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Lesbian Migrant Writing: From Lesbian Nation to Queer Diaspora

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Abstract:

The paper examines selected texts of Anna Livia and Shani Mootoo, whose diasporic experiences allowed them to discuss lesbian desire from a non-stigmatised point of view. It also portrays how writing from white, western countries towards the end of the twentieth century, privileged the Irish lesbian narrative to represent a more globalised approach towards lesbian desire. Firstly, the paper will illustrate how distance from Ireland allowed authors to discuss issues affecting and disturbing Lesbian Nation and lesbian community of the 1980s, and secondly, it will discuss how queer diaspora and hybridity shaped lesbian diasporic writing in non-western societies at the turn of the century.

Keywords: Irish Lesbian Diasporic Writing, Lesbian Nation, Migration, Queer Diaspora and Hybridity

1. Irish women's migration and queer diaspora

The theme of diaspora has been a thread that reoccurred in works of Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien, Edna O'Brien, and Emma Donoghue, authors who have always had a strong link with Ireland. This paper will examine texts of writers whose diasporic experiences enabled them to discuss lesbian desire more openly and earlier on, as they were subjected neither to censorship nor to the contempt of Irish patriarchal heteronormativity. However, it will also portray how Livia's writing from England, and Mootoo's from Canada, created a worldwide interconnectedness and thus broadened the writers' possibilities, effectively allowing Irish lesbian narrative to represent a more globalised approach towards lesbian desire. Nevertheless, in the 1980s and early 1990s, at a time when lesbian writing from the Republic of Ireland was

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concerned with issues of coming out, Anna Livia and Shani Mootoo were discussing problems of inclusivity encountered within already established lesbian communities in their respective countries of arrival.

In the 1980s, Livia emphasises the conflicting disparities of age, race, ethnicity, class, social status, and position, whereas Mootoo, in the 1990s and 2000s, touches upon subjects of nationality, transculturality, and gender performativity troubling lesbian communities. This paper will, firstly, delineate Irish women's migration before investigating queer diaspora. Secondly, it will illustrate how distance from Ireland allowed Anna Livia to discuss issues affecting and disturbing Lesbian Nation and lesbian community of the 1980s, and thirdly, based on Shani Mootoo's fiction, it will discuss how queer diaspora and hybridity shaped lesbian diasporic writing and reshaped Irish lesbian literature at the turn of the twenty-first century. The term Lesbian Nation was coined by Jill Johnston in *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (1973). She proposed to build the nation of lesbians in order to portray her disagreement with the anti-lesbian branch of the women's liberation movement, as well as her conviction of the oppression of lesbians by heteronormative institutions (Sayer 2003, 461). The term adheres to European and North American lesbian utopian separatists, who believed in creating women communities, with an emphasis on women's superiority. Lesbian Nation, however, soon became to be criticised for its white exclusiveness and class hierarchy. The need to make the connection between Lesbian Nation and queer diaspora is extremely crucial, since it challenges the prevalence of gay white men in queer diasporic discourse and emphasises the presence of lesbians within queer diasporic communities. The essay, however, will portray the shift away from Lesbian Nation in Livia's work towards the inclusivity of queer diaspora, which allows Mootoo to emphasise the need for the inclusion of non-white lesbians in the tradition of queer writing.

There were three major waves of Irish emigration in the twentieth century, each of which was highly populated by young women in their rejection of family life (O'Carroll 1990, 145). Diaspora, therefore, is undoubtedly marked by gender, which means that although economic causes, such as employment opportunities, may have been initially the main motive for Irish women to emigrate, this changed with time, and around the mid-twentieth century other social causes began to play an equally important role (146). Thus, as an alternative to marriage, Irish women chose emigration as a way of emancipation from patriarchy, which considered women's migration as threatening to the image of their purity, and as undermining their national and religious identities (Ryan 1990, 45-67), given that the traditional Irish family was endangered by the women's search for better opportunities and liberation abroad.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Irish women who became more open about their lesbian sexuality were proclaimed as sexual transgressors and were brought to

