On Becoming a Paradox: negotiating gender and power in "Wake Up" by Shani Mootoo

Thiago Marcel Moyano*
Aline Souza Martins*

Proposition one: time is a man, space is a woman.
(Carter, 1977, p. 55)

Abstract

This work analyzes Shani Mootoo's story "Wake Up" through gender studies and psychoanalysis to read a domestic scene between a mother and a daughter in the realm of an Indo-Caribbean family home. By focusing the narrative on the gaze of a teenage racialized girl in this "coming-of-age" narrative, Mootoo establishes a sharp criticism of heteronormative patriarchal codes by intertwining two different types of imagery that are strategically used in the text: the appropriation of mass culture in film and television, as well as an access to the characters' dreams, which suggest critical responses to the social and political environments surrounding them. Such scenario invokes an analysis about the teenager's identification and the processes of subjectivity through: the feminist and psychoanalytic work of Jessica Benjamin (1980, 1988, 1995) on psychic development inside patriarchal culture and Moyano's theory on alterplaces (2023). In conclusion, this story reflects on how gender creates a series of subjective displacements, a phenomenon that is constitutive of Mootoo's informed queer and postcolonial gaze.

Keywords: gender; feminism; psychoanalysis; queer theory; Shani Mootoo.

* Universidade de Brasília (UnB). Doutor em Estudos Linguísticos e Literários em Inglês (FFLCH/USP). Professor Doutor do Dpto de Teoria Literária e Literatura (TEL/UnB). Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6810-8606.

* Universidade de São Paulo (USP). Doutora em Psicologia Clínica (IP/USP). Professora Doutora do Departamento de Psicologia Clínica (PSC/USP). Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7391-2551.

Cadernos CESPUC de Pesquisa. Série Ensaios. n.47, 1º Sem./2025, p. 141-158.
e-ISSN: 2358-3231 (OJS). Recebido em: 29/09/2025. Aceito em: 06/11/2025.

Sobre ser um paradoxo: negociações de gênero e poder em "Wake up" de Shani Mootoo

Resumo

Este trabalho analisa o conto "Wake Up", de Shani Mootoo, pelas lentes dos estudos de gênero e da psicanálise, para interpretar uma cena doméstica entre mãe e filha no contexto de uma família indo-caribenha. Nessa narrativa de formação, centrada no olhar de uma adolescente racializada, Mootoo estabelece uma contundente crítica aos códigos patriarcais heteronormativos, entrelaçando dois tipos de imagética estrategicamente utilizados no texto: a apropriação da cultura de massa no cinema e na televisão, bem como o acesso aos sonhos das personagens, os quais sugerem respostas críticas aos ambientes sociais e políticos que as cercam. Tal cenário convoca uma análise sobre os processos de identificação e de subjetivação da jovem, fundamentada na obra feminista e psicanalítica de Jessica Benjamin (1980, 1988, 1995) acerca do desenvolvimento psíquico no interior da cultura patriarcal, bem como na teoria dos alterlugares de Thiago Moyano (2023). Em conclusão, a narrativa reflete sobre como o gênero engendra uma série de deslocamentos subjetivos, fenômeno constitutivo do informado olhar queer e pós-colonial de Mootoo.

Palavras-chave: gênero; feminismo; psicanálise; teoria queer; Shani Mootoo.

Cadernos CESPUC de Pesquisa. Série Ensaios. n.47, 1º Sem./2025, p. 141-158.
e-ISSN: 2358-3231 (OJS). Recebido em: 29/09/2025. Aceito em: 06/11/2025.

