. As Victor J. Ramraj writes, even in her earlier work, *Out on Main Street and Other Stories*, Mootoo writes "about characters coming to grips with their multiple cultural perspectives and identities – national, racial and sexual" (Ramraj 114). Twelve years later Mootoo is continuing down the same path, as *He Drown She* similarly deals with the identity issues raised from being displaced from the colonized Caribbean homeland. Harry St. George, a central figure of *He Drown She*, chooses to immigrate to Canada to escape from the growing political tensions in his native Guanagaspar (Mootoo 282-285). Here, Mootoo is contributing to the current trend of Caribbean-Canadian literature, which "is largely *immigrant writing*, preoccupied with the complexities, contradictions, and ambivalences associated with leaving one society and adjusting to another" (Ramraj 102). As Harry builds a successful life for himself in British Columbia, it becomes evident that "for English-speaking West Indian [immigrants,]…Canada, with a shared British colonial heritage, is not altogether a foreign land" (Ramraj 102), and for Harry St. George, this shared colonial heritage seems to lessen the severity of the "assimilation-separation dilemma" (Ramraj 102) experienced by many immigrants. However, despite the amount of success Harry St. George attains in Canada, his struggle for identity remains palpable

and poignant, as he spends much of his adult life striving for social and economic accomplishments to win the heart of Rose (Sangha) Bihar, his childhood companion whom endures an identity crisis of her own.

To mirror the ambiguity and isolation felt by her central characters, Mootoo employs geographic spaces such as the island of Guanagaspar and the sea which surrounds it; diverse places of rootedness and re-birth, such as the Caribbean garden, the Canadian garden, the Carribean picturesque and the Canadian sublime; and imagined nations and communities which foster both positive and negative impressions of personal identity. While Curdella Forbes argues that migration literature "naively" produces "singularized images of the Caribbean" which "suggest a unproblematic continuity of identities between the geographical Caribbean and the Caribbean in diaspora" (Forbes 230), Mootoo provides the opposite, depicting a Caribbean of varying nationalities, communities and social and economic classes. Yet while these varying Caribbean identities are apparent, so too is an all-encompassing identity of displacement which becomes itself a type of national identity. A genuine example of this community of displacement can be found in *The Islands in Between: Essays on West Indian Literature*; in the book's dedication, editor Louis James writes:

> To
>
> the writers of the new West Indian
>
> nations (James "Dedication," *The Islands in Between*)

Such a dedication clearly celebrates the Caribbean diaspora while embracing the common bound of the community's native West Indian roots. As James writes, West Indians know that "the island experience is primarily one of heat and sea breeze, luminously beautiful,

but with its identity constantly compromised by the flux of the surrounding sea" (James 42); this shared experience of compromised identity is at the heart of *He Drown She in the Sea*.

Chapter One: The Island and the Sea

In postcolonial literatures, the motifs of the island and the sea that surrounds it are often employed as ambiguous figures of place and passage. This is true of *He Drown She*, which takes place on the fictional Caribbean island of Guanagaspar, and in Vancouver, British Colombia. As Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, "it is nature the symbol, nature certifying the supernatural, body overflowed by life, which [the poet] worships, with coarse, but sincere rites" (Emerson 188), and throughout the novel, Mootoo employs the sea to play upon the equivocal temperament of nature, proving it both "dangerous but purifying, innocent yet wise, the only real touchstone of what is good and right and beautiful" (Turner 42). Mootoo's treatment of the sea is not unique: many British and American slave narratives employed the same motif of the sea as a passage to enslavement, as well as a passage to freedom. As Janelle Collins argues, in *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano*, "the sea embodies contradiction and paradox; it exists as both a site of enslavement and a medium to liberty" (Collins 2). In *He Drown She*, Mootoo highlights the dark side of the sea, depicting it as a passage to slavery for both African slaves and indentured Indian laborers in Guanagaspar, as well as a destructive and fatal force, threatening the lives of those who rely on the sea for subsistence. However, Mootoo also celebrates the liberating aspects of the sea, both as a physical passage to freedom from colonial domination, as well as a source of spiritual cleansing and renewal. Both feared and longed for, the sea surrounding Guanagaspar is perhaps the most complex and oblique character in the novel.

Throughout *He Drown She* the sea is consistently represented as an ambiguous figure: at one time, "the silken turquoise water" is a stand-alone entity, where the sea is

so dense that "the early-fall sun" is "unable to penetrate" its surface (Mootoo 45); yet later the sea "sprawled on endlessly," so there was "no horizon…just a haze where sea and sky became one" (Mootoo 103). However, the depiction of the sea as both destructive and rejuvenating is a more prominent theme. *He Drown She* is framed by a prologue, "The Dream," and an epilogue, "Air." Both sections of text are distinguished from the main portions of the novel by italicized type. While "The Dream" describes Harry's dream of the sea exploding onto the shore and destroying all in its path, "Air" describes Harry and Rose arriving in Honduras, via the ocean, finally free. Mootoo frames the novel in this ambiguity, framing her story with images of the sea as both destructive and liberating.

The novel opens with Harry's dream of the Guanagasparian sea, about to explode:

> *In the dream he first notices that there are no frigate birds in the sky and that the sea has suddenly and strangely retreated. Then, there are no waves but the ocean undulates, and the level of the water on the horizon rises rapidly. On the exposed floor of the ocean gasping fish slap themselves until, exhausted, they give up and are still. The sea begins to swell, swelling until its surface is smooth and shiny, like a taut plastic bag on the verge of bursting. And he realizes that the reason there are no frigates in the sky is that from there they already saw the magnitude of the ocean's bulge, and, predicting the outcome of its inevitable and imminent belch, they took off to seek refuge*. (Mootoo 1)

While his surrounding neighbours do not heed his warnings, Harry knows "*if the sea continues to grow like that, it is bound to split its plastic-like surface, emptying it of its*

intestines and all that it has swallowed" (Mootoo 2). When the water finally engulfs the seaside town of Raleigh, and subsequently retreats, "the shattered remains of houses are strewn" about the shore, "and in the ocean…are floating bodies and wood chips the size of matchsticks: the remains of boats, houses, and furniture" (Mootoo 4). This image of the sea, and its wreckage, runs throughout *He Drown She*: when living in Elderberry Bay, Harry notes that "the odour of the sea, its floor churned and spat up by winter storms, saturates the air" (Mootoo 21). This odour of destruction Harry would have learnt from Tante Eugenie and his mother Dolly, who lost Seudath, Harry's father, to the sea. Mootoo writes that on the day of Seudath's death:

> …sky and sea turned shades of grey, and in moments, some parts even black. It was full of tides, lines of ripples, the language of the ocean that fishermen and their families know. The sea chopped and boomed. Waves formed far, far out, and at their fullest, they stretched up like ravenous mouths opening wide. They brutally dissected one another, ran against one another. Ones racing backward slammed into others that were pelting forward, and each wave that shattered rolled high up the beach, scattering chip-chip, pebbles, sea cockroaches, and starfish, spitting fringes of dense, ochre-coloured froth laced with seaweed, tangled lengths of fishing lines, bits of old net, and cork floaters. Air that blew in from across the ocean was heavy with the scent of things from the ocean's bed ripped up and churned. Tante Eugenie had sniffed that particular odour early and came immediately to keep a silent watch with Dolly. (Mootoo 105-6)

Such images of the sea's wreckage evoke Walt Whitman's "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life," from the "Sea Drift" cluster of poems. "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" depicts meditative moments where the poem's speaker seeks to describe the divine unknown, the transcendental, the over-soul: to employ symbols and signifiers of nature to represent states of being which lie beyond the realm of signification. Drawing on Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Poet" and "The Over-Soul," this poem exposes the limitations of poetry and symbolism in expressing the notion of a supernatural or divine unknown, illustrating that the transcendental ideal of cosmic or universal divinity, which pervades all of nature, cannot be contained within a symbol, type, or signifier.

In "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life," the narrator explores beachscapes, searching for poetic inspiration, and couples the "ocean of life" (1), or "fierce old mother" who "endlessly cries for her castaways" (5) with the land of the "fish-shaped island" (39) Paumanok, referred to as "my father" (40). Together, the mother-ocean and father-earth become cosmic creators, and their union on the beach forms "the rim, the sediment that stands for all the water and all the land of the globe" (9). The ocean and land become signifiers for cosmic or universal creation, and it is the site of their union, the beachscape, that the poet visits for poetic inspiration. While walking the shores of Paumanok, the poet becomes distracted by the materials expelled from the ocean at high tide, such as the "chaff, straw, splinters of wood, weeds, and the sea-gluten" (11). Although the poet had been "seeking types" (17), or poetic symbols or signifiers, he quickly realizes he is one with the objects wrecked on upon the shore: the poet and the wrecks are transcendentally unified for upon "Paumanok there and then as I thought the old thought of likenesses" (14). Employing transcendental ideals of unity, Whitman

aligns himself with the wrecks upon Paumanok's shore, and becomes one with the washed up sea drift.

Just as Whitman's sea spits wreckage onto the shore, so does the sea of Guanagaspar, as Dolly awaits the return of her husband:

> First a big piece of the net, full of seaweed, washed up somewhere along the coastline. The boards from the pirogue, one piece with the boat's name, *St. Peter* [the Patron Saint of Fishermen], partially visible. One of the men's jerseys, but not the red one she was hoping and not hoping for. A few days later, more flotsam and jetsam of a nighttime high tide. A month or so beyond that time, the engine was discovered a few miles up the shore, but no bodies were ever recovered. (Mootoo 107)

While Dolly awaits the wreckage of the storm which killed her husband, Whitman's speaker listens to "the dirge, the voices of men and women wreck'd" (19) upon an unnamed shore. In contrast to the immortal, infinite cosmos, the poet realizes that he too is as finite as the wrecks upon the beach, admitting:

> I too but signify at the utmost a little wash'd-up drift,
> A few sands and dead leaves to gather,
> Gather, and merge myself as part of the sands and drift. (22-24)

Whitman employs both himself and the drift upon the shore as symbols or signifiers to be gathered from the shore to represent the mortal creations of the immortal, the cosmos. The poet, like the drifts in section one, has washed upon the shores of Paumanok, "a trail of drift and debris" (43) leaving "little wrecks" (44) upon the shore. While the poet accepts this position, accepts that both he and the oceans "murmur alike" (36), he asks

father earth to "breathe to me while I hold you close the secret of the murmuring I envy" (50), to explain the transcendental secret realm of the cosmic (the universal unity that poetry fails to express), to reveal the over-soul which cannot be contained within a poetic symbol.

Whitman, as a poetic creator, does not place himself on the same pedestal as cosmic, universal creators: he too is a finite creation to be wrecked upon the shore and become one with the "little corpses" (57). The mother-ocean weeps for her castaways, while the "sobbing dirge of Nature" (67) mourns those finite beings that cycle through birth and death while nature carries on immortally. However, Mootoo's nature does not mourn for those destroyed, but remains ignorant to its wreckage: after the storm which killed Seudath, the

> Coconut trees, brilliant yellow, their trunks white like the sand, fanned the beach, and the fishing pirogues lined up, posing as if nothing had happened, as if awaiting the arrival anytime soon of a photographer from town, or abroad, or an oil painter. It would have been inconceivable to someone passing by on the main road, watching the picturesque seaside village, the ground under the coconut trees covered in orange crocuses waving at them, inviting them even, that tragedy had befallen Raleigh. On the evening of the third day, the sea still close-lipped and innocent looking, Dolly reluctantly made her way back into her house and wrapped herself in white. (Mootoo 106-107)

Because Mootoo depicts the sea as a fatal and destructive force, ignorant or unmoved by its own devastation, the sea is respected and feared by those around it. Dolly refuses to

leave a young Harry with Uncle Mako and Tante Eugenie, fearing they could turn "their backs on him" allowing him to wander "out on the beach, or worse, [run] into the sea" (Mootoo 135), and Dolly instills this fear and respect for the sea into Harry, for as an adult in Elderberry Bay, Harry decided not to "fish out the logs" from the water, for "if he were to fall into that frigid salt water crammed with mountain-slide debris and logs escaped from booms, he would be beaten to a pulp so fine that he could be formed into the newsprint on which his obituary would be announced" (Mootoo 23-24).

Despite the obvious destructive power of the sea, Mootoo also celebrates the purifying and liberating powers of the water, as Harry longs to be cleansed by the water in four separate episodes. Despairing over Rose Sangha's marriage to Shem Bihar, "a sea bath, a cleansing in salt water, seemed to Harry an antidote to an insalubrious day," although Dolly stops him, bawling "fiercely that it was in that hour…of his deep despair at Rose's marriage, when, if it were his fate – like it had been his father's – to die by drowning, the sea was bound to snatch him from her" (Mootoo 271). After many years in Vancouver, Harry returns to Guanagaspar, where "the sun blasts its heat, reproachful to those who have stayed away from their homeland too long" (Mootoo 289); despite driving inland, Harry anticipates the approach of the "Caribbean Sea" from "the brilliant beckoning light, the stifling humidity, and a taste of salt in the air" (Mootoo 290) and decides that "once he has seen Rose, he will head straight for the ocean, the tropical ocean that his body is suddenly aching to be submerged in" (Mootoo 291). Later, for relief from the Guanagasparian heat, Harry wades into the water and "scoops and splashes…water on the top of his head" and "pats the back of his neck with it" (Mootoo

331). More obvious biblical resonance can be found in Harry's initial sea-cleansing, which takes place after his wife Cynthia has betrayed him. Mootoo writes:

> That evening after the station had closed, enraged by the prospect of anarchy brewing in his house, Harry got in his car and, after several years' absence, drove to Raleigh, directly to the location of the house he and his mother used to live in....A good distance from the place that was once his and his mother's, he whipped off his clothes and hung them over the fallen trunk of a coconut tree, after which he walked into the sea. Waist-high, he stood in thick brown foam, waves rising, crashing and pelting toward him. The sand shifted rapidly under his feet and threatened his balance. Snakelike and trembling, lines of current wrapped about his feet like a lasso. (Mootoo 257)

Harry's cleansing in the sea serves as a baptismal ritual, absolving him from his marriage to his cheating, adulterous wife. The baptismal scene also serves as an integration back into his home community of Raleigh, for after "several years' absence" he waits for the "evening sun and the cool winds" to dry his body before visiting "the house of Uncle Mako and Tante Eugenie" (Mootoo 257). This has clear Christian parallels, as "in the New Testament, baptism is clearly understood as both a condition for, and a sign of membership of, the Christian community" (McGrath 367). Mootoo employs the sea as a force of destruction and renewal, death and rebirth, as baptism is "interpreted theologically, both in terms of dying and rising with Christ" (McGrath 367).