courts and public attention in order to be shamed. Although Breda Gray sees such punishment, especially in the mid-1990s, as having a rather opposite effect, as more and more women gained the courage to express their sexuality, the numbers of women emigrating during the 1980s, unfortunately, proved that many could not withstand being exposed to public scrutiny (2004, 29). Furthermore, this also suggests that many of these women were most likely lesbians, since public shaming would reveal their sexuality, an event that, of course, many tried to avoid at all costs. The latter statement emphasises the interrelation of Irish women's migration and queer diaspora, as many lesbians left Ireland in order to be able to escape both contempt and prosecution. In fact, until as late as the 1990s, many Irish gay men and lesbians believed that they were expected to emigrate, as their lesbian sexuality was incompatible with Irishness (O'Carroll, Collins 1995, 1-10).

Categories of migrancy and diaspora are deeply interrelated. Diaspora provides a space that is inclusive of identification with the country of origin and the country of arrival. In an Irish context, it "highlights multi-generations, multi-connections [...] a global imagined community of Irishness, and the contradictory relationship between the 'homeland' and [the host country]. It also undermines nation-state identities and profiles hybrid identities and it challenges assimilation paradigms" (Hickman 2002, 16). This means that the experience of identifying as Irish is different for each individual, depending on their social status, religion, colour, or other historical motives, such as reasons for the dispersal itself.

Queer diaspora entails the creation of queer spaces within the already ethnically defined diasporas, and it refers to the transnational and multicultural web of connections of queer communities. In opposition to the restrictive Lesbian Nation, queer diaspora not only problematises, but also recognises differences within the group (Fortier 2002, 185). Frank Mort, for instance, writes about a "well-established homosexual diaspora, crossing nation states and linking individuals and social constituencies" (1994, 202-203), which provides gay men and lesbians with spaces for sexual identification and expression that is independent of borders and boundaries. In Britain, for example, the Irish Women's Centre, established in 1983, meant that the identities of "Irish and woman, Irish and feminist, Irish and lesbian could be supported and legitimized" (Gray 2000, 73).

Anna Livia and Shani Mootoo, by adopting imagery of queer diaspora in order to portray lesbian sexuality devoid of discrimination, succeed in remodelling the homeland and place of arrival into queer spaces that permit "identification, affiliation, and communication across class and racial boundaries [...] that would inevitably fall outside traditional place-bound readings of Irish diaspora" (Madden 2012, 175-193). In the Irish context, therefore, queer diaspora represents minoritised lesbian sexualities that were hitherto undertheorised and often historically omitted from traditional as well as gay

diasporic discourses. Accordingly, for the purpose of my argument, I will adopt the notion of queer diaspora as a space from which Irish-born female authors could write freely about lesbian desire, and which equipped them with the possibility of addressing the female-loving-female issues in a direct manner, and with the use of an infinite, non-restrictive vocabulary. As Gopinath suggest, "suturing "queer' to "diaspora' [...] recuperates those desire, practices and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries" (2007, 11).