In Angela Carter's dystopian world in The Passion of the New Eve (1977), power's hierarchical discourse is constantly subverted, transgressed, and even exposes the cracks in a foundation that has perpetuated gender roles and expectations throughout time. An example of that can be seen in the case of Beulah, an underground city founded and ruled exclusively by women, whose matriarch dictates the total annihilation of men and forcibly transitions the male protagonist Evelyn into Eve. In this radical shift, Mother, the oppressive ruler, rewrites the logic of western thought by privileging space over time, as opposed, for instance, to Foucault's claims in the 1970s that a 'History of Space(s)' had to be written, implying that 'Time' had been favored in the forefront of epistemology (Foucault, 2001, p. 149). It is by twisting the logic behind such narrative that Beulah is ruled under three main propositions, which maintain the association between men and time versus women and space; however, unveiling time's (or men's) failed project, recoding the Oedipus Complex. Mother says:

> Oedipus wanted to live backwards. He had a sensible desire to murder his father, who dragged him from the womb in complicity with historicity. His father wanted to send little Oedipus forward on a phallic projectory (onwards and upwards!); his father taught him to live in the future, which isn't living at all, and to turn his back on the timeless eternity of interiority. But Oedipus botched the job. In complicity with phallocentricity, he concludes his trajectory a blind old man, wandering by the seashore in a search for reconciliation. (Carter, 1977, p. 45).

By creating a complete reversal of discourse, Carter's use of parody, satire, and appropriation of certain ideological values point towards a post-structuralist agenda that aims to dismantle totalizing and universalizing narratives (Weedon, 1987; Hutcheon, 1990). The novel somehow anticipates a series of discussions in the realm of gender studies, namely Judith Butler's contributions focusing on the performative, that which can never be fully traced back to an original, but which is systematically repeated. The end of the twentieth and first decades of the twenty-first centuries have witnessed a profusion of works of fiction which further complicate gender and power relations, adding, to an initially all-white feminist production in the West, an array of voices from the Global South, bringing together questions of

race, gender, sexuality, among other analytical categories of subjectivity. Within the broader scope of Post-colonialism, Caribbean literature has provided fruitful grounds to reflect upon intertwined and intersectional issues in fiction, theory and other hybrid forms of writing (Fanon, 1952; Lorde, 1984; Phyllips, 1991; Brand, 2001; Carby, 2019). As the region puts side by side a number of imperial projects, a vast diversity of languages –Western or otherwise–, immigrants, and diasporic identities, processes of re-diasporization or serial accommodations (Gunew, 2008; Hall, 2013) embedded in fiction continue to acquire nuances that mirror a global culture that is highly impacted by transnational politics. In the realm of Human Rights, discussions on migrations, racial issues, sexual orientation, and gender identities are enriched by diversity despite numerous challenges that are yet to be overcome.

Keeping these dynamics in mind, this paper looks into a representative of such literary trajectory, whose oeuvre has consistently tackled interconnected systems of oppression and the constitution of subjectivities in Indo-Caribbean communities, both in the archipelago and abroad in the Global North: Shani Mootoo. As it happens to many of her peers, fixed labels fail to represent the multiplicity of her background. One could say, however, in broad terms, that she has been analyzed as a post-colonial, migrant author, as a lesbian writer, and even within the relatively new 'queer migration studies' field (Luibhéid, 2008). While these qualifiers do not necessarily always go hand-in-hand, with a tradition of male-oriented post-colonial studies on one hand, and Western (white) feminist criticism on the other, Mootoo's work has helped a number of racialized queer theorists to reflect upon questions of intersectionality, particularly those that blend multiple horizons of expectations in the North and South concerning gender, race, and sexuality, always negotiated with or against structures of power.

Therefore, this work analyzes a narrative from Mootoo's first collection of short stories, *Out on Main Street and Other Stories* (1993), entitled "Wake Up", focusing on gender and power relations constructed over the course of the narrative and the main character's process of becoming aware of the paradoxical place in which she finds herself. The story is centered around a private scene, in the heart of an Indo-Caribbean family home, inviting the reader to dive deeper into issues of identification

and processes of subjectivity, through Jéssica Benjamin's work (1980, 1988, 1995). By focusing the text on the gaze of a teenage racialized girl in this "coming-of-age" narrative, Mootoo establishes a sharp criticism of heteronormative patriarchal codes by intertwining two different types of imagery that are strategically used in the text: the appropriation of mass culture in film and television, as well as an access to the characters' dreams, which suggest critical responses to the social and political environments surrounding them. While negotiating with her own identity, Mootoo's protagonist finds herself at odds with her own horizon of possibilities in terms of gender, in constant tension with configurations of masculinities which she either identifies with or despises. This character's reflections on gender within the borders of the private sphere (her parents' home) creates a series of subjective displacements, alterplaces, a phenomenon that is constitutive of Mootoo's informed queer and postcolonial gaze (Moyano, 2023).