A source of destruction and renewal, the sea is also seen as a passage to enslavement and to liberty. The Africans who populate Guanagaspar were forced from

their homeland during the African slave trade: Uncle Mako consistently "would babble on about a family waiting for him across the sea," and how "Africa was really the home of his ancestors, from where he was taken against his will" (Mootoo 197). Indian indentured laborers, of both upper and lower classes, suffered similar indignities to these African slaves. Dolly explains:

> [Upper class Indians] cross them terrible waters…in the same stinking boats. All of we lie down side by side, catch head lice, cough, and cold, chew betel leaf together, and spit blood. They enter this country through the same procedures. They did have to line up for placement, answer the same questions, and do daily hard labour under estate boss and the hot sun in cane field. Everybody get treat the same way. Everybody had was to line up for pay and for handouts….And no matter how some rise, how some fall, or how some stay put, all of we…stem from the same tide. (Mootoo 219)

Despite the horrors of the passage, Mootoo employs the sea as a "site of enslavement and a medium to liberty" (Collins 2). For many characters in the novel, the sea provides a means of personal rebirth, renewal, or escape. When Dolly first meets Harry's father, Seudath, she is immediately attracted to his "fisherman's eyes," fascinated by "the ocean deep and wide with foreign shores swimming in them" (Mootoo 100). It is Seudath who builds a seaside home in Raleigh for Dolly, providing her with refuge, and a new beginning, when her family disowns her. While Dolly finds her new life by the sea, Uncle Mako and the Africans of Raleigh celebrate the sea as their connection to their ancestral homeland, and they often "praise the Lord!" for soon "they would see land in the

distance, and that land would either be heaven or the home from which their ancestors had been taken, and to which they themselves would, praise the Lord, return" (Mootoo 134). Searching for his home, Uncle Mako "took his rowboat out every morning, God willing, still looking for the African shoreline," trying to catch a glimpse of the land he wished to be reunited with (Mootoo 258).

While Dolly may view the passage to Guanagaspar as the passage to sugar cane estates and hard labor, Rose appropriates the sea as her passage to freedom. Throughout the novel, Mootoo develops Rose as an avid and strong swimmer: swimming since a child, Shem has a swimming pool constructed at their home for her birthday (Mootoo 276); and Rose "enjoyed swimming" at the Bihar beach house, "as neither Shem nor the children much liked being in the water" and "it was time she had to herself" (Mootoo 276). Mootoo begins portrayal of the sea as a liberating force in Canada: while visiting Harry, Rose swims in the cold Pacific Ocean, and Harry believes "she had been so at home in the water there, [that] he imagined her content in Elderberry Bay" (Mootoo 28). Cassie, who is only free to live her life as a lesbian outside of her public life in Guanagaspar, also moves to Canada, where she is associated with water as an avid kayaker (Mootoo 52). However, Rose's most significant encounter with water occurs when Harry brings her to a canyon with a salmon ladder. Over the canyon is a suspension bridge, the importance of which Harry does not notice, but a bridge which Rose knows her husband would never allow her to walk across:

> I had never experienced anything like that before. In the middle of the swinging bridge, swinging from side to side, you know, I stop to look down. Below, far, far, far below, on the bottom of the canyon, it had a

> river and the water in that river was green, inky green, and it was flowing fast, fast, fast, over big boulders that was white like the cow's first milk. It had people down on the bottom; they look like ants, they were that far down, and they were hopping brave and stupid for so, from boulder to boulder. Harry ask if I liked what I was seeing, and I could only say, 'Is beautiful, is beautiful,' and I realize then that I didn't know how to describe what I was seeing or how I was feeling. (Mootoo 53)

Rose does not know how to describe such things, as this is the first time she has been with a man who does not determine her every move for her: her experience at the canyon is her first taste of emotional freedom.

Once Rose returns to Guanagaspar and Shem discovers she is selling everything to return to Canada, Shem violently throws cash at Rose, "shouting that he himself would pay her passage" (Mootoo 318): Rose would clearly travel by an airplane for such a long journey, so Mootoo's choice of the word "passage" reclaims the Middle Passage to slavery for a "passage" to freedom. Like "Anacy, the spider man, from Akan folklore," described in *The Empire Writes Back*, Rose embarks upon an "imaginative recrossing of the notorious 'Middle Passage' through which the slaves originally crossed from Africa to the Caribbean," except Rose literally crosses the ocean to escape colonial and patriarchal domination (Ashcroft et al. 34). Rose rejects Shem's money in favor of employing the sea as her passage to freedom, literally; Rose frames her husband, giving the impression Shem had drowned her at their beach house, when in reality, "ready for a fresh start" (Mootoo 338), Rose fakes her death so she and Harry can travel, by sea, to Honduras, then Central America, where they can start their lives over (Mootoo 340ff).

"Air," the epilogue and closing frame of the novel, acts as an answer to "The Dream," Harry's dream of death and destruction. In place of the wreckage, "*the remains of boats, houses, and furniture*" (Mootoo 4) littering the shore, "*the beach is littered with reclining sunbathers*" and "*carefree sounds of families and friends playing volleyball on one section of the beach, cricket on the other*" (Mootoo 345). Where earlier there were "*no frigate birds in the sky*" (Mootoo 1), now "*seagulls shriek overhead*" (Mootoo 345). However, just when it appears Rose and Harry have made it to Honduras - they have almost reached the shore - two giant tidal waves approach them from either side, "*moving toward each other with equal grace and purpose, [to] clash at the precise place where she and he stand*" (Mootoo 346). The couple flee to the sea floor and "*concentrate on holding on to the ground*" (Mootoo 347) while the waves rip through the sea above. Thankfully, Rose and Harry have a better outcome than Seudath, as:

> *Several minutes pass, and finally the weeds, salt, and sand have settled and the water has stilled about them. Hesitantly they raise themselves and find that the sea is calm again, that the sun shines as brazenly as before, and the sounds of the people continue, as if uninterrupted, and they, he and she, have broken the water's surface.* (Mootoo 347)

The sea is now presented, not as a force of destruction, but as a route to freedom, while we do not witness the ocean deliver Harry and Rose to their new lives in Central America, free from Shem and the social constraints the couple would be subject to in Guanagaspar, the positive attitude of the epilogue in juxtaposition to the prologue suggests success. Here, the sea has provided a passage to freedom, not a passage to slavery, yet with Mootoo's positing of "The Dream" and "Air" as the prologue and

epilogue, respectively, the novel is framed by the sea as an ambiguous figure of place and passage.

Chapter Two: The Island, Postcolonialism and Nationalism

While *He Drown She* employs the motifs of the island and the surrounding sea as ambiguous figures of place and passage, the island itself is constructed as a postcolonial space. As Dorothy Lane writes in *The Island as Site of Resistance: An Examination of Caribbean and New Zealand Texts*, "in literary texts that emanate from former British colonies, the island recurs as a figure of postcolonial space" for "the island figure encapsulates ideas of enclosure and control" (Lane 1). However, one can argue that the island figures as an *ambiguous* postcolonial space, based on the varying degrees of nationalism the island fosters. Lane writes:

> The island in British literature is an ambivalent space that can be used to suggest a nexus of dichotomous forces: privacy and isolation, control and imprisonment, protection and tyranny. The related motif of enclosure features a paradox: both a prison which 'renders characters helpless and drives them inwards' and a paradise which 'encircle[s] characters with a protective buffer against the disrupting world' (Rosenwasser 9). (Lane 9)[1]

The argument that the island is both "prison" and "paradise" can best be exemplified by contrasting the nationalistic feelings of Mrs. Sangha and Uncle Mako. Both characters demonstrate Benedict Anderson's notion that a nation "is an imagined political community" which "is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6); however, Mrs.

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[1] Lane cites David Rosenwasser. "The Idea of Enclosure: Prisons and Havens at the Rise of the Novel." Diss. U of Virginia, 1985.

Sangha's nationalist allegiance is torn between Guanagaspar and Britain, while Uncle Mako's loyalties are strictly to Africa.

Mrs. Sangha's nationalist sentiment towards Guanagaspar and Britain is evident by the relationship she has with her Zenith radio, a gift from her husband Narine. With Narine's absence, Mrs. Sangha becomes increasingly involved with the national and international news broadcasted daily:

> Sometimes she awoke early, after a fitful night of bad dreams and spurts of sitting up with worry caused by some aspect of the previous night's news; the dire direction in which the world seemed to be careening filled her with concern for all humankind and for the future of her daughter and herself. (Mootoo 118)

Mrs. Sangha's concern "for all humankind" leads her to construct a daily ritual, where she begins her day by listening to "the anthem 'God Save the Queen,' followed by Guanagaspar's anthem" on the Zenith, and she officially stands "at attention, one hand lightly touching the edge of the piece of furniture through which the music flowed, the other palm flat upon her breast" (Mootoo 119). Her reverence for the anthems of both the mother country and Guanagaspar displays the complexities of allegiance in postcolonial societies. In addition to Mrs. Sangha's sentiment for such state-nationalism, she also imagines a connection to those who share her geographical region; each week, she listens to Guanagaspar's death announcements on the Zenith, and although she may not know the deceased personally, she grieves for their loss:

> At ten a.m. on the dot, an appalling dirge threw the house into moments of mourning. Mrs. Sangha would stand in the doorway demanding silence as

> she listened to the announcement of the previous day's deaths throughout the island. With one hand pressed to her lips, she grieved immediately for the deceased and shook her head in sympathy for the list of bereaved: beloved wife of so-and-so, father of so-and-so, and so-and-so. Brother of this one, uncle of that one. Friend of so-and-so. (Mootoo 119)

Mootoo's colloquial language, "wife of so-and-so, father of so-and-so," insinuates that Mrs. Sangha does not know any of these people personally, proving Anderson's ideal that that national unity is imagined because complete strangers living in the same region will foster an "image of their communion" (Anderson 6). Mrs. Sangha is similarly affected when "Augustus Martin ran for Guanagaspar in the Berlin Olympics" (Mootoo 119). Because he was expected to win, "his name and the fact that he was from the island of Guanagaspar were invoked on the air time and again" evoking "the feeling, whenever she heard his and the island's name, that she had become a relevant part of the big world" (Mootoo 120). Mrs. Sangha had never met Augustus Martin nor had any personal connection to him, yet his presence on the international stage made her imagine that "the world had overnight come to know of her personally," and although he lost the race, "she felt that he had won for the island something bigger than a medal: a place for them on the map of the world" (Mootoo 120). For Mrs. Sangha, hearing the name of her nation-state broadcast on the international news gives her a sense of *personal* importance, as she imagines a connection between Augustus Martin, Guanagaspar, and herself.

While Benedict Anderson argues that imagined nations and communities were fostered primarily through print capitalism, which aided in the development of national

consciousness[2], the Zenith radio, a different form of communications media, provides the ability to draw imaginative linkages as well. Using the radio as an alternative to print capitalism in an endeavor to unite citizens in a shared nationalist sentiment is not unique to *He Drown She*, as Newfoundland author Wayne Johnston depicts Joey Smallwood utilizing a similar tactic to unify the island of Newfoundland in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. In "Doubling and Irony: Print Nationalists vs. Radio Confederates in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*," David Williams notes that Johnston's Smallwood is portrayed "as a man who goes over the heads of print-merchants to appeal orally and personally to the trust of voters" (Williams 117) with his radio program "The Barrelman." This program celebrated

> ...local people for 'their bravery, resourcefulness, and talent for survival in adversity until Newfoundlanders began to believe it all themselves'....Ironically, the new medium that created a sense of community out of distance and isolation also enabled an outport 'audience to suspend its disbelief in the existence of the outside world' (Johnston, *Colony* 389). Newfoundlanders could begin to imagine themselves as part of a greater world, just as Smallwood could envision himself in opposition to the print-merchants, the ruling class of St. John's who had everything to gain and nothing to lose in confusing independence with economic monopoly. (Williams 116)[3]

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[2] Please refer to Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. "Chapter 3: The Origins of National Consciousness." New York: Verso, 1991. pp. 37-46.

[3] Williams cites Harold Horwood. *Joey*. Toronto: Stoddart, 1989.

Mrs. Sangha is drawn to the BBC by the same type of national consciousness that Smallwood employs in joining together the forgotten people of rural Newfoundland, as "radio, which knows no borders, served to draw a population on the margins towards a larger nation" (Williams 117).

Therefore, the Zenith radio is also able to allow Mrs. Sangha to imagine the nation as "a deep, horizontal comradeship," and as a "fraternity that makes it possible…for so many millions of people…[to be willing] to die for such limited imaginings" (Anderson 7). When the threat of Nazi Germany explodes in 1939 and a state of emergency is declared, "Mrs. Sangha became frightened, but at the same time she seemed to have a sense of satisfaction" (Mootoo 175), as the pending war provided her with an opportunity to defend her nation, in her own small ways. As Anderson writes,

> In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals…to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love. (Anderson 141)

The nationalist duty that Mrs. Sangha displays during the Second World War is illustrated by her sense of obligation to the welfare of her servants. When the state of emergency is declared and a low flying airplane evokes a false alarm (Mootoo 176), Mrs. Sangha prepares the house for her servants' stay with "an unusual urgency and determination about her actions" (Mootoo 179). Mrs. Sangha transforms into

> a solider of high rank; it was as if she understood it to be her duty to take care not only of her daughter but of her servant and the boy, and even of

> the watchman, for in a way, they were all her responsibility. They were all hers. It was, therefore, up to her to protect them from that great unknown called war. (Mootoo 179-180)

For Mrs. Sangha, wartime is an opportunity to display a sense of unity with her servants, based on their shared nation-state, and the opportunity provides her with pride, "knowing that she had…the capacity and ability to look after a household during a time of international crisis" (Mootoo 181). The sense of duty experienced by Mrs. Sangha is staggering; upon hearing news reports of Hitler's actions, she confides in Dolly:

> Is war…He killing, killing, killing, Dolly. Everywhere he go, he murdering people because of their looks and beliefs…If my body was stronger, Dolly, I would be ready to form an army and go after him, you know. I myself. Is like a force equal to his that is rising inside me. I don't know what to do. (Mootoo 162)

While Mrs. Sangha's nationalist tendencies for Guanagaspar may provide her with a sense of pride and self-worth, this nationalism is ambiguous, as her nationalist sentiment for England as the motherland leaves her ignorant to racial conflicts evolving across the island. Nonetheless, Mrs. Sangha's compassion for her servants and for other, unknown members of her community demonstrates a positive aspect of island nationalism, which lies in contrast to Uncle Mako's African nationalism.