In the short story, although the text is not marked by the displacements and migrations that are so recurrent in Mootoo's prose, aspects of transnationalism, as well as a critique of patriarchal and heteronormative codes will also emerge via other mechanisms. In this plot, we are introduced to a tense scene of complicity and revolt between mother and daughter, during a night when the father, the breadwinner strategically never named in the text, is away from home – a habit that arouses suspicion and generates great anxiety for the narrator's mother. Angenie, the one whose perspective we follow, is the eldest daughter, but only 14 years-old, in a family made up of three daughters and a son. The younger girls, Siri and Tara, alongside their little brother, Anil, are systematically shielded from the tensions that plague the parental couple, making the protagonist a kind of witness and participant in the oppressions and instabilities to which her mother is exposed.

The position that Angenie occupies is, therefore, permeated by ambivalence: on the one hand, she is the daughter and hierarchically subjugated to the maternal authority; but on the other, she is the only first-hand witness of the violences committed by her father, a role that creates complicated feelings of empathy, anger, and confusion. Throughout the narrative, one can see that the character is not indifferent to the instabilities of the position she occupies, sometimes becoming hostage to her mother's

demands; sometimes an interlocutor and, thus, to a certain extent, in control of the situation; and sometimes losing control altogether. These oscillations that mark the constitution of this character's subjectivity, the different places created, occupied, and dissolved in the plot, end up clearing the way to a series of reflections on gender, sexuality and, in a way, the heteropatriarchal structure itself that governs that particular micro-universe.

In spatial terms, the great majority of the story takes place within the family home, except for a few brief passages and references to public spaces, such as the school where the narrator studies and the office where her father works. From a geographical, racial and cultural standpoint, the Caribbean and Indian diasporic space is inferred, for instance, through the names of the children, but especially through some subtle, but relevant, insertions in the text: comments on the weather, descriptions of the flora– with an emphasis on coconut palms and tropical weeds – and, finally, by the curry stew that the inebriated father inadvertently tries to prepare in the middle of the night.

The text is also deeply informed by sensorial elements that provide another way of accessing the complexity of the relationships portrayed therein. In psychoanalysis, sensory apprehension occurs even before the possibility of elaboration through words can arise. We might intuit that there is here the intention of a profound transmission, far beyond what can be expressed in these relationships. As if the author accessed the unconscious of family relations. In Post-colonial literature, sensory elements are used to reinforce, dismantle or challenge cultural, national, and racial identities, as a form of coded communication system that serves as a critical lens to read the political, economical, and social dimensions of diaspora (Mannur, 2010).

For example, on the very first page of the text, the acute perception of her surroundings, as well as the appearance of the skin on her mother's face, are already indicators that link the presentation of the plot to the construction of the main character-narrator. From her bed, in the bedroom she shares with her younger sisters, she observes: "I'm aware of any change in breathing as they sleep in their beds. Before my mother entered the room, I heard her approaching, and within a second I was alert and under control. [...] I see her skin swollen with worry and loneliness, her emotions too dampened to feel anger." (Mootoo, 1993, p. 33).

Angenie is the eldest sister in a family that violently intrudes upon her, demanding that she takes on the role of either caregiver for her mother and siblings, or accomplice to her mother, who becomes weakened in the face of the father's absences. This position places her between the parents, creating the ilusion of having power or the duty to resolve the parental couple's problems. The tensions and dynamics that are embedded in this process of the narrator's subjectivation, through the observation of her parents' dynamics, evoke a discussion in the field of recognition, in the feminist view of Jessica Benjamin (1988). For her,

> Recognition is that response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self. It allows the self to realize its agency and authorship in a tangible way. But such recognition can only come from an other whom we, in turn, recognize as a person in his or her own right. This struggle to be recognized by the other, and thus confirm our selves, was shown by Hegel to form the core of relationships of domination. (Benjamin, 1988, p. 12).

This process is related to power relations that Benjamin calls "New Oedipus complex". For her, this concept was originally designed based on an idea of woman/mother and man/father deeply influenced by patriarchy and the resulting power relations of domination and submission. Benjamin demonstrates how the power dynamics of gender domination permeate Freud's Oedipus complex, suppressing female desire and reducing the mother's role to objectification. To support her argument, the author draws on Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic, illustrating the child's dynamic between domination/differentiation or separation/individuation as a struggle to free themselves from dependence on the other. This struggle, according to Benjamin, creates a blockage in the Oedipus complex regarding the recognition of the mother. This tension between dependence and separation forms an unsolvable paradox in the self-other relation, which Benjamin further explores through the concept of recognition (Martins, 2020). To addresses different manifestations of what she calls "rational violence", Benjamin argues that the male experience of differentiation is necessarily implicated in (and in tune with) Western rationality, a model that operates on division, which is dependent on oppositions and boundaries and can never make room for mutuality and/or reciprocity.

Recovering the Hegelian critique, Benjamin thus denounces the paradox of the "incongruous logic" in which, through these mechanisms of differentiation, the subject needs to turn the other into an object, but one that it can never do without. In the heteropatriarchal plot, therefore, the denial of the mother's subjectivity – the emptying of her position to a status inferior to humanity – is bifurcated in the development of the binomial of gender difference: on the one hand, the boy will need to make a shift, no longer longing to be like his mother, but always-already endowed with the power to consume her; on the other, the girl will need to develop a "[....] continuity and similarity with her mother at the expense of difference and independence" [from the father/male] (Benjamin, 1980, p. 148).

We are, thus, dealing with the consequence caused by social misogyny, which was generated by the refusal of mutuality between child and mother. In this process, the father represents difference and independence because he symbolizes this opposition. The girl will not sacrifice her need for independence; she will be led to believe that she needs to identify with the mother, that is, with the representative of a position that is not valued in her societal fabric. At a later stage, the little girl will rival and establish an aggressive relationship with the mother in an attempt to separate. She tries to identify with the one representing freedom and the possibility of desire, that is, the father. The little boy will also try to separate himself from the mother and become independent through aggression, denying the intimacy inherent in dependence, which may contribute to the process of social misogyny, that is, the need to distance ourselves from feminine traits.

This recognition on which one side of the equation occupies the position of subject and the other, that of object, is intricate in the consolidation of male cultural hegemony within a rationalist logic based on difference. However, for Benjamin, it is already an oxymoron: a fallacy based on fantasy. In the short story, these multiple facets of differentiation and recognition will be present in the constitution of the narrator-character's subjectivity. In the process, however, the author will make some insertions and displacements that will complicate this equation even more, especially if we read it in a way that includes the racial and queer dimensions present in this script.

It is not merely incidental, therefore, that the male characters in "Wake up" are always written outside the private sphere (the father, at work,

in a meeting, or having an extramarital relationship without ever having to answer for it) or within the domestic space, with marked indifference (the boy is briefly described as unable to identify his father's responsibility for his mother's condition, and so simply withdraws or abstains). This absence, however, does not correspond to the role that the masculine– especially projected in the paternal figure–plays in the development of the text: an invisible, omnipresent force, which will open the way to some routes that will question the fixity of masculinity in the constitution of the narrator-character.

By turning specifically to the interaction between mother and daughter, we would like to suggest that Mootoo's narrative construction once again places the body in a series of interstitial and borderline positions, bringing to light multiple clashes that foster fluidity and plurality for identity. Aside from these overdeterminations and intersectionalities in subjectivity, we will also make some considerations about the author's systematic mobilization of diverse expressions of masculinity, which are, in a way, displaced in that post-colonial space.

The young narrator, Angenie, a character constructed during the formative years of her adolescence, realizes that she will have to deal with different horizons of expectation. Within what she herself seems to interpret as an obligation to return attention to her main source of care and protection – her mother – she will reflect on a list of impossibilities, identifications, and disidentifications that require her to come up with new alternatives. Aware of her liminal position, sometimes as daughter, sometimes as accomplice, sometimes as partner, she concludes, about her mother's search for consolation, that

> [...] it would be easier if she asked for money. I could just turn my little plastic pig upside down, rip off the lid and gladly empty it into her hands. But every time she comes to me for comfort, I feel poor and I'm desperate to know the best way to give her what she steals from my belly. (Mootoo, 1993, p. 33).