Uncle Mako's physical displacement from his ancestral homeland leads him to construct an exile-based sense of nationalism. As Timothy Brennan notes,

> in one strain of Third World writing the contradictory topoi of exile and nation are fused in a lament for the necessary and regrettable insistence of

> nation-forming, in which the writer [or here the speaker, Uncle Mako] proclaims his identity with a country whose artificiality and exclusiveness have driven him into a kind of exile — a simultaneous recognition of nationhood and an alienation from it. (Brennan 174)

Such "recognition of nationhood and an alienation from it" leads to what Salman Rushdie determines in *Imaginary Homelands* as a nostalgic (re)imagining of home. He explains that "writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss," and the "physical alienation" one feels from such displacement "inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will…create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible [places], imaginary homelands" (Rushdie 10). In *He Drown She*, Uncle Mako best exemplifies Rushdie's notion of creating an "imaginary homeland," as he maintains there is "a family waiting for him across the sea" and that "Africa was really the home of his ancestors, from where he was taken against his will" (Mootoo 197). As an old man, "Uncle Mako still took his rowboat out every morning, God willing, still looking for the African shoreline," worrying Tante Eugenie that "he might catch a heart attack and drop dead with all that heavy rowing in the middle of the sea" (Mootoo 258). Physically, Uncle Mako's distance from his ancestral homeland means he may never physically return, or "be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost" (Rushdie 10), his ancestral identity, but he can rely upon the invisible nation he constructs in his imagination. As Nana Wilson-Tagoe writes in *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature*, "in the imagination of the Afro-West Indian writer," or in Mootoo's case the Trinidadian-Canadian writer,

> Africa has always loomed large as a reality and an idea, and the writer's relationship to it has often been defined by a sense of origin, of the past and its impact on West Indian people and their place in history. The striving to achieve this relationship is itself an aspect of a deep psychological need that creates a nameless yearning for origins in most peoples of the African diaspora. (Wilson-Tagoe 253)

However, in his quest for origins, Uncle Mako often alienates himself from Guanagaspar, and from reality, favoring an attempt to reclaim his place in African society, his imagined home.

For Uncle Mako, exile from his ancestral home of Africa has led to an attempt to reclaim his heritage, fostering a sense of African nationalism within him, despite his geographic displacement. As Alan Lawson writes, "nationalism is a reaction of peoples who feel culturally at a disadvantage" (Lawson 169), and because Uncle Mako is trapped upon an island, so "the cultural identity in question is that of a people transported to a new and strange place, the physical environment assumes unexpected importance" (Lawson 169): as discussed above, the island of Guanagaspar, surrounded by the Black Water of the Middle Passage, becomes a prison to be escaped from, and Africa becomes a "symbol and vision of the ancestor…which writers feel can be activated in a new definition of the 'African' man in the Caribbean" (Wilson-Tagoe 12). Mootoo certainly employs the trope of African nationalism in defining Uncle Mako as a character, as he often relies upon his "relation to the ancestor and to ancestral history [to] lead to new self-conceptions and sensibilities" (Wilson-Tagoe 268), as his imagining of his African ancestors shapes his present life, his beliefs and values; upon seeing a group of seemingly

lazy and unproductive children, Uncle Mako chastises the group, as he is sure they are defying what the inhabitants of the African continent would want or expect from the African Diaspora:

> [Uncle Mako] would point in disgust to a distant group of youngsters banging on oil cans, on hubcaps, and on bottles with old enamel spoons, dancing, singing, drinking, and smoking, and he would growl, 'That is not what our people, African people, would a want for us. Them children shaming us. They ain't got no dreams....Look at them! Shameful-shameful.' (Mootoo 197)

Clearly, Uncle Mako would have no idea what, if anything, the inhabitants of the African continent would want for those displaced by the African Diaspora, but Mootoo allows Uncle Mako to construct a relationship with his ancestors, however imaginary, to allow him this sense of belonging. As Wilson-Tagoe explains,

> a relationship to the ancestor is...much more than a restoration of links with origin; it is also a chance to create new sensibilities, to move into a future and to reintegrate ancestral memory into the West Indian psyche in order to achieve that wholeness which is the prerequisite for self-knowledge and creation. Memory...must liberate and transform the past by linking itself with the continuous cycles of change and renewal that goes on throughout history. (Wilson-Tagoe 254)[4]

[4] Wilson-Tagoe cites Wilson Harris. "History, Fable, and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas" *Explorations.* Ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek. Mundelstrup, Denmark; Dangaroo, 1981.

However, this reintegration of "ancestral memory into the West Indian psyche" only fosters the need for return to the ancestral homeland, as the African population of Raleigh are often found excited by the prospect of their eventual but inevitable return to Africa:

> they jumped up and danced on the beach, shouting that the day, praise the Lord! would certainly come when they would see land in the distance, and that land would either be heaven or the home from which their ancestors had been taken, and to which they themselves would, praise the Lord, return. (Mootoo 134)

Clearly, the nationalist sentiment Uncle Mako feels towards Africa differs greatly from the nationalist sentiment Mrs. Sangha holds for Guanagaspar.

However, these differing forms of nationalism demonstrate just a small fraction of the political complexities found within the postcolonial island, as "the island draws a line around a set of relationships which do not possess the normal political, social and cultural interference" (Loxley 3). In *He Drown She* the imperial colonizer, Britain, has moved away from the island, leaving the Indian population, who arrived as indentured laborers, in a position to dominate the African population, who arrived as slaves. While the African population fosters a sense of national identity based upon their ancestral homeland, the Indian population, in a position of power, develops a national consciousness not only towards the Indian population of Guanagaspar, but to the colonial homeland of Britain; when those in power are ruling "colonized peoples, who have every reason to feel hatred for their imperialist rulers, it is astonishing how insignificant the element of hatred is in these expression of national feeling [*sic*]" (Anderson 142). As Anderson notes, "the nature of this political love can be deciphered from the ways in

which languages describe its object: either in the vocabulary of kinship (motherland, *Vaterland, patria*) or that of home....Both idioms denote something to which one is naturally tied" (Anderson 143). While BBC news broadcasts refer to Britain as "the home country" (Mootoo 159), and Mr. Walter, the taxi driver, refers to it as "the mother country," (Mootoo 172), it is the tendency of Guanagaspar's ruling elite, represented by Narine Sangha and Shem Bihar, to turn a blind eye to the affairs of Guanagaspar in favor of Britain, a practice that has catastrophic effects. Upon the end of the Second World War, Narine Sangha chooses to travel abroad to witness the "excitement" of rebuilding England, as "wherever one looked, new buildings were going up, each and every one an architectural wonder" and he "wanted to be in that great country to witness the changes taking place" (Mootoo 216). Mootoo notes that Mrs. Sangha describes England "as if she herself had been there in the great country, witness to the changes taking place" (Mootoo 217); in fact, Mrs. Sangha has not been there, has not witnessed such changes, but again, imagines herself as a part of England in her imagined national connection. While Narine and Mrs. Sangha turn their thoughts to rebuilding the war-torn mother country, they effectively ignore the chaos brewing within Guanagaspar that eventually leads to their own civil unrest. As Franz Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth*,

> The national bourgeoisie turns its back more and more on the interior and on the real facts of its undeveloped country, and tends to look towards the former mother country and the foreign capitalists who count on its obliging compliance. (Fanon 165)

Such ignorance can be exemplified by Mrs. Sangha's concern for the "invisible war" (Mootoo 167) abroad, which often distorts her grasp on reality. While Mrs. Sangha

allows the war in Europe to consume her life, becoming emotional and crying over Hitler's bombing of Spain (Mootoo 121), Dolly, by contrast, remains relatively unaffected, as Europe is "too big, too far away, and too everything for Dolly to even have a picture of it in her mind" and "all Dolly knew of Europe was that it was too-distant land full of people who were supposed to be very important but who they were and why they were so important, she had never understood" (Mootoo 121). When it appears that war may be approaching the island, Mrs. Sangha dresses up for the occasion "in one of her going-out dresses, stockings, shoes, and all, as if she were going to see a sick person in the hospital, or to the doctor" (Mootoo 159), leading Dolly to think that "something must have happened" or "someone must have died" (Mootoo 160). Dolly cannot understand this and asks Mrs. Sangha: "You dress up because it have war in another country?" (Mootoo 161). Dolly is undeniably naïve; she is unable to recognize the potential for war upon a British colony, and she believes that American construction in Guanagaspar is a positive sign (Mootoo 173-174), but Dolly does have a point when she questions "why this woman whose husband had taken up elsewhere was so busy-busy every day paying attention to what was going on in parts of a world she had never seen" (Mootoo 163). Mrs. Sangha also irrationally becomes upset over possible food supply shortages, before Guanagaspar is even remotely affected by the war. As Dolly recognizes, Mrs. Sangha's fixation upon war distorts her grasp on reality; when Mrs. Sangha worries about food rations, Dolly questions her "stupidness" as "they [were] living on an island; anybody could go and catch their own fresh salmon, or buy it from the men in Raleigh or the fish vendors in Marion" (Mootoo 164). Dolly's inability to understand war places her in stark contrast with Mrs. Sangha, as Dolly believes

> As long as the sun does shine and rain does fall, as long as it have fish and shrimp in the sea, crab on the beach, coconut, mango, and lime on the tree, rice in Central, cock and hen in the yard, a cow in the area, and provisions in the ground, I can't see what it have so to worry about. I ent got no oven to bake cake. If flour get hold up, what that have to do with me? (Mootoo 168)

Dolly believes that even if war does come to Guanagaspar, her life will be unaffected; Dolly is distanced from the world outside of the island and cannot envision a rational connection to her own affairs and the affairs of the imperial motherland. By contrast, Mrs. Sangha and other members of the Indian bourgeoisie remain preoccupied with Europe. Narine Sangha also has a fixation with England, and Dolly aptly states that the entire Sangha family are "people who have their eyes in the back of their heads always facing abroad, as if abroad even noticing us here on this island" (Mootoo 219). In addition, Shem Bihar, and other members of the Guanagasparian elite turn to England for education, as Shem attended "university abroad, and had returned home especially, the gossip section of Guanagaspar's only newspaper reported, to be married" (Mootoo 271). The practice of studying abroad and returning home for marriage leads to the widespread transfer of British knowledge and standards back to Guanagaspar. As Lane writes, "in island discourse, then, England itself became a kind of transcendental signified–*the* Island–replicated in its many postcolonial islands," and "these colonised islands can be envisioned as an imperial continent with England at its centre" (Lane 12). The Guanagasparian bourgeoisie can turn to England for the education to run their island in the same fashion that the English bourgeoisie runs their own. However, to perfectly

replicate the mother country and its relationship with the colonized requires the Guanagasparian bourgeoisie to dominate the disadvantaged class, as

> Islands, unlike continents, can be considered successfully colonised only if inhabited by a single, representative master who is able successfully to subdue, domesticate, and linguistically own any deviant elements. The struggle for control over that territory therefore becomes an important focus in postcolonial narratives. (Lane 3)

The island of Guanagaspar is clearly problematic politically, as it consists of an Indian government oppressing an African population while aiming to please a white colonial power. When World War II begins, the island forfeits any national sovereignty when Guanagaspar's Minister for National Security announces "the island would temporarily be, from that day forward, in the service of other governments and countries for as long as the war should last" (Mootoo 165). While the Indian-led government may do all in their power to please their white colonizers, any sense of national Guanagasparian sentiment felt by the Indian population is false, for they neglect a significant portion of their population, those of African descent. As Fanon writes,

> National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been. The faults that we find in it are quite sufficient explanation of the facility with which, when dealing with young and independent nations, the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is

> preferred to the state. These are the cracks in the edifice which show the process of retrogression, that is so harmful and prejudicial to national effort and national unity. (Fanon 148-149)

Indeed, the Indian support of white, colonial Britain and simultaneous oppression of the African population leads to political chaos in Guanagaspar. Shem Bihar, having returned from law school in England as a member of the Guanagasparian bourgeoisie,

> was busy with a case against a group of black students from the University of the West Indies, the Guanagaspar campus, who had burned down the university chancellor's house. The chancellor was a white-skinned man from the U.K., and they felt that the position should belong to a man born on the island who happened to be black-skinned and had many more letters of learning after his name than had the U.K chancellor…It had been much publicized in the daily paper, but it was not the only eruption on the island. There was, in general, noticeable discontent brewing in pockets in the north of the island. The Indian population had halted their lavish displays of wealth, no longer allowing photographs of them at private or public functions. The people of African heritage had begun to hold public forums and street-corner meetings where they preached and ranted to ever-increasing crowds about slavery days being over, about a back-to-Africa movement, and about not replacing one form of oppression with another – the new one being an Indian-run government. (Mootoo 273-4)

Here, we see in practice Elleke Boehmer's argument that "elites who sought to challenge aspects of imperial rule also found they might gain advantages from making

compromises with it" (Boehmer 115), as the Indian elite privileges their white colonizers over the Africans who had been oppressed alongside them. As Fanon argues, the "national middle class," or in this case, the Indian population, which "takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is an underdeveloped middle class" for "it has practically no economic power, and in any case it is in no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country which it hopes to replace" (Fanon 149); furthermore,

> In its narcissism, the national middle class is easily convinced that it can advantageously replace the middle class of the mother country. But that same independence which literally drives it into a corner will give rise within its ranks to catastrophic reactions, and will oblige it to send out frenzied appeals for help to the former mother country. (Fanon 149)

Indeed, the Indian population's ignorance of the political tensions brewing within Guanagaspar provokes Fanon's "catastrophic reactions," as African nationalism reaches new heights, with "all the noise in the country about Africa, about what was being called black power, and about black beauty" (Mootoo 284). Such sentiment is fostered by the continuous injustices done to the African population, as

> Long-standing racial tensions between blacks and whites, and blacks and Indians, were erupting on a daily basis across the island. Backyard grumblings gave way to organized mobilization when the son of the minister of housing and works, driving in a drunken state after a party, hit and killed a black woman in an impoverished neighborhood at the heart of the capital city. Although his car was witnessed flying recklessly down the middle of a narrow unlit road, the young man (whose prominent family of white English descent had fingers deep in the

> sugar and sea-urchin industries, and in towel manufacturing) was charged only with driving a vehicle while intoxicated, and with public mischief. The judge (a man of Indian origin) reprimanded the dead woman for being out in the middle of the road late at night in clothing that did not make her more visible, and the minister's son's license was suspended for a month. The black population of Guanagaspar had endured enough. For them the incident was bigger than itself. It was about the history of their forced displacement. It was about racial, social, and economic injustices. It was, for many in the country, an ending and also a beginning. (Mootoo 279-280)