The passage is extremely revealing in at least three ways that end up intertwining throughout the narrative. Firstly, the use of an analogy with a financial transaction to describe the situation, as if evoking the solvency of a debt, reinforces the narrator's position in relation to her interlocutor.

As a creditor, she will then need to find different ways to negotiate with the dubious figure of both authority and extreme vulnerability represented by her mother. Furthermore, the choice of the image of the plastic pig is also very constitutive. By using a metaphorical construction from outside the semantic field of the "human", or humanizable, Mootoo promotes gradual slips in the text, in which the narrator herself becomes the receptacle that will be violently and emotionally assaulted by her mother, who always steals something from her "belly". The tense game of power, imbued with a deep relationship of paybacks, acquires materiality in the body, which becomes, at the same time, both the object of one subject and the boundary violated by the other. Finally, the scene transports us to the world of childhood, identified in psychoanalytical terms as the birthplace of subjectivity. This early, unpayable debt creates the foundation of a woman's subjective experience. Extending this common narrative to a broader understanding of gender relations, it suggests that every woman may have to contend with such debt.

The viscerality of the confrontation will be reiterated by the narrator in her thoughts about the dangerous fine line over which she will continually have to navigate. The textual depiction of risks and the body resurface when, for example, she observes:

> Subordination and authority delivered to me, in the same hand, for a juggling act with double-edged swords. [...] an order, a hand that reaches into my gut and tears it apart, centimeter by centimeter, desperately searching for something it hasn't even defined yet. (Mootoo, 1993, p. 35).

The impasse, explained in detail in Benjamin's (1980) critique, becomes explicit. In psychoanalysis, the process of identification in the girl begins with the mother as the first other, the one with breasts, which are the first "not me" perceived by the child (just as it does in the boy). Then, after castration, she identifies herself with the father, as the one who represents the world, the law, the third holder of power, independence, and freedom (the boy stops here). Finally, the girl must make one more passage back to identify herself to the mother to constitute her femininity. Although it is a general theory created from and for the Western bourgeois family, it is in western symbolic and, as an effect of modernity's modes of colonization,

racialized children must also deal with these expectations. As the sole subject/agent of family formation, the daughter's identification must be with her father, but differentiation leads to another path. Continuity needs to be in relation to the mother, in an insidious demand to become the one who is responsible for servitude and care and for consequently ceasing to crave agency. In the short story, Mootoo seems to open up the cards in this game, and gender, or a feeling of incongruity in relation to it, once again appears as an important marker of subjectivity. The mother reminds the protagonist while pleading: "You are the eldest, Angenie, if only you were a boy, but I have to call on you, I am so lonely, I don't want to spend the rest of my life worrying where your father is [...]. I just wish I could die." (Mootoo, 1993, p. 36).

This passage reveals the violence inherent in the intrusion of the mother's desire into the daughter's psyche, manifesting as an impossible demand. The mother desires for Angenie to be a boy, to protect her not only from the father but also from loneliness; furthermore, Angenie is chosen to shield the mother from her suicidal impulses, thereby sustaining her life. This position engenders an imaginary fantasy in the daughter. Jéssica Benjamin (1995, p. 114) explains how the gender relation that affects a mother's relationship with her own father, along with the social limitations, will later also shape her relationship with her children, both sons and daughters. One reads:

> Continuing her ideal love for the father, she projects her desire and grandiosity on her male child and casts them out of herself. The boy's gender splitting is thus also shaped by his rapprouchment experience, when the father is inaccessible and idealized, while the mother views her son as both Oedipus object and ideal self. And so, it was no accident that Freud's theory gave the woman a son to love, in his view the only unambivalent love. The mother was granted the fulfillment of the wish for identificatory love not in relation to her father but in ideal love to her son; to the son was given the grandiosity that is mirrored by the mother who renounced it. But Freud´s story also gave the son an ideal love, a forever unrequited search for identificatory love of the father who has cast him out as a murderous rival. This may be the great triangle of identificatory love, replayed endlessly in stories of women's submission to and sacrifice for heroes who leave them to follow the quest for the paternal grail, the father's recognition (Benjamin, 1995, p. 114).

Angenie, like the children described, will be at the mercy of the inheritance of this unequal relationship that is transmitted unconsciously. She concludes:

> How inadequate I feel around her. If I had been the firstborn, a boy, I could have handled the situation more efficiently and offered her a strong, firm shoulder. I want to reach out and touch her, but there's no room for that. [...] I imagine how I would touch her if I had the green light to do so, but to do so I must frame my feelings of protection for her in television images of the cowboy heroes I so envy. (Mootoo, 1993, p. 36-37).

The excerpt is representative, not of a proposition of fixity in terms of gender and/or sexuality in the constitution of this protagonist, but of the ideological, political and cultural clash that she, already in her teenage years, will have to face on the domestic and everyday territory. The will to take on the role of the male, of a firstborn, with notes of an erotic encounter with the "other" body of the mother will, however, be mediated by a third figure who exposes an intersectional dimension, informed by globalization in the colonial space.

If the masculine omnipresence of the father in Benjamin's critique presupposes the Western universality of whiteness, what happens with the racialized patriarch in Mootoo's text? As if contrasting two models of masculinity, the narrator seems to establish a new binomial, this time projecting the adulterous, violent, and authoritarian father on the one hand and the highly idealized image of the cowboy character on the other, a construction of the cultural industry, a product of the technology of gender within the scope of Teresa de Lauretis (1994). This universal hero, symbol of courage, force and erotic fantasy (who does not need to be characterized as white, western, North American), will act as a frame for an identification that breaks out of the crystallized positions of that family structure, an escape route that sees this foreign body as its main outlet. In her fantasy, which is so strong that we could call an awake dream, this outsider represents both a spectator and a metamorphosed body, as the narrator observes:

> The cowboy sits on the edge of her bed. He stands next to her on her left. He puts his right arm around her shoulders and gently pulls her against his body. He's like a warm wall to lean against, a tall, silent man with long, hard arms, and men fear him. He doesn't say anything, but she feels safe and calms down. She knows he won't take advantage of her. In his kindness, she senses his indignation at her hurt. He wants revenge for her. (Mootoo, 1993, p. 37).

When the father arrives after four in the morning, the mother retakes her position of authority and insists that her daughter quietly goes back to bed. The narrative then presents a dreamlike insertion, strategically marked in italics in the text, in which the protagonist once again sees herself in the position of her mother's protector within the confines of the domestic space. However, in this dream, the scene of eroticism takes on more explicit contours, culminating in a kiss immediately followed by the unbearable terror of abandonment. Dreams are a form of fulfillment of unconscious desires through the transformation of content into symbolic representations, serving to protect the dreamer from the anxiety of nocturnal thoughts. In Angenie's dream, she is compelled to meet the mother's demand for protection and erotic companionship; in other words, the daughter shapes herself to become the man who will play the hero and rescue the mother from her loneliness and violent relationship with the father.

The next morning, the disturbing memory of the dream brings up other reflections permeated by the asymmetrical division of power that is sustained by the constraints of gender. Faced with her mother's impotence and the impossibility of confronting her father's behavior, Angenie admits:

> I despise the role of the good wife behind a successful husband, the mother of educated, well-behaved and intelligent children. I despise her for staying, for the way she allows herself to be hurt, for the way she accepts. The woman in front of me and the woman I kissed in my dream have the same characteristics, but my feelings towards them are very different. (Mootoo, 1993, p. 41).

The broad understanding of the limitations of the role imposed on her mother, even if permeated by a value judgment that transfers responsibility to individual action, seems to motivate the need to create new possibilities. Not only is the intimate bond between mother and daughter broken the

following morning, experienced as a betrayal, but also the influence that causes the daughter to take up the role of object. Angenie separates from the mother with aggression, highlighting her lack of courage and self-respect, which will shape her refusal to identify with this representation of weakness and lead her to suppose that the image of the father, even if violent, offers a better future outcome. She says:

> As a woman, my future looks bleak, claustrophobic. [...] The alternative to being like her is to be like him. And as much as I cry inside for his rejection of her and us, his freedom seems more exciting, more interesting. [...] The freedom inherent in his masculinity to enjoy. What he does with that freedom is another story. Even so, the fantasy of shaping myself in his image (with modifications to the details, of course) is more honorable than consenting to spend my whole life trapped in a woman's body (Mootoo, 1993, p. 42-43).