This incident was indeed a beginning, sparking more and more public protests across the island (Mootoo 280). As Diana Loxley writes in *Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands*, in literature from colonizing, imperial nations, "islands may well provide an apt location for a demonstration of intensified power conflicts and struggles over sovereignty" because of the power struggle that is "transported from outside *onto* them," just as "the landing of the American Federals [in *The Mysterious Island*]…is the result of a tempestuous storm which, much like that of *Robinson Crusoe*, brings utter confusion and bewilderment" (Loxley 37). However, while the island "is a sign both of English insularity and of the ideal colony" in colonial literature, "it later becomes an important site of resistance to colonial discourse," where "postcolonial island narrative can be regarded…as an example of 'counter discourse'" (Lane 12). As a postcolonial author, Mootoo does not use the island to demonstrate Lane's "ideal" colony, but employs the island as a site of an internal conflict catalyzed by a white imperial power. In creating an intelligent Guanagasparian elite, Indian nationalists enact a "double process of cleaving"

for they are "cleaving from, moving away from colonial definitions, transgressing the boundaries of colonialist discourse" in an effort to gain independence, while simultaneously "cleaving to, borrowing, taking over, or appropriating the ideological, linguistic, and textual forms of the colonial power" (Boehmer 105-6) to dominate the African protests. Shem's conviction of black union leaders leads him to be "publicly hailed" by the "Indian business and religious communities in particular," who publicly reported that "it was because of him that the country was settling back into its peaceful ways" (Mootoo 274). However, Dolly shrewdly observes: "if they don't kill him first, he will run for prime minister one day" (Mootoo 274). African protesting, "kidnappings" and "murders, as asides to robberies" had "become commonplace" and "white-skinned people" began "departing the country in droves" (Mootoo 282). As Fanon argues, the problem "which is almost congenital to the national consciousness of underdeveloped countries, is not solely the result of the mutilation of the colonized people by the colonial regime" but is "the result of the intellectual laziness of the national middle class" (Fanon 149). Here, the Guanagasparian Indians have ignored the political problems of their own country for too long:

> Unlike the Africans, who had been brought to the islands against their will and enslaved, the Indians had come as indentured labourers, armed with promise, the guarantee even, of a return trip to India, or, if they chose, after the completion of their indentureship, a parcel of land, gratis. Still, a century and more later, they bowed before the white-skinned British, yet lorded superiority over those of African descent. Suddenly the Indian population was terrified. Younger nationalistic Guanagasparian Indians,

> infuriated by the divide of Africans and Indians and therefore of the country they knew as their one and only home, fanned the fires of protest. Pandemonium threatened to drown the little island. (Mootoo 282-3)

It is this civil unrest, and "the rumor of an army-led coup" that leads Harry to immigrate to Canada (Mootoo 283).

When Harry immigrates to Canada to escape the civil upheaval in Guanagaspar, he finds his own community of Canadian immigrants in British Columbia. He and his friends form the "Once a Taxi Driver Wine-Tasting and General Tomfoolery Club" (Mootoo 38), comprised of other gentlemen from the islands, because they had viewed "fine-wine drinking" as "status-mongering," meant to "exclude immigrants and to imprison them—in particular those from the non-grape-growing equatorial climes, the darkies of the world" (Mootoo 37). Harry believes that he and other West Indians are "born with taste buds" for "flavours like hurdi, illaichi, dhania, the tandoor," as well as "turmeric, cardamom, [and] Indian spices," not the flavours typically found in wines; therefore natives of the West Indies are typically not wine drinkers, as "people like us not born with a wine-tasting gene" (Mootoo 37). As Wilson-Tagoe suggests, "clinging to fragments of memory," such as flavours from one's homeland, "may suggest the links and continuities that are crucial for the people's sense of themselves" and by "criss-crossing and linking of memories in the protagonist's mind the more personal and intimate memories are those that connect two areas of the diaspora," such as the Caribbean and Canada" (Wilson-Tagoe 268). That is why Harry displays a nationalist pride in Canada when explaining the guidelines established by his club to Kay:

> He revelled, gilding fact and fiction, that he and his friends vowed to shun the Old World vintners — the wines of Europe. They, the dark-skinned island people…had been too wounded by centuries of Old World greed and exploitation to unbegrudgingly partake of its stuffy fare, the result of which was that he and his ex-taxi-driver friends agreed to drink only the less expensive but lighthearted wines of Chile and Argentina, those of Australia, since it was, after all, a commonwealth country and, one way or the other, their consumption would benefit the aboriginal population. They conceded…to support the British Columbia wine industry, and still drank Californian wines because they were all in agreement that much of the labour propping up that industry was immigrant, and it was the support of the immigrant — not the consideration of taste — that was of significance to them. (Mootoo 38-39)

Where Harry seemed to display limited nationalist sentiment in Guanagaspar, fleeing the country because "it was as dangerous not to take a side as it was to take one" (Mootoo 283), this new immigrant culture, and supporting those in his imagined immigrant community from Chile, to Australia, to California, is now "significant" to him. But it is his position as a person displaced from his homeland that allows him to participate in this imagined immigrant community, linking his memories from both home and abroad.

Mootoo utilizes the site of the island, as both prison and paradise, to contain unique political complexities induced by the postcolonial movement of imperial Britain retreating from the island, leaving the Indian population, who had arrived in Guanagaspar as indentured laborers, in a position to dominate the African population, who had arrived

in Guanagaspar as slaves. As both groups foster their own sense of national consciousness and imagined communities, political tensions lead to violent conflicts. While postcolonial nationalism can lead to the sense of belonging to a community of shared beliefs and customs, it can also serve to segregate and incite mixed populations. On the island, Mootoo portrays the postcolonial community in an ambiguous fashion, due to the positive and negative nationalism the geographic space fosters.

Chapter Three: The Consequences of Space and Place

While Mootoo employs the island as an ambivalent geographic space which fosters a postcolonial nationalism with both positive and negative outcomes, *He Drown She* further explores the consequences of space and place as differing geographic locations which influence the identity of Mootoo's characters. This motif is common to West Indian literature, due in part to the success of V.S. Naipaul's critically acclaimed novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Naipaul follows the life of Mohun Biswas as he struggles to secure house and home for himself and his family. In *The Enigma of V. S. Naipaul: Sources and Contexts,* Helen Hayward explains that in the novel, Naipaul

> successfully fuses the general and the particular. The veracity of detail with which it presents the individual case is balanced by…wider significances and symbolic overtones. The house is both a reality, and the metaphor at the centre of the book. It is given a depth of meaning which transcends the physical object, without effacing its solidity. (Hayward 24-25)

The image of the house, at the centre of the novel, becomes both a symbol of identity and a symbol of independence, in which the houses he occupies act as a mirror reflecting the status of Biswas's life. Hayward notes, "the disintegration of Biswas's house at Green Vale is simultaneous and intimate with his nervous breakdown; the house is an extension of the self and a symbol of individual identity" (Hayward 25). Mootoo similarly employs this motif in *He Drown She*; after "Dolly not-yet-St. George"[5] meets Seudath St. George, Seudath "returned to his seaside village of Raleigh" and "he immediately set out to look

[5] Dolly's maiden name is not revealed in the novel.

for a good piece of land"; he then "began clearing it of the hardy old guava trees that grew wild" and "he brush-cut a path he named Timbano Trace" to construct "a one-room dwelling" (Mootoo 100). In other words, Seudath constructs a small, but new, home, to accommodate his small, but new, family. The Bihar house similarly reflects its occupants; when Rose returns to Guanagaspar after her monumental trip to Canada, she returns as a new woman, ready to free herself from her stale, loveless marriage to Shem. In Marion, the Bihar family home reflects the state of Rose and Shem's relationship as "the air in the house bristled with all manner of trouble" (Mootoo 7). Rose begins to clean the house in preparation for her departure with Harry, and all reminders of her old, deteriorating life must be abandoned; when cleaning out a flower vase, conveniently shaped as a fish, a common Christian symbol of re-birth, Mootoo describes the vase as containing "sluggish…old water" as "it had been almost a month since there were fresh flowers in the house. The water was at least that old, and surely, bitter with the odour of rotted chrysanthemum remains" (Mootoo 9). This symbolic gesture of cleaning rotted remains from a vase which is suggestive of rebirth points to the rebirth that is to come in Rose's own life. Similarly, Rose wants the refrigerator cleansed of all leftovers, all reminders of the past, as she tells Piyari to "throw them out….Throw everything out. Don't keep a damn thing. I have to say it yet again? Is time for a fresh start" (Mootoo 10).

Each of the houses Rose occupies reflects Rose's position as an imprisoned woman. Rose confides in Piyari that "from the day I left my mother's house and got married, nobody has bothered to ask me what I think or what I feel. Nobody in this country can imagine that I might have feelings" (Mootoo 8). In neither her father's house

nor her husband's house is she regarded as a person of intelligence, but as a trophy daughter and trophy wife for public display, respectively; after their marriage, "the daily papers were never…without a photograph of Shem, and often [Shem and Rose] at some official or private function" (Mootoo 272). Furthermore, Rose was often featured "in the women's section of the paper as the prime example for all women of the Caribbean" (Mootoo 275) and she was frequently interviewed on topics such as housekeeping and cooking. Rose did not "care for the publicity and everybody knowing her every move," but she obliged the media as "Shem liked that kind of thing, and he liked it when the papers paid her all that attention" (Mootoo 275). This exposure leads Rose to comment "you don't recognize yourself in their stories" (Mootoo 275) as she has become trapped in a lifestyle she does not desire. The Bihar family home subsequently begins to visually reflect the imprisonment Rose feels, as:

> Over the course of the time during which Harry visited Shem Bihar's outstanding wife, improvements noticeable from the outside had been done to the house. When Rose got a car of her own, the garage was widened to include it. The hedge around the house was pulled up, and a high stone fence that blocked the view of the house was erected. Then a section of the fence came down to make way for the construction of a swimming pool, Shem's birthday present to her — an extravagance, she said to Harry, apologetically, for she was the only one in the family who would make use of it. (Mootoo 275-276)

The Bihar home becomes a prison for Rose, with the swimming pool as her only escape from the bounds Shem has created. The water becomes Rose's only space, her only

freedom, and she escapes to the water to avoid the man who has imprisoned her; when Shem comes home, Rose retreats to the pool to avoid him: "If Boss ask for me, tell him I was feeling hot. That I in the swimming pool" (Mootoo 20). Later, "the Bihar beach house on the east coast" (Mootoo 276) becomes a similar escape, as Rose "enjoyed swimming, enjoyed that more than anything, and as neither Shem nor the children much liked being in the water, it was time she had to herself" (Mootoo 276). Rose's space is not to be found in a house, but in the water. Rose's affiliation with water runs throughout the novel; while resting at home in Elderberry Bay, Harry observes a "dolphin-shaped water stain on the ceiling and indulges in a particular remembering" (Mootoo 25) of Rose, the image foreshadowing Rose's escape by water.

In *He Drown She* the house also becomes a symbol of social class and prosperity, as it does in *A House for Mr. Biswas.* As Hayward describes, Naipaul ensures that "the furniture is invested with human meaning and associations" as

> People have a habit of being grouped together with things in the novel, which animates these things. It uses physical objects to represent the characters: the difficulty the family has in accommodating their furniture in the cramped space of the house in Port of Spain can appear to reproduce its human overcrowding. The furniture has been dispersed around the house in Port of Spain in the same way the family has been engulfed by the social organization of the Tulsis, but they are re-united as a unit in the house on Sikkim Street. (Hayward 24)

Similarly, Mootoo employs household items to reflect "human meaning and associations," especially as indicators of economic prosperity. Mrs. Sangha's Zenith

radio and the global connection the Zenith affords her is a privilege denied to lower class laborers such as Dolly[6]. Similarly, when Rose and Mrs. Sangha first visit Harry and Dolly's home in Raleigh, Harry becomes acutely aware of the significant difference between the toilet of Rose's home and the toilet of his own home:

> Misangha's house, he was thinking, had two toilets, both of which were on the inside of the house. The bowls were made of cold, shiny white porcelain. Each had a tank full of water situated high above its bowl. To clean out the bowl after using it, there was a shiny brass chain to pull. Water would rush out of the walls of the porcelain and rise high up the side of the bowl, then be sucked back, everything disappearing down the drain. (Mootoo 151-152)

By contrast, Harry's toilet consists of an "outhouse" or a "enamel chamber pot stored under the dressing table" which, despite being washed "daily" had an "odour" that "remained sharp, like newly turned worm-ridden dirt" (Mootoo 152). Here, the differences between the Sangha's two, porcelain, indoor toilets versus the St. George's outhouse and enamel chamber pot make the dramatic economic differences between the two families painfully obvious to Harry. Just as in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, the furniture in each home mirrors the social identities of its inhabitants.

In *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*, David Harvey explores the politics of space and place within the scope of public policy, socialism, capitalism, globalization and culture. Harvey explains that

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[6] Please see Chapter 2 of this paper.

> Locating, positioning, individuating, identifying and bounding are operations that play a key role in the formation of personal and political subjectivities. Who we consider ourselves to be (both individually and collectively) is broadly defined by our position in society and the world. (Harvey 221)

Such use of space and place is employed throughout *He Drown She* to construct identities and alternate identities of Mootoo's characters. As Harvey explains, "the accumulation of capital has always been a profoundly geographical affair" for "without the possibilities inherent in geographical expansion, spatial reorganization and uneven geographical development, capitalism would long ago have ceased to function as a political economic system" (Harvey 369). Such a "global historical geography of capital accumulation" (Harvey 369) is apparent in *He Down She*, where economic prosperity and geographical location are one and the same. The novel takes place in a number of major regions: Dolly's childhood home in Central Guanagaspar; Raleigh; Marion; the Bihar's east coast beach house; and Canada. Each area is depicted as drastically different economically. As Harvey explains, in the late 19th century, the development of merchant capitalism and demand for "human resources" (Harvey 227) meant that

> geographical knowledges were deeply affected by imperial and colonial practices coupled with the exploration of commercial opportunities and markets. The objectification and exploitation of nature under capitalism went hand in hand with the objectification and exploitation of peoples. (Harvey 228)

In Guanagaspar, most citizens share the same humble beginnings: as a child, Dolly lived "in her parents' portion of the barracks that once housed the workers for the sugar estate not far away in Central Guanagaspar" (Mootoo 100); in Marion, the Sangha home has a similar foundation, as "in the days when the house belonged to Narine Sangha's nana and nani, it had been little more than a barracks-like box sitting atop wood posts" (Mootoo 136). However, at the Sangha home,

> Over the course of three generations, walls had been put up to make extra rooms and other walls taken down to enlarge others. The house was raised; the original packed dirt underneath was paved and enclosed on two sides by lattice woodwork. Unadorned pillars that once had been purely functional were embellished. The original four wood ones at the back were replaced with straightforward concrete ones. And the newer section of the house sported custom-made moulded concrete ones with opulent bellies and Corinthian-like crowns. Stairways that connected upstairs and downstairs were erected, a concrete one with wrought-iron banisters at the front, and a plain one of wood at the back. A portion of the downstairs area was walled off in the course of time to make servants' quarters and to enclose a laundry area. A verandah with arched framing eventually wrapped around the house. Decorative vines grew on the latticework, and potted bread-and-butter begonias lined the banister of the verandah. (Mootoo 136)

While the Sangha home, located in the prosperous city of Marion, is very different than the home of Dolly's parents in Central Guanagaspar, they both have the same barracks-

style origins. Dolly brings a consistent reminder of the similar origins of various Guanagaparian people of different classes; she repeatedly warns Harry that "all of we cross Black Water…months side by side in the same stinking boat, to come here" (Mootoo 192):

> How, child, how out of those beginnings some end up higher than others and some end up lower, tell me this? Well, God alone know. We come here same time, same boat, same handling. They not better than we, and *that* you should remember. (Mootoo 192-193)

While the Sangha home has evolved into a upper class home for an upper class family, both the house and the family have the same roots as Dolly and her parents.

The St. George home in Raleigh also contrasts with the Sangha home in Marion. Dolly muses:

> Their house was small. High-tide nights when, in darkness and quiet, the roaring ocean would seem to be upon them. The house itself, though, lifted a yard off the sand by nine stumps of shaved teak, three sets of three, had never so much as swayed in any of the storms that frequented this unprotected archipelago strewn to one side of the Caribbean Sea. It was but a room, well built, and thanks to Seudath her Indian, it was hers. (Mootoo 140)

Although small but steady, the house is a picture of economic poverty. The one room employs a "stitched-together flour sack that hung on a rope dividing [the] house into two rooms" and the flour sack conceals "the thin and torn coconut-fibre mattress that lay directly on the floor" along with "the dressing table — two orange crates side by side,

covered with a printed cotton sheet" (Mootoo 153). Harry is embarrassed of his home in the presence of the Sanghas, as he hopes they do not notice that "there was no fine ceiling over their heads, only the raw galvanize of the roof, parts of which billowed a little with each passing breeze" (Mootoo 53). In place of a modern kitchen, the house has a "lean-to of corrugated iron that rested on pillars shaved down smooth out of the coarse trunks of guava trees" and inside, "a mound of piled-high rocks encircled a pit" and "a blackened pitch-oil can" for cooking is kept on the ground (Mootoo 155). Despite this economic poverty, Dolly is able to rely upon the resources provided by the earth for the survival of her and her family. The St. Georges utilize trees to construct their outdoor stove and to act as pillars for their home, exploiting natural resources to their advantage. As Harvey explains:

> all societies develop means to evaluate, appreciate, represent and live within their surrounding environments....Local knowledges concerning the uses of various processes and things, the appreciation of the qualities of local fauna and flora (indigenous resource knowledges), of changing meteorological and climatic conditions, of soil types, of natural hazards, the construction of symbolic meanings and the development of capacities to represent and 'read' the landscape and its signs effectively — these sorts of knowledges have been fundamental to human survival since time immemorial. (Harvey 226-227)

Dolly certainly possesses such "local knowledges," as she collects raw guava to make cheese that she sells to make a living (Mootoo 194-195). As Harvey explains, "the nature of such knowledges vary greatly, depending upon technologies, social forms, beliefs and

cultural practices all of which instantiate a certain view of the relationship of human life to life and nature in general" (Harvey 227); in Raleigh, Dolly maintains an intimate knowledge of her surrounding environment and utilizes this knowledge to the benefit of her family, employing natural produce for both shelter and economic sustainability. Dolly transfers this knowledge of her own rural geography to Marion when the St. George's move to Mr. Persad's home in the city. This is a very different space than Raleigh, as

> There was always something going on in the street directly in front of Mr. Persad's house. The Americans maintained a base on the island. On their days off, soldiers in uniform swept into Marion. The townspeople were often awakened by their aggressive singing, shouting, and laughter as jeeploads of them sped by, uninhibited by the lateness of the night.
>
> Myriad odours wafted into the house in Marion: petrol from the station next door, effluvia fom the gutters on either side of the street. The latter had to be cleaned daily by the city public works crew; otherwise the surface, made slick and shiny overnight, trembled with mosquito larva. Cars and trucks burned dirty oil, and their exhaust hung heavily in the air. (Mootoo 211).

Despite this dramatic change of scenery, Dolly still keeps chickens in her yard (Mootoo 217). Here, Dolly's actions are suggestive of Harvey's notion that we have "mental or cognitive maps (perhaps even whole cartographic systems) embedded in our consciousness that defy easy representation on some Cartesian grid or graticule" (Harvey 221). While physically moving from a rural space to an urban space, Dolly still maintains a rural knowledge, as the rural way of life is what she understands as part of her cognitive

map. Despite being physically removed, Dolly maintains that part of her geographic identity, as mentally the rural lifestyle is the lifestyle she identifies with.

In addition to the differences between the rural Raleigh and the urban Marion, Marion contains several sub-geographies that differ greatly from each other as well. One of these alternate spaces is explored when Mr. Persad takes Harry for a car ride through the city to "show him something" in "a hillside residential area" (Mootoo 236-237). Here,

> The houses on the side of this terraced hill were large and extravagantly built, with gardens that had been landscaped and were enclosed by high fences. The stillness in the area was underlined only by the twitter of birds. Every house had an unobstructed view of the town far below and the ocean in the distance. They came to a piece of land that had yet to be built on. Here Mr. Persad stopped the car. They got out to admire the view. The houses were sprawling and were designed, it seemed, to hide away the interiors, unlike the houses of the town that had welcoming verandahs, and windows and doors that in the daytime were left wide open to the eyes of passersby. Unlike the wood houses of the town, these were constructed of steel, stone, and concrete. The fanciest house the boy had seen until these was that of the Sanghas. Mr. Persad clasped his hands behind his head and arched his back for a stretch. The boy was uneasy. He wondered if he was about to be told that Mr. Persad had purchased the property in front of which they stood. This was not an area where he would feel comfortable, would know how to carry himself. (Mootoo 237)

Harry is nervous that his stepfather is moving the family to this "hillside residential area" (Mootoo 236) until Mr. Persad explains that a real businessman, as a signifier of success, must have a nice car and a house like the homes in this neighborhood. For Harry to be considered a success, he must have style and good taste to select fine things for his family (Mootoo 237-238). By contrast, Mr. Persad confides that personally, "he wouldn't be comfortable in a house that had a room for every occasion" (Mootoo 238) but:

> he hoped that the boy would live in a place like this, with a big garden landscaped by a professional who had vision, and a house that was designed by a reputable architect with vision, too, and built by a big-time contractor who knew materials and could install modern plumbing and other conveniences. (Mootoo 238-239)

Mr. Persad hopes that Harry will have the success to afford him a good home, not a "box" or "one of those make-do things put up by a fellow who has no idea about convenience or comfort, nothing more than how to bang two pieces of wood together" (Mootoo 239); not the kind of home Harry's father, Seudath, had built for his family. Mr. Persad believes such homes are ungodly, as their builders "see no value, no function in prettiness. But prettiness is not slackness, it is a way to call and honour God." (Mootoo 239) Mr. Persad's concern with aesthetically pleasing homes and properties speaks to Karl Marx's elite culture of creativity[7]. As Harvey explains,

> Marx held that production of any sort requires the prior exercise of the human imagination; it is always about the mobilization of human desires,

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[7] Harvey cites multiple works by Karl Marx. To review the full list please see David Harvey. *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography.* New York; Routledge, 2001. 418.

> purposes and intentions to a given end. The problem under industrial capitalism is that most people are denied access to this process: a select few do the imagining and designing, make all the decisions and set up technologies that regulate the worker's actions, so that for the mass of the population the full play of human creativity is denied.
>
> That is a profoundly alienating situation, and much of history recounts attempts to respond to this alienation. The rich and the privileged, themselves not enamoured of industrialism, countered alienation by developing a distinctive field of *culture* — think of romanticism and the cultivation of aesthetic pleasures and values — as a kind of protected zone for creative activities outside of the crass materialism of industrial capitalism. (Harvey 124-125)

In *He Drown She*, the few citizens privileged enough to inhabit Marion's hillside neighborhood are privileged enough to enjoy the artistry and creativity of carefully designed homes built by professional architects, instead of "one of those make-do things" that men such as Seudath would construct. It is Mr. Persad's hope that Harry will climb the socio-economic ladder to become one of the privileged few stuck in Marx's industrial capitalism, one of the few to enjoy Marx's concepts of culture. Instead, Harry makes his mark by earning a living from a creative outlet meant to replace the culture of the bourgeoisie. As Marx explains, in response to the "culture" of the elite,

> Workers likewise developed their own creative pleasures when they could: hunting, gardening, tinkering with cars. These activities, which went under the general name of "culture," high or low, were not so much

> superstructural as compensatory for what industrial capitalism denied to the mass of the people in the workplace.
>
> Over time, those compensatory pleasures have gradually become absorbed into the processes of capital accumulation and turned into new spheres for making profit. (Harvey 125)

Such a notion has been explored elsewhere in Caribbean literature, such as in Lillian Allen's poem "Dem Days," which strictly assigns social status to the geographic space of the garden. Allen writes:

> Dem days oh dem days
> dem days backa yard
> oh de ole talk
> an bus laugh
> fi peas soup
> a time when everything ripe
> that is how mi like to remember home
>
> but if it wasn't fa the fat one, the round one
> the one dem who big and broad
> and if it wasn't fa the tough head one dem
> the one dem who scrawny
> full a bad talk
> box food outa mouth bark
> the one dem whose puppa

work inna other people's yard (1-15)

The geographic space of the garden is significant here; in her paper "Calling the Conscience: The Interplay of Situation, Sight and Sound in Lillian Allen's Poetry," Mildred Mickle notes

> The second stanza of the poem mentions the alienation of someone the speaker knows whose parent works as a domestic in the yard of a wealthy homeowner. Here, the "yard" symbolizes the distance in status between employer and employee, for it is a space not to be enjoyed by all, but rather a select elite few. The Jamaican who tends the yard is a *tool* used to maintain order and to further showcase the higher status of the homeowner who can afford to hire at least one gardener. Most likely the gardener must tend the wealthy homeowner's yard as a means of survival, for the gardener works for wages to feed his/her family. No matter what the gardener does s/he cannot hope to breach the socio-cultural gap that divides rich and poor, colonist and colonized. He cannot fully assimilate into colonizer's culture and find easy access and acceptance into the social world of the colonizer who views him or her as less than equal. The 'yard's' space thus becomes not a welcoming, open place of potential congregation and communication, but rather a limited area that traps people in proscribed roles of employer and employee. (Mickle 265)

While Harry would have been subjected to the same social fate if he was employed as a gardener in Guanagaspar who "washed his employer's car and after he scrubbed the bathroom floor and tiles" (Mootoo 70), he subverts this identity as a landscape designer

working out of a new cartographic space in Canada. Here, Harry is successful enough to purchase his own home, one reminiscent of the home his step-father dreamt Harry would some day own. When Harry visits his house for the first time, he explains:

> I heard water lapping at rocks, small waves breaking on the shore, felt the breeze through the trees. The words 'seaside house,' 'waterfront property,' formed in my mouth. I used to dream about living in a house by the sea. A real house in a nice neighbourhood. I used to live by the sea with my mother when I was a child. But that house — with the two of us in it — could have fit in this kitchen. In that house, bedroom, kitchen, dining room, and living room were one and the same. And the bathroom and toilet were separate stalls outside in the yard. When I was a little older, we went to live in the town — my mother had married a petty businessman, and it was he who filled up my head with ideas and dreams about houses like this one. So it was as if my blood started racing when I saw this house. (Mootoo 80)

Harry had "dreamed as a child, as a youth, as a young man, of having a house and home that would have brought him and his mother a little recognition from the business community of Guanagaspar" (Mootoo 69); the economic success Harry finds in the geographic space of Canada allows these dreams to come true, as in Canada, Harry has all of the capital and social success that would have brought his family the recognition he desired. In Canada, Harry exploits "the accumulation of market niches, of diverse preferences and the promotion of new heterogeneous lifestyles, [which] all occur within the orbit of capital accumulation" (Harvey 125), as Canada has the economy to sustain

Harry's comodification of gardening and landscape design. Harry now earns a living performing a pleasure that was reserved for Guanagasparian elite to enjoy.

Dolly and Harry further exemplify Harvey's notion of the existence of "mental or cognitive maps" that may "defy easy representation on some Cartesian grid or graticule" as "the mental maps of children, of men and women, of the mentally ill, of adherents to different cultures and religions, of social classes or of whole populations, evidently vary greatly" (Harvey 221). In the geographic space of the Sangha's home, the adult Dolly is able to recognize her place as the hired help, while the child Harry remains ignorant to his lower class status, subsequently putting Dolly in an awkward position when disciplining her son. As the innocent child comfortably moves through the Sangha home, Dolly becomes "uncomfortable with her son's ease in that big house" (Mootoo 123) and she is embarrassed to find Harry and Rose sitting on the vinyl couch, Harry with his bare feet drawn up onto the seat (123-4). To Dolly, a luxury such as a couch is no place for the hired help, whether or not one is sitting upon the furniture with bare feet, and "she would rather he didn't even sit on the couch, vinyl or no vinyl" (Mootoo 124). To Dolly, such a geographic space represents a place where she and her son do not belong:

> To her mind, he had no right to even enter the drawing room at all. She herself didn't like going farther into the house than the kitchen. She hastened over to him, admonished him in a low urgent voice, pulled his feet off, rearranged his body as if it had no will of its own, his feet sticking over the edge into the air. (Mootoo 124)

Mrs. Sangha, by contrast, is unaware of Dolly's cognitive map, and she urges Dolly to leave Harry alone, as "he is just a child, and that is just a couch" (Mootoo 124). To Mrs.

Sangha, Harry may be "just a child" and the couch may be "just a couch," but in Dolly's cognitive map the Sangha house is a geographic space where she and her son, the low-class laborers, should not be too comfortable. Dolly so highly respects the home of her employer and her own position as the hired help that she will not even allow herself to have a glass of water from the Sangha's fridge, but instead "she would satisfy herself with water from the stand pipe in the backyard, though she could taste its metal flavour just thinking about it" (Mootoo 125). Because "her child was comfortable enough for the two of them in that house," Dolly "was not about to take liberties" (Mootoo 125), or to over-step the bounds of her cognitive map.