This forced identification showed the consequences of the presence of Western cultural values in the construction of the psyche, emphasizing that many of these values serve to maintain domination. In this context, the child needs to idealize the father to form their sense of agency and desire, with the father representing the ideal image the child wishes to embody (Martins, 2020). Once again, Benjamin describes this process accurately:

> This early love of the father is an "ideal love": the child idealizes the father because the father is the magical mirror that reflects the self as it wants to be – the ideal in which the child wants to recognize himself. Under certain conditions, this idealization can become the basis for adult ideal love, the submission to a powerful other who seemingly embodies the agency and desire one lacks in oneself (Benjamin, 1988, p. 100).

Beyond this psychoanalytic aspect, we can read the protagonist-character as racially queer, not always because of a refusal or transgression of sexuality as such, but through the lens of non-normative, ethical and aesthetic elaborations that traverse the constitution of their subjectivities. In dealing with a teenage girl, I would like to stress that this reading is not intended to psychologize the character. The purpose of this analysis is, above all, to recover a very delineated script (in terms of gender), within

a bourgeois and western ideal of the family, as opposed to a strategic use that Angenie will make of a plural repertoire (of discourses, images and constructions) that will be at her disposal.

Unlike many of the characters in Mootoo's oeuvre, who deal more objectively with their sexuality and desire, whether normative (as is the case with Harry St George in *He Drowned She in the Sea*) or not (like the characters in the short story "Out on Main Street"), the author's choice to avoid Western designations of the Global North for sexual identity (gay, lesbian, bi, etc.) is in line with King's (2014) critique when she thinks of a continuum for Caribbean sexualities. Thus, I believe that Angenie will also be part of this large and broad spectrum of people who are grappling with their own identity in a complex and intricate network that intertwines gender, race, class, sexuality, generation, body, religion, and any other dimension that crosses their constitution.

In the specific case of this plot, Angenie's queer body will take on different shapes and forms, inside and outside her fantasies, calling into question the gender roles that a family structure – the substance of psychoanalytic thinking – seems to continually impose. In this binary and fixed division that the character identifies in the interaction between her parents, she seems to reach the ambivalent conclusion expressed in a final desire. I would like to identify myself with my father.

Our queer reading of the character seems to take on even more effect when the character imagines herself in a figuration of the male. According to the text, she states: "[...] I would paint like Dorian Gray. I would write like Somerset Maugham. I would disguise myself as a boy and no one would ever know I was a girl." (Mootoo, 1993, p. 43). It is no coincidence that both references chosen by Mootoo make up a Western queer canon. Firstly, by mentioning the classic character of Oscar Wilde, an Irishman sentenced to prison for his homosexuality. Subsequently, through Somerset Maugham, an English playwright and novelist, sometimes described as bisexual, sometimes homosexual, whose work has been discussed, at various times, with an explicit sense of misogyny[1]. Despite her origins in the first colony of the British Empire, the mirroring of the figure of Oscar Wilde–taking into account his wide acceptance and assimilation by the literary canon, often

1 Philip Holden makes an analysis of the complex relationship between gender and imperialism in Maugham's fiction, published in *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation: W. Somerset Maugham's Exotic Fiction.* Westport: Praeger, 1996.

even obliterating his possible framing as a post-colonial author–side by side with Maugham, suggests an omnipresence of whiteness in the references of the young Angenie, bringing into play a racial dimension to this discussion. However, as Sabsay (2016) reminds us, breaking with some aspect of normativity is not synonymous with a complete transgression of it. Thus, by subverting gender ideals, and especially those of the male gender, by casting queer men as role models, the character ends up reinforcing another hegemonic face of culture.