Both Dolly's and Harry's cognitive maps, dividing Marion and the Sangha home from Raleigh and the St. George home, are amplified by Dolly's authority, or lack of authority, in each space. While working at the Sangha home, Dolly catches Harry playing with a lighter and immediately steps into her parental role as disciplinarian. However, Mrs. Sangha intervenes and orders Dolly to "leave the children alone" as "they doing nothing wrong" (Mootoo 132). In the Sangha house, Dolly is stripped of her authority over her own son, as she has no authority in this geographic space. By contrast, Dolly's authority over her son returns in the geographic space of Raleigh, for Dolly possesses the knowledge of that place to propel her back into the role of Harry's guardian. While Harry may not acknowledge Dolly's authority in Marion, upon their return to their home of Raleigh, Harry

> …would expect her to go outside with him in the coming night to look up at the black sky and tell him, as she had done from the time he was born, which constellation was which, and which star which. Can Mrs. Sangha do

> that? she mockingly thought. He would, on the coconut-fibre mattress behind the sugar-sack curtain dividing the house into two rooms, lie close against her. He would fall asleep, as usual, as she rubbed his back and mumbled songs to him, songs she barely remembered from her mother....She knew, come tomorrow, weather permitting, she child would sit on her lap on a fallen coconut tree on the beach and ask her to tell him over and over the same stories, stories about his father, stories Mrs. Sangha could not have known. (Mootoo 134-135)

While she may not possess authority over her child in Marion, Dolly's knowledge of Harry's personal history, her knowledge of his geographic, cultural and social narratives, propels her back into a position of authority in their home of Raleigh.

Dolly's role as an authority figure further changes in the geographic space of Marion, or, more specifically, when Dolly marries Mr. Persad and the St. Georges move into his urban home. Dolly fully embraces her new socio-economic class, boasting to Harry that "we living in town now, and I don't work for nobody no more. I, Dolly Persad, have servant — manservant, to boot — now. And if that is not enough, nobody better than me or my son" (Mootoo 219). However, while Dolly may be geographically displaced from her rural roots, she maintains her rural identity through her cognitive map. As Harvey explains:

> All societies, classes, and social groups posses a distinctive 'geographical lore,' a working knowledge of their territory, of the spatial configuration of use values relevant to them, and of how they may intervene to shape the use values to their own purposes. This 'lore,' acquired through experience,

> is codified and socially transmitted as part of a conceptual apparatus with which individuals and groups cope with the world....It can be used in the quest to dominate nature and other peoples and to construct an alternative geography of social life through the shaping of physical and social environments for social ends. (Harvey 108-109)

Such "geographical lore" is evident as Dolly maintains hens at her new home in the city, a practice which is uncommon in Marion, but is a means of survival in Raleigh. In Marion, however, "rather than go down to the backyard to catch, kill, and pluck a fowl for dinner, [Dolly] would awkwardly order Rodney [the yard boy] to do it" (Mootoo 217). Instead of maintaining the hens herself, Dolly instructs Rodney, ensuring he performs his task just as she would have in Raleigh; "she would stand right behind him, watching every move he made, correcting him, telling him how to do it her way" (Mootoo 217). Dolly is no longer physically responsible for this task, but she transfers her knowledge, her "geographic lore" to the city in her new authoritative position. Furthermore, Dolly instructs Rodney to carry out a whole host of household duties (217-218) that once would have been her responsibility. Through reversing her role from employee to employer, Dolly is able to dominate others for the first time in her life, as she can "construct an alternative geography of social life" (Harvey 109) which places her higher on the social ladder. In this alternate geographic space, Dolly has an alternate social and economic identity.

Mootoo further employs space and place to express alternate worlds, as Canada is positioned as a pseudo-Utopia to the natives of Guanagaspar. As Harvey explains, drawing upon the works of Kropotkin[8] and Reclus[9];

> geographical literature can express hopes and aspirations as well as fears, can seek universal understandings based on mutual respect and concern, and can articulate the basis for human cooperation in a world marked by human diversity. It can become the vehicle to express utopian visions and practical plans for the creation of alternative geographies. (Harvey 112)

Both Harry and Rose experience a social and economic freedom offered in Canada which they would not have been privy to in their homeland. Rose, as a public figure on the small island of Guanagaspar, relishes the privacy Canada affords her, as she explains to Piyari that, in Canada, "nobody minding nobody business. I could sit down in a public place with a man like [Harry] and eat a piece of cheesecake and enjoy myself and there was nobody watching my every move, ready to run their mouth off" (Mootoo 19). Harry similarly experiences a social freedom in Canada, his freedom stemming from the change in his economic status. Harry muses to himself that his home in Elderberry Bay, "this little piece of land with this house, part of a tight community nestled in a cranny at the foot of a mountain by the sea, is his. His piece of Canada. None of this would he have had in Guanagaspar" (Mootoo 69).

But despite the social and economic freedoms he has earned in Canada, Harry still falls victim to his cartographic map, as he mentally maintains the social boundaries he

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[8] Harvey cites P. Kropotkin. *Fields, Factories and Workshops*. London, 1898.
[9] Harvey cites E. Reclus. *L'Homme et la Terre*. Paris, 1982.

was subjected to in Guanagaspar. The presence of this cognitive map is evidenced by Harry's ability to share with Kay the story of how he was able to purchase his home in Elderberry Bay (Mootoo 76-84). Despite his ability to share his story with Kay, Harry "remembers Rose asking him about the house in the summer, but he avoiding imparting to her the circumstances under which he bought it" (Mootoo 84); Harry has maintained Rose's position as a socio-economic superior in his cognitive map, and he is therefore unable to be fully honest with her, or to free himself of the boundaries the Guanagasparian community has imposed upon him. By contrast, Kay, positioned in the liberating land of Canada, is free from the prejudices of Harry's cognitive map, allowing Harry to be more honest with her; "this woman here with him tonight, listening to his every word and so ready to grin and laugh — he had the impression that she wouldn't care if he lived in a studio apartment" (Mootoo 85). Kay does not represent the same boundaries and limitations that Rose impresses upon Harry, proving that "space, like cartography, is as much a mental as a material construct" (Harvey 223); in Canada the social boundaries of Guanagaspar are only present in the cognitive maps of Mootoo's characters.

To be truly free, Mootoo's characters must liberate themselves from the social boundaries they mentally maintain. Harvey explains:

> The embeddedness of persons within larger collectivities (such as those of neighbourhood or community) becomes a problem precisely because the norms of behaviour and of belonging that define social solidarities operate as constraints which…can just as easily have the effect of limiting the

> courage of our minds rather than liberating them for more radical styles of action. (Harvey 201)

To liberate themselves for more "radical styles of action," Harry and Rose must displace themselves from Guanagaspar, thereby removing themselves from the limitations of their community, their nation. It is only after Harry and Rose spend time in Canada that they are able to return to Guanagaspar where Rose implements her plan to fake her own death; this allows Harry and Rose to flee the country and finally live their lives together, entirely free from the nation, both physical and imagined, which has imprisoned them.

Chapter Four: Ecocritical Elements

Expanding the exploration of space and place, Mootoo employs ecological and environmental signifiers to further construct identity in *He Drown She*. While *Cereus* relies heavily on pastoral elements, as discussed in Sarah Phillips Casteel's "New World Pastoral: The Caribbean Garden and Emplacement in Gisèle Pineau and Shani Mootoo," *He Drown She* contrasts the gardens of the Caribbean with the gardens of Canada, while exploring the Caribbean picturesque and Canadian sublime. A close reading of these landscapes reveals that one's surroundings often influence, or are influenced by, the people inhabiting them: Mootoo actively explores both the anthropocentric binary between humans and nature, the androcentric binary of man and woman, and through combining such dualisms in her characters Mootoo subverts these otherwise oppressive relationships (Garrard 23).

Harry's first taste of the sublime comes when he is invited to go canoeing on the lakes with Kay (Mootoo 40). Forging a new Caribbean-Canadian identity, Harry hopes the trip will be successful enough to be repeated, as "it would be very Canadian of him to be able to say that he used to get up early on mornings, drive to a lake high up, awfully high up, in the mountains, and go canoeing" (Mootoo 43). What Harry does not anticipate is the sublime experience he is about to embark upon. As Edmund Burke argues in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*" (Burke 36). Harry certainly experiences such a sublime encounter at Carol Lake (Mootoo 41), as he ponders his

demise amongst the terrible "ice-capped mountains" before him (Mootoo 42). Harry wonders:

> how Rose might be affected on learning that he'd had an accident or met his death while on a pleasure trip to go canoeing....He wondered how far inland he was, how far from public roads, from a town, a gas station, a hospital, and decided it was better to remain inside [the vehicle]. From there he took in the vista, a picture straight out of a calendar. (Mootoo 42)

Despite this terror before him, and the difficult terrain over "loose shale" forcing the truck to "[lurch] over large rocks" so it "squeaked and rattled ferociously" (Mootoo 41), Harry has a positive experience with the "range beyond range of ice-capped mountains" that "ahead loomed" (Mootoo 42). As Harry observes the "bursts of lavender" and "clumps of mustard goldenrod" (Mootoo 42),

> Pride coursed through him; he had become an insider. By inviting him up, Kay was showing him something few people like him – he grinned at the thought – ever had the chance to glimpse. This was the Canada of postcards and tourism posters. In reality, it was his backyard. He wanted to get out of the truck and look around but had the sensation, terror really, that at any time the land and road could simply slip away. (Mootoo 42)

Harry has a sublime experience Burke refers to as a "positive pain" (Burke 40), as alone in the mountains, in "absolute and entire *solitude*, that is, the total and perpetual exclusion from all society, is as great a positive pain as can almost be conceived" (Burke 40): this is an enjoyment which cannot be found in "society, merely as society, without

any particular heightenings, gives us no positive pleasure" (Burke 40). Here, isolated at Carol Lake, Harry experiences the true Canadian wilderness. As Allison Byerly explains:

> The idea of wilderness refers to the absence of humanity, yet 'wilderness' has no meaning outside the context of the civilization that defines it. This paradox requires that we experience the wilderness without changing its status *as* wilderness. This can only be done by constructing an aesthetic image of the wilderness that allows us to avoid confronting its reality. (Byerly 54)

Harry certainly experiences Carol Lake "without changing its status *as* wilderness," as instead of reducing the rough terrain to a common or familiar space, Harry recognizes "that in every sense he was in unfamiliar waters" (Mootoo 44). Harry relishes Burke's "perpetual exclusion from all society" (Burke 40), as he is immensely proud of his unique experience, and he wonders "if Anil or Partap or any of the other men from the [Once a Taxi Driver Wine-Tasting and General Tomfoolery Club] had ever been up such a road, seen this kind of landscape, or known a woman — or even a man — as adventuresome as Kay" (Mootoo 43). For Harry, this experience of positive sublime pleasure is a rare and exclusive experience that few will ever enjoy.

Kay, by contrast, does not approach the sublime as an experience for her to enjoy exclusively, as she invites Harry to experience Carol Lake with her, but she does approach the sublime as an entity deserving of respect. Upon Harry's arrival at Carol Lake, Kay introduces Harry to the scene, as she "opened her arms to the view, the icy green lake in the foreground, and backdropping it, a vivacious glacier-topped ridge, best seen to postcard-beauty standards only from this narrow angle of view" (Mootoo 44).

Kay takes in the sight and exclaims: "Have you ever seen anything so magnificent? Have you?" (Mootoo 44). Kay exemplifies Immanuel Kant's notion that "the sublime does not so much contain positive pleasure as it does admiration or respect, i.e., it deserves to be called negative pleasure" (Kant 129). Kant explains "that is sublime which even to be able to think of demonstrates a faculty of the mind that surpasses every measure of the senses" (Kant 134), as

> We call sublime that which is absolutely great. However, to be great and to be a magnitude are quite different concepts (*magnitudo and quantitas*)....[the sublime] is that which is great beyond all comparison. (Kant 131-132)

Harry, therefore, exemplifies Burke's "positive pain," while Kay exemplifies Kant's "negative pleasure," respectively.

When Rose visits Canada, her reaction to the sublime landscape differs from that of both Harry and Kay, as evidenced by her trip to Capilano Canyon (Mootoo 52ff). At Capilano Canyon, Rose experiences a freedom that Boss had never allowed her—a freedom to actively experience sublime landscapes first-hand. As Rose describes:

> I had never experienced anything like that before. In the middle of the swinging bridge, swinging from side to side, you know, I stop to look down. Below, far, far, far below, on the bottom of the canyon, it had a river and the water in that river was green, inky green, and it was flowing fast, fast, fast, over big boulders that was white like the cow's first milk. It had people down on the bottom; they look like ants, they were that far down, and they were hopping brave and stupid for so, from boulder to

> boulder. Harry ask if I liked what I was seeing, and I could only say 'Is beautiful, is beautiful,' and I realize then that I didn't know how to describe what I was seeing or how I was feeling. (Mootoo 53)

Rose could not describe what she was seeing or feeling at the Canyon because the experience was nothing like anything she had seen or felt before. Because Rose, unlike Harry or Kay, does not internally personalize the landscape, nor reduce the landscape to that of language, she alone experiences what Kant would consider "properly sublime" (Kant 129), for

> what is properly sublime cannot be contained in any sensible form, but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though no presentation adequate to them is possible, are provoked and called to mind precisely by this inadequacy, which does allow of sensible presentation. Thus the wide ocean, enraged by storms, cannot be called sublime. Its visage is horrible; and one must already have filled the mind with all sorts of ideas if by means of such an intuition it is to be put in the mood for a feeling which is itself sublime, in that the mind is incited to abandon sensibility and to occupy itself with ideas that contain a higher purposiveness. (Kant 129)

Rose, therefore, experiences Kant's notion of the "properly sublime" at Capilano Canyon, as she cannot make sense of the Canyon nor reduce it to descriptive language. Similarly, like Kant, Rose does not see the ocean as sublime: as discussed in the previous chapter, for Rose, the ocean is a vessel, a vehicle to aid in her escape, not a sublime or terrifying space.

To provide contrast to the Canadian sublime, Mootoo provides the Canadian garden, which is dramatically different from the Caribbean garden. In her discussion of Mootoo's first novel, *Cereus*, and Gisèle Pineau's *The Drifting of Spirits*, Sarah Phillips Casteel explains:

> Caribbean writers come to the garden with a considerable historical burden. In a Caribbean context, the paradisal garden tends to evoke its dark underside: the plantation. The garden also recalls the historical importance of botany and botanical gardens in the colonial project. Yet equally problematic are the garden's links to the European pastoral vision of the Americas that fuelled colonial exploration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While the early explorers' hopes of recovering the original Garden of Eden in the New World were eventually abandoned, Edenic and pastoral associations persisted throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the form of Rousseauian naturism and emerging scientific, ethnographic, and travel discourses. (Casteel 14-15)

While Mala's distinctively bordered garden in *Cereus* serves as both Mala's sanctuary and her place of imprisonment, the Caribbean garden of *He Drown She* too bears Casteel's "historical burden." Just as plantation workers and slaves were viewed as lower-class citizens (if citizens at all), the employed gardeners of the Guanagaspar of Harry's youth are indeed lower-class citizens. Harry explains to Kay that in his homeland, "a gardener was a man who came to work barefoot on his bicycle that was held together by string and a prayer" (Mootoo 70). Seen more as a servant than a skilled or talented labourer, the gardener, "before pulling out weeds and shoring up beds, washed

his employer's car and after scrubbed the bathroom floor and tiles" (Mootoo 70). Children are taught to avoid the areas of the garden, the spaces of the gardener, that have not yet been tamed; for instance, Narine Sangha "employed a man twice a week to upkeep the garden and the house" (Mootoo 137). However,

> At the back, the yard was undeveloped, the bushes there tended only with an occasional swipe of a cutlass, to keep them short enough to discourage snakes, and it was because of the possibility of snakes, scorpions, and other biting and stinging insects and larger fauna that had never been named that the children were not to play there. (Mootoo 137)

Painted as a space of serpents and un-known vegetation, this garden thwarts the European vision of "the original Garden of Eden in the New World" (Casteel 15). Just as in *Cereus*, Mootoo provides a "traditional New World pastoral [which] juxtaposes the garden and exile, but understands them as firmly opposed terms: the garden is the place where exile comes to an end" (Casteel 25). Instead, in *He Drown She* Mootoo (and Pineau) provides visions of Caribbean gardens which "highlight the historical dimensions of the garden – its relationship to colonial rule, the plantation system, and the circulation of plants and people — so that the garden itself becomes the signifier of exile and displacement" (Casteel 25). While *Cereus* provides a Caribbean garden of exile where Mala can escape, *He Drown She* positions the Caribbean garden as a place to which lower-class laborers are banished. While children are discouraged from the area of the uncultivated garden, the laboring gardeners must enter this serpent-filled space with only the "occasional swipe of a cutlass" (Mootoo 137) to protect them from the wild.

In place of the pastoral, Edenic Caribbean garden envisioned by early colonial settlers, Mootoo's Caribbean illustrates a wild version of the garden; instead, the picturesque is employed as an ideal, tranquil Caribbean space. Mootoo frames the sea-side village of Raleigh in this ideal light, as after the storm which takes the life of Seudath, the town returns to its picturesque self:

> Coconut trees, brilliant yellow, their trunks white like the sand, fanned the beach, and the fishing pirogues lined up, posing as if nothing had happened, as if awaiting the arrival anytime soon of a photographer from town, or abroad, or an oil painter. It would have been inconceivable to someone passing by on the main road, watching the picturesque seaside village, the ground under the coconut trees covered in orange crocuses waving at them, inviting them even, that tragedy had befallen Raleigh. (Mootoo 106-107)

While the Caribbean garden subverts the image of the Edenic garden, as its cultivation is reminiscent of the cultivation of the plantation, the picturesque, as a natural space free from human creation, is revered as a natural retreat for the upper class. While the family retreats to the "Bihar beach house on the east coast" Rose explains "neither Shem nor the children much liked being in the water" (Mootoo 276): upper class families visit the picturesque area for its social prestige, not to actively interact with the landscape. In the Caribbean, the upper class are drawn to the picturesque, in place of the pastoral garden, as "the picturesque scene is able to obscure the boundary between nature and human art because the origin of its 'artistry' is unfixed" (Byerly 55). Because the picturesque scene is a natural, un-cultivated space, free from allusions to the plantation and free from any

fixed-origin, such as the European ideal of the pastoral, the Caribbean picturesque replaces the Caribbean pastoral.

For Harry and Rose, however, the garden represents a space free from Caribbean cultural restraint, a place where social boundaries are eliminated. Despite the fact that Harry and Rose are told "not to play [in the garden]" (Mootoo 137), this is where the children find a neutral space. Playfully helping Narine Sangha's unnamed gardener, Harry and Rose would:

> drop seedlings of flowering plants into beds of rich black manure. The children would pull up weeds for no longer than just a few minutes, but to them, in the hot sun, it would seem as if they had been out in the yard with the gardener all day, and so they would boast of their labour to Mrs. Sangha and to Dolly, wiping their brows and necks of imaginary perspiration. With a tin watering can belonging to the girl, they watered plants but mostly themselves. Quickly they tired of chores and resorted to digging holes into which they poured can after can of water with an aim only they knew. They picked periwinkles and strung them on lengths of thread. One day the gardener caught the boy struggling to get one of these garlands over the girl's long, frizzy hair, with the aim of hanging it around her neck. (Mootoo 137)

In this space, the children are able to work and play together, as equals. This freedom is thwarted once the gardener warns Harry and Rose are not of the same social class; the gardener explains "girls like she does only make fellas like we cry," (Mootoo 138) as:

> You and she different, boy. That is Narine Sangha daughter. You and me is yard-boy material. She is the bossman daughter. Oil and water. Never the two shall mix. You too young to know what I saying. But I saying it anyway. (Mootoo 138)

This revelation painfully tears the Caribbean garden back to its traditional function as "gardens — actual and metaphorical — have traditionally functioned as sites of self-reflection and as spaces in which to express social, economic, and power relationships" (Casteel 14). Where for a fleeting moment, the garden becomes a place free from social constraint, Narine Sangha's gardener quickly brings back the social shackles reminiscent of the plantation.

The Canadian garden, however, returns Harry and Rose back to this space free of social restraints. Now employed as a professional "landscape designer" (Mootoo 22), Harry builds his gardens as an artistic expression of himself and a forging of his new identity. While European colonists held fast to the ideal of a pastoral America, Harry subverts this ideal and uses it himself, as a man from Guanagaspar marking his own Canadian territory. As Leo Marx writes in *The Machine in the Garden*:

> The pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery, and it has not yet lost its hold upon the native imagination. The reason is clear enough. The ruling motive of the good shepherd, leading figure of the classic, Virgilian mode, was to withdraw from the great world and begin a new life in a fresh, green landscape. (Marx 3)

Here, in his own "fresh, green landscape," Harry creates pastoral Edenic gardens that were denied to him in Guanagaspar, while simultaneously expressing his own identity. Working on a new water garden, Harry envisions the reactions of Rose and her husband Shem, were they to witness his creation:

> Were they to see this water garden completed as he — with them in mind — imagined it, a dazzling knit of stepping stones between which mosses sprang, ornamental grasses and lilies on the pond's banks, dashes of dragonfly iridescence above, orange koi brilliance beneath, tadpoles, lemon-yellow frogs grunting on velvety lily pads, were they to see all of this, much more would be revealed to them about him than he would ever speak about himself. (Mootoo 298)

Harry's gardens quite obviously help him to mark his place in the world. As a fatherless child who spent considerable time in Raleigh with his mother, as well as in Marion with the Sanghas and with Mr. Persad, Harry chooses Canada to enact a pseudo-colonization upon. As James Barilla explains,

> The restoration narratives of the colonizer often induct a version of indigenous memory into the practice of becoming native, of belonging. This weaving of native story into the narrative of a new presence is central to the legitimacy of bioregional, re-inhabitory practice. What is happening here, however, is the weaving of white memory into fictionalized "coloured" experience, a reversal of sorts that both legitimizes the author's presence in that landscape and undermines it. It represents a presumption that "coloured" experience of the land is akin to white experience when

> both are seeking the sense of belonging, that the physical markers of belonging—ecology, ruins, the experience of harvest—are universal and therefore potentially transferable. (Barilla 135)

As a person native to Guanagaspar, but to no one particular "place" in Guanagaspar, Harry re-inhabits the Canadian landscape, "weaving" his own "native story." As Barilla writes, "for many of us, a deep sense of place is no longer something we inherit simply by residing in the same place over time; rather, it is something we must actively construct" (Barilla 120), and Harry, through building his Canadian gardens, actively constructs his own Caribbean-Canadian identity. Harry indeed uses his gardens as an expression of himself: Rose explains that Harry "puts rose trees in every garden he designs" (Mootoo 56), indicative of the hold that Rose has upon his life. As a landscape designer, Harry creates a higher-class niche for himself than that of the Guanagasparian gardener. While Harry cannot conquer the sublime landscapes of Canada, he can employ the garden to express his own identity. Burke explains,

> A great beautiful thing, is a manner of expression scarcely ever used; but that of a great ugly thing, is very common. There is a wide difference between admiration and love. The sublime, which is the cause of the former, always dwells on great objects, and terrible; the latter on small ones, and pleasing; we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us; in one case we are forced, in the other we are flattered into compliance. (Burke 103)

In the Caribbean, the garden is something to be feared, a negative space reminiscent of the plantation and the Edenic ideals of the British colonizers, while the picturesque is an

ambivalent space of no fixed origin. In Canada, the sublime landscapes provide a space to "submit to" and "admire," while the garden "submits to us," or submits to humans. This submission allows Harry to manipulate the garden into an expression of himself. Rose, who shared the childhood Caribbean garden experiences with Harry, also shares this love of the Canadian garden, as at Harry's job sites, "Rose paid attention to the variety of roses, to the groupings of colours, and to the juxtaposition of differently textured plants. She sniffed open blooms and pinched old leaves and spent buds from the flowering plants" (Mootoo 310). Shem, however, representing the negative views of the serpent-filled anti-Edenic garden, is unaware of the freedom of the Canadian garden, as walking through the landscape surrounding Harry's home, Shem smokes a cigarette and throws a "smoldering butt on the path that led to the beach" at Harry's house, and Rose follows "behind him and quietly picked it up" (Mootoo 309). Both Harry and Rose exemplify Frederick Turner's ideal that the gardener knows the meditative trance in which a person becomes one with nature:

> As one moves about the flower beds, weeding, propagating, pruning the apple tree, shifting the rock in the rock garden an inch or two to make room for the roots of a healthy Erica, one becomes a subtle and powerful force of natural selection in that place, placing one's stamp on the future of the biosphere; but it feels like pottering, like a waking dream. (Turner 49-50)

For Harry, gardening is exactly "a waking dream," as he dreams of Rose and Shem's reaction to his water garden and his Canadian identity as he moves through his work (Mootoo 298).

In *He Drown She*, the Canadian garden, like the colonial gardens cultivated by the British, becomes a synthesis of cultures (Turner 50). *He Drown She* enacts the same practice as *Cereus*, where

> Mootoo draws attention to the colonial practice of exporting plants from the colonies to botanical gardens in the Mother Country. When Tyler first encounters the cereus plant at the alms house, he immediately recognizes it from 'the Exotic Items Collection of the SNW [Shivering Northern Wetlands] National Botanical Gardens' he had visited while studying in England (p. 23). When the young Mala learns of what she believes to be her impeding departure for the Wetlands, she sets about collecting seeds and cuttings from the garden to take with her, mimicking the activities of colonial botanists who exported exotic plants from the New World to the Old. (Casteel 23)[10]

Like *Cereus* and Pineau's *The Drifting of Spirits*, *He Drown She* helps forge "a new Caribbean pastoral that reimagines identity as conditioned by a dynamic interaction between place and displacement," as at the centre of these novels "is a semi-magical garden that is set against the experience of displacement — the rhythm of arrival and return — that is so characteristic of the Caribbean and its literature" (Casteel 16). *He Drown She* continues Mootoo's task of "exploring a Caribbean pastoral landscape from a diasporic perspective and ultimately by reframing the relationship between the garden and exile" (Casteel 16). While Harry may have exiled himself to Canada, as Mala exiles herself to her home and garden, and the displacement of both Harry and Mala can been

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[10] Casteel cites Shani Mootoo. *Cereus Blooms at Night.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1996.

seen as escape and isolation, Harry's exile is an entirely positive experience, it is not, like Mala's isolation, a negative or mentally damaging experience. As we have seen, Harry believes his gardens are a reflection of his true self, and that his gardens speak more of his identity "than he would ever speak about himself" (Mootoo 298). Reflecting Harry's new hybrid identity, Harry ensures his new surroundings incorporate elements of his former home: as Rose describes, Harry's home in Canada

> has a verandah running in front of his house, and all around the ledge of the verandah, he place milk cans — milk cans he had painted red. The cans had geraniums, and anthuriums, and the brown-leaf variety of bread and and cheese in them, just like you see in front of houses in the countryside here. (Mootoo 55)

This is obviously Harry's nod not only to Caribbean flora—geraniums originate from a "subtropic" native habitat (Graf *Tropica* 1005), anthuriumns originate "from Tropical America and the West Indies [and] Southeast Asia" (Graf *Exotic* 67) and the bread and cheese, or Hawthorne Tree, which is "a member of the Rose family" is "native to the Mediterranean region including north Africa and all of Europe and central Asia, and now grows in many areas of North America" (Garden Guides)—but also an homage to the "the milk cans lining the steps [of his mother's home in Raleigh], painted fire-truck red and full of lush bread and butter begonias" (Mootoo 152), as well as the anthurium lilies planted in milk tins at Mr. Persad's house in Marion (Mootoo 214). Mootoo again speaks to the themes of transplantation and rootedness of *Cereus*, explored by Casteel, as "running through *Cereus Blooms at Night* are botanical images of transplantation and

hybridization. The opening sentences of the novel draw an analogy between the transplantation of plants and people" (Casteel 25), and:

> Later, when Lavinia brings cuttings from her orderly English garden to plant in Mala's mother Sarah's garden, the hybridization of the two gardens — English and Caribbean — forecasts Sarah's and Lavinia's eventual sexual union and their own 'transplantation' to the Wetlands. Over the course of the novel, the cereus plant travels from Lavinia's garden, to Sarah's garden, to the garden of the alms house, echoing the movements of the novel's characters. (Casteel 26)

Just as transplantation, rootedness and escape are prominent in *Cereus*, the same is true for *He Drown She.* Asha Ramchandin, a central figure in *Cereus*, re-surfaces in *He Drown She* as a Canadian immigrant who fled Lantanacamara to escape her abusive father. *He Drown She* provides an element of closure to *Cereus*, finally revealing what has become of Asha. As Rose explains:

> One day we went to a place name Asha's Garden Supply. Is a woman who had emigrated from Lantanacamara who owns it. She was the reserved type, secretive for so. That was good, because I myself didn't want to be caught by anyone who might know Caribbean people — anyway, her business sold supplies for professional gardeners — all kinds of tools that we can't find in shops here. She had plants from down here, bromeliads, passionflower, pelican flower. She had a good few varieties of the Cereus plant, ent you know the night-blooming cactus? She had Caribbean broom and baliser. That sort of thing. (Mootoo 58)

Asha, too, has transplanted herself, along with her native flora and fauna, to set new roots in Canada. In doing so, Asha helps others to plant roots as well, as Rose purchases a Norfolk Pine from Asha. Notably, the Norfolk Pine, or Norfolk Island Pine, originates from "Australasia" and it is commonly "found in New South Wales and South Australia" (Timber 306), alluding to the existence of other diasporas, as well, as well as re-enforcing Mootoo's theme of transplantation. Harry had notably planted a Norfolk Pine before, as a child in Marion, when Narine Sangha's unnamed gardener allowed Harry to help him (Mootoo 138). Mootoo's description, where "the child patted the earth around the pine while the gardener held it steady" (Mootoo 138) speaks back to a similar scene in *Cereus* where Otoh tends to Mala's cereus plant:

> In the final scene of Mootoo's novel, Otoh tends to the cereus plant in the alms house garden, patting the soil at its base in a gesture that 'honour[s] its place' in Mala's life and at the same time reaffirms her connection to that soil (p. 268). Thus, as a metaphor for identity, the cereus plant simultaneously points to hybridity, mutability, and mobility on the one hand and to attachment to place on the other. (Casteel 26)

Just as the cereus plant in *Cereus* "points to hybridity, mutability, and mobility on the one hand and to attachment to place on the other," the Norfolk Island Pine, along with the other "exotic" flora and fauna introduced to the Canadian landscape, suggests the hybrid identity, the "mutability, and mobility" of the characters in *He Drown She*, as well as their "attachment to place" as they imitate Caribbean practices, such as decorating their gardens with milk tins filled with Caribbean flowering plants.