From that moment on, the ending of the story recalls, in a scattered and fragmented way, a series of stereotypical images reproduced in fiction, theater and film. In them, the woman continues to emerge in representations canonized by the West, as submissive, crazy, with suicidal and filicidal tendencies, while the man remains idealized in the heroic figure of the cinematographic cowboy:

> I can hardly hear what's being taught at school today. First, because I'm unbearably tired. Then, because I have images in my head of my mother lying in bed crying; of my father making love to a multitude of women; of a jealous wife poisoning her husband; of a furious madwoman stabbing herself and her children; of a cowboy bringing his wagon and putting his wife and children in it and riding off with them to a vast country estate in the countryside. (Mootoo, 1993, p. 44).

Throughout our reading of "Wake up", we have shown how Mootoo's work is committed to the most varied complexities that involve the racialized queer subject in a world marked by globalization and transnational dynamics. In this analysis, the author repeatedly resorts to a continuous strategy of shifting positionalities. Without falling into the dangers of a complete dismantling of identity in a purely post-modern fashion, the author moves different pieces of gender, race and sexuality in the colonial clash and in the very projection of an ideal for "masculinity". Whether it's through the lesbian, "*butch*", "slutty", "masculine" body of an immigrant in the urban center of the Global North, or through the fantastical reflections of the teenager in a home marked by gender oppression, Mootoo presents some ways out, doors to the imagination for another kind of fluidity and instability, one that cannot lose track of the material and historical processes that constitutes these identities.

Referências

BENJAMIIN, Jéssica. The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination. *Feminist Studies*, v. 6, n. 1, p. 144-174, Spring, 1980. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177655.

BENJAMIN, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love*: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination. Pantheon Books: New York, 1988.

BENJAMIIN, Jessica. *Sameness and Difference:* Toward an 'Over-Inclusive' Theory of Gender Development. *In*: ELLIOT, Anthony; FROSH, Stephen (org.). *Psychoanalysis in contexts*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

BRAND, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return*: Notes to Belonging. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001.

CARBY, Hazel V. *Imperial Intimacies*: A Tale of Two Islands. London: Verso, 2019.

CARTER, Angela. *The Passion of New Eve*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1977.

FANON, Frantz. *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952.

FOUCAULT, Michel. *Ditos e Escritos*, Vol. III – Estética: Literatura e Pintura, Música e Cinema. Tradução de Inês Autran Dourado Barbosa. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2001.

GUNEW, Sneja. Haunted by the Diasporic: Serial Diasporas and the Politics of Nothing. *In*: GUNEW, Sneja. *Haunted Nations*: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms. London: Routledge, 2008. p. 99-117.

HALL, Stuart. *Da diáspora*: identidades e mediações culturais. Organização de Liv Sovik. Tradução de Adelaine La Guardia Resende *et al.* Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2013.

HUTCHEON, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

KING, Rosamond S. *Island Bodies*: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014.

LAURETIS, Teresa de. A tecnologia do gênero. Tradução de Márcia Bandeira de Mello Leite Nunes. *In*: HOLLANDA, Heloisa Buarque de (org.). *Tendências e impasses*: o feminismo como crítica da cultura. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1994. p. 206-242.

LORDE, Audre. *Sister Outsider*: Essays and Speeches. Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1984.

LUIBHÉID, Eithne. Queer/Migration: An Unruly Body of Scholarship. GLQ: *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, [S. l.], v. 14, n. 2-3, p. 169–190, 2008.

MANNUR, Anita. *Culinary Fictions*: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010.

MARTINS, Aline Souza. *As voltas do reconhecimento na clínica e política da psicanálise*. 2020. Tese (Doutorado em Psicologia) – Instituto de Psicologia, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2020.

MOOTOO, Shani. *Out on Main Street and Other Stories*. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1993.

MOYANO, Thiago. *Os alterlugares do corpo*: a diáspora caribenha de Shani Mootoo. São Paulo: Pimenta Cultural, 2023.

PHILLIPS, Caryl. *The European Tribe*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991.

SABSAY, Leticia. *The Political Imaginary of Sexual Freedom*: Subjectivity and Power in the New Sexual Democratic Turn. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

WEEDON, Chris. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.