Harry's transplantation and his desire to till the Canadian soil to construct his own Caribbean-Canadian identity, can be viewed as a masculine act. As Loxley explains when British colonizers visited America, they had

> Indissolubly anchored to that image of a national identity…a specific and equally powerful mythology of masculinity: an association between colonial activity and exploration and a concept of manhood which became more strongly forged as the century, and the empire, progressed. (Loxley 117)

While Harry's construction of identity in the Canadian garden may be viewed as a masculine act, Mootoo avoids constructing what Annette Kolodny coins as "pastoral impulses" (Kolodny 26) in *Lay of the Land*, or the gendering of the landscape as female. Instead Mootoo creates more ambivalent visions of nature and equally ambivalent gendered characters. Harry cannot be interpreted as masculinely seeking a potentially damaging sexual relationship with the landscape. Similarly, socially Harry blurs gender boundaries by submitting to the women in his life. When Kay is over for dinner "he serves her before serving himself" (Mootoo 68), although he thinks that "a woman from back home would have served him" (Mootoo 69). However, he does not expect this submission from Rose, who explains:

> We would go to the grocery together, and he and I would decide — together — what we want to eat for dinner. Then he might go in his office or go and work in the garden, and I would cook. Or he might stay right in the kitchen and cut up the onions for me, or mash garlic or peel potatoes and carrots...The first night we eat together, he set the table. We eat

> together at his house many other times, and he always set the table. And he cleared it afterward, and he washed the dishes while I dried, and never once he made a comment about any of this. It was like it was natural for him. (Mootoo 56-57)

What Harry seeks in Canada is a re-birth, a common theme in colonial literature. Referencing Hector St. John de Crevecoeur and his *Letters from an American Farmer*,[11] Kolodny notes that the synthesis of races and/or cultures in America was desirous of a return to a "maternal landscape" and while "the Mother was reputed to be so generous in America," she allowed that "the old European vulgar, striving, acquisitional self could die, to be replaced by the yeoman farmer, loyal at once to the soil that had made this new reality possible" (Kolodny 26). As the British colonized America,

> just as the impulse for emigration was an impulse to begin again (whether politically, economically, or religiously), so, too, the place of that new beginning was, in a sense, the new Mother, her adopted children having cast off the bonds of Europe....If the American continent was to become the birthplace of a new culture and, with it, new and improved human possibilities, then it was, in fact as well as in metaphor, a womb of generation and a provider of sustenance. Hence, the heart of American pastoral—the only pastoral in which metaphor and the patterns of daily activity refuse to be separated. (Kolodny 9)

Harry certainly experiences this re-birth in Canada as a successful landscape designer ("He really come up good, and with not one bit of help from anybody" (Mootoo 15)), as

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[11] Kolodny cites Hector St. John de Crevecoeur. *Letters from an American Farmer*. Ed. Warren Barton Blake. New York; E. P. Dutton, 1912.

he has been re-born into a new, hybrid identity. Rose touches on Harry's multi-culturalism as she explains to Piyari, "he talks nice, you know. Like Boss. You could still hear that a little bit of this place remain in him, but he sound Canadian" (Mootoo 17). Mootoo does not limit this rebirth to her male characters alone, as Rose notes: "Is a good thing Cassie is up there. She speaks nice, too" (Mootoo 17). Cassie, an outdoor enthusiast herself who enjoys kayaking "out in the sea" and "down the coast" (Mootoo 52), is also reborn in Canada. Rose laments of Cassie, "when they living abroad so, by themselves, they change plenty-plenty, you know. You can't make them do anything anymore" (Mootoo 13). This new freedom affords Cassie the ability to sustain an openly gay relationship, as suggested by Rose, who comments about Cassie going to the movies with "that woman she spending so much time with" (Mootoo 17). Like Harry, Cassie forms a new identity in Canada that she may not be afforded in Guanagaspar.

While Harry seems to blur gender roles by serving the women in his life, Cassie too blurs gender roles in her lesbian relationship and her heightened intellect. Rose tells Harry when Cassie is still a child that "the boy was not as bright as she would have hoped....the girl was just like her father, strong-willed and bright, maybe even too much so for a girl" (Mootoo 276). Cassie's intellect and reason subverts "the dominant tradition of men as reason and women as nature" (Plumwood 20). Instead of associating her female characters with a female gendered landscape, Mootoo humanizes them: as Val Plumwood explains

> the characteristics traditionally associated with dominant masculinism are also those used to define what is distinctively human: for example, rationality (and selected mental characteristics and skills); transcendence

> and intervention in and domination and control of nature, as opposed to passive immersion in it (consider the characterisation of "savages" as lower orders of humanity on this account); productive labour, sociability and culture. Some traditional feminist arguments also provide striking examples of this convergence of concepts of the human and the masculine. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft in the *Vindication of the Rights of Women* appeals strongly to the notion of an ungendered human character as an ideal for both sexes…but in her account this human character is implicitly masculine. The human character ideal she espouses diverges sharply from the feminine character ideal, which she rejects, 'despising that weak elegancy of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners.' Instead she urges that women become 'more masculine and respectable.' (Plumwood 25)

Like Harry, Kay blurs gender boundaries as Mootoo employs ecofeminism "to challenge dominant ideologies of dualism and hierarchy within Western culture that construct nature as separate from and inferior to human culture (and women as inferior to men)" (Armbruster 199). In *He Drown She* , Kay is indicative of more ambivalent gender roles, as she is physically independent: on their canoe trip, Harry wonders how she got her canoe to the lake, and realizes she did it herself. Witnessing her physical strength and assertiveness on the water, Kay "wasn't in this moment physically appealing to him, yet such independence fascinated him" (Mootoo 45). Kay's strength leads Harry to believe

> that she is exactly the type of woman men from Guanagaspar — in general, of course — love to be with and at the same time fear. The type

> you don't have to worry over, as you know they are quite capable of taking care of themselves, and of you if it ever came to that. But the kind you don't dare fool with. Guanagasparian women tend to admire such women for what they would call brazenness, but in the next breath they would think these kinds mannish, harsh, too independent, too own-way. (Mootoo 69)

However, Kay still identifies with more feminine traits, as "freshly sprayed marigold scent announces her return" from the washroom, and when she re-enters the room, "her hair is neatened, fluffed up, her lipstick reapplied thickly" (Mootoo 86). By using cosmetics to attract Harry, as common with North American women, Kay subverts dualism by embodying both masculine and feminine qualities.

Such subversion of female dualism is also exemplified by Dolly. When her husband Seudath dies, Dolly finds employment in Marion by means of a "washing and ironing job" (Mootoo 111) for Mrs. Sangha. When she leaves this job she lives off the land making guava cheese (Mootoo 194-5) and when her second husband, Mr. Persad, has a heart attack, "she took charge of the overall running of the station and with an acumen her son had never witnessed" (Mootoo 250). When Harry compliments his mother's abilities, he offends her, as

> she retorted gruffly that she was not stupid, she just had not had any opportunities before. Thinking back, the boy realized that he had often seen her and Mr. Persad bent over the business logbooks, and he had heard Mr. Persad mumble things to her about the figures, but he hadn't

> understood what attention she was paying, or that Mr. Persad might have been instructing her, or that she was even capable. (Mootoo 250)

As Armbruster explains, "within ecofeminism, an unproblematized focus on women's connection with nature can actually reinforce dualism and hierarchy" through fostering "another dualism: an uncomplicated opposition between women's perceived unity with nature and male-associated culture's alienation from it" (Armbruster 199). Mootoo provides her female characters with the rationality and intellect to avoid such dualism, while providing her central male character, Harry, with a strong connection to the garden to further blur gender boundaries.

Mootoo's most complex character is Rose, who begins by reductively identifying herself as "Shem Bihar wife" (Mootoo 14), and who is shocked when Harry speaks *to* her. Rose explains that, in conversation, "he was talking to me in truth, and not just to hear himself" (Mootoo 15); unused to such attention and respect, Rose has "to learn how to pay attention. It takes energy to pay so much attention, in truth....It make me uncomfortable" (Mootoo 16). As the Attorney General's wife, Rose must act the part at all times: when Harry unexpectedly drops in on Rose for a visit, he notes that "although she had not been expecting any visitor that day, her lips were coloured with shiny burnt-orange lipstick, and her eyes were outlined in black kohl" and he realizes that he had "never seen her, as an adult, without lipstick or eyeliner" (Mootoo 277). Rose's life revolves solely around pleasing her husband, as when she and Shem visit Canada, she makes no indication of where she would like to eat; she is only pleased if Shem is pleased (Mootoo 310-311).

However, Rose breaks out of the submissive female role which likewise imprisoned her mother. Strongly connected to the natural world, as "she had been so at home in the water" (Mootoo 28) and, in Canada, assisting Harry with his garden work (Mootoo 55-56), Rose returns to Guanagaspar as a different woman. As Piyari explains, upon her return Rose "was not the same Madam" (Mootoo 313) as before:

> that place make her strong-willed, and it put ideas in her head. She was brisk....her voice get bright. And almost every day she went to bathe in the swimming pool. She was looking after herself....she stop eating too much fat and meat and say how she feeling like a young woman again. (Mootoo 313)

Rose slowly begins plotting her escape from the submissive female role she has been entrapped by. As expensive tableware goes missing, piece-by-piece (Mootoo 313ff), Shem realizes that Rose is selling their belongings to pay for her escape to independence. However, before she can make her grand exit, Rose apparently meets her death, as swimming in the ocean she is lost when "caught in a riptide" (Mootoo 324). Rose's clever plan is deciphered by Harry, with the help of Piyari, and he finds her awaiting him in Raleigh, now "ready for a fresh start" (Mootoo 338). In planning her great escape, Rose clearly possesses the wit and intellect which Mary Wollstonecraft would have considered a masculine trait. Emerging from her submissive role, regarding herself as "Shem Bihar wife" (Mootoo 14), Rose possesses a rationality often regarded as strictly masculine.

Each character who experiences a re-birth — Dolly, Harry, Cassie and Rose — blurs gender roles to subvert gendered dualism, and each has a strong connection to the

maternal sea and to the experience of transplantation. Through gendered landscapes such as the sublime and the pastoral, Mootoo blends the text with ecocritical and ecofeminist readings where the anthropocentric binary between humans and nature is compared with the androcentric binary of man and woman, and both are considered as an oppressive relationship (Garrard 23). As Mootoo explores the issues of gender and sexuality, reading her characters in relation to their ecological surroundings reveals important aspects of their complex identities.

Conclusion

As we have seen, throughout *He Drown She*, Shani Mootoo employs various ecological and geographical motifs to construct ambiguous identities for her characters in a postcolonial Caribbean. Through depicting landscapes and communities as places of consistent flux, Mootoo is able to illustrate ecological spaces that influence her characters, as they, in turn, influence the earth. In "Writing the Wilderness," Henry David Thoreau asks "where is the literature which gives expression to Nature," for "he would be a poet who could impress the winds and streams into his service, to speak for him" (Thoreau 23). It is the Poet "who derived his words as often as he used them — transplanted them to his page with earth adhering to their roots" (Thoreau 23). Mootoo is such a poet, as she employs the space of the island to reflect both isolation and imagined community, entrapment and national unity. She further employs the sea as an ambiguous site of place and passage, both reminiscent of the Middle Passage (Mootoo 219) and providing Harry and Rose with a passage to freedom (Mootoo 318). The sea also acts as both a site of death (Mootoo 105-107) and baptismal rebirth (Mootoo 257), with the maternal sea also providing a final resting place for Dolly (Mootoo 283). Mootoo's gardens, such as those constructed by Harry in British Columbia, reflect both a sense of Canadian rootedness and Carribean transplantation, while in Guanagaspar the garden is both a site for aesthetic pleasure and a reminder of the plantation and its indentured and slave labourers. Furthermore, Mootoo's blurring of gender boundaries in relation to the gendered earth subvert typical gendered dualisms, thereby obscuring gendered identities. The imagined communities and nations fostered by the island have both positive and negative associations; at the onset of war, a sense of nationalism draws the community

together with a sense of unity, but where imperial Britain has left Guanagaspar with the Indian descendents of indentured workers in a position of power over descendents of African slaves, these differing communities incite the type of violence and civil unrest, the divide of Otherness, that drives individuals away (Mootoo 273-274, 282-285). Where different geographical spaces or places, such as differing homes in differing communities, may reflect socio-economic status, such status remains dynamic, as after moving to in with Mr. Persad, Harry "realized that although he and his mother had bettered their circumstances through the move to Marion, everything was relative" as to upper-class citizens, "she and he were probably only a little better off than when they lived in Raleigh" (Mootoo 239). In *He Drown She in the Sea*, reading characters in relation to geographical, ecological and national spaces reveals ambiguous and dynamic identities, both within the Caribbean and as part of the global West Indian Diaspora.

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