This paper does not use the term only in relation to the Irish-born authors' opportunities to portray lesbian desire explicitly; it also employs it as a counterpart of Lesbian Nation. The word "queer" in queer diaspora includes a variety of lesbian sexualities that would not be permitted in just simply gay or lesbian diasporas. The use of the term "queer" opens new inclusivity, quite distinct from the restrictiveness of Lesbian Nation, as "queer" not only dislocates the assertive categories of "gay" and "lesbian" (13), but also "encourage[s] the breakdown of traditional scholarly or cultural categories [as it refers to] topics outside of the range of lesbian/gay studies, employing it instead as a kind of position against normative or dominant modes of thought" (Whittington 2012, 157). Nevertheless, the obliteration of Lesbian Nation and the concomitant move of diasporic fiction to represent an all-inclusive queer diaspora does not only reduce the risk of creating a transexclusionary space, but also defies the concept of a post-lesbian era. In fact, Jack Halberstam visualises the interconnectedness of those two fields, and refers to it as "a queer lesbian studies", and argues that " 'lesbian' is a term that modifies and qualifies 'queer', and 'queer' is a term capable of challenging the stability of identities subsumed by the label 'lesbian' " (1996, 259). Moreover, the juxtaposition of queer diaspora and Lesbian Nation offered here allows for the imagining of lesbian desire across national and cultural borders, often characterised by, but not limited to, queer hybridity. The intention of this paper is to portray how lesbian narrative depicts the politicisation of lesbians of colour and from a variety of backgrounds not only to oppose heteronormativity, but in order to become more inclusive, and to emphasise lesbian presence within queer communities of the world. Moreover, the essay offers the reconsideration of lesbian desire and national belonging in the global context, as both Lesbian Nation and queer diaspora are independent of national borders. Diasporic lesbian writing, furthermore, challenges national borders and subverts national bonds. Thus, lesbian fiction from (queer) diaspora connects lesbians of all nationalities, races, ethnic backgrounds and classes. At the core of all Livia's novels, owing to her own emigration, stands a comparison of various countries and issues that national displacement causes within the lesbian community.

Following the second wave of feminism in England, which, similar to Ireland, included lesbian activism, Livia is at pains to point out the disparagements between lesbians. The disappearing of this shared sense of a united

lesbian community, to which Jill Johnston, who coined the term in 1971, refers to as Lesbian Nation, is the focal point in the majority of Livia's fiction. Lesbian Nation, argues Bonnie Zimmerman, "is a separate lesbian space inhabited by a community of women who share lifestyle, a set of beliefs, an ethic, and a culture. [...] The lesbian community is a space, or a group of people, or even a concept, within which the individual lesbian feels herself welcome and at home" (1990, 120-121). Although Lesbian Nation has failed because of its privileging of white women (177), it is the idea of an ideal lesbian community, however, a community where "the lesbian individual may feel a sense of camaraderie with other lesbians, a sense of support, shared understanding, shared vision, shared sense of self 'as a lesbian, vis-à-vis the outside world' " (Krieger 1982, 92) that Livia seems to be problematising the most. Queer diaspora, therefore, offers the heterogeneity of which Lesbian Nation was devoid.

2. Lesbian nation

Probably the most prolific writer of lesbian fiction writing from diaspora was Anna Livia, who is often omitted from the canon of Irish writers and is only considered to have "an Irish background" (Donoghue 2002, 1090). Anna Livia Julian Brawn (1955-2007) was born in Dublin and spent her early childhood in Africa, where her father worked as a filmmaker. In 1970, the family returned to England, where Livia graduated from University College London, and later worked at Onlywomen Press that, at the time, was the only lesbian and radical feminist press in Britain. In the early 1990s, she moved to Berkeley, California, to complete her PhD in French linguistics. During her writing career, and later as an academic, Livia published six novels, four collections of short stories, and three scholarly books on language, gender, and sexuality. Whereas her first novel emphasises the existence of Lesbian Nation, her later works argue for an establishment of a lesbian community that, unlike Lesbian Nation, will be inclusive to lesbians of different ages, races, social positions, cultural backgrounds, and ethnicities. Her first work of fiction, *Relatively Norma*, was published in 1982 by the Onlywomen Press. It is Livia's only book where the main narrative is distant from issues of lesbian equality; at that time, Lesbian Nation was still unified in its common cause for acceptance, as it was regarded as a refuge by the wider society (Sayer 2003, 462). Therefore, *Relatively Norma* concentrates on the issue of lesbian otherness in relation to the rest of heterosexual society and vice versa. Zimmerman suggests that the title of the book itself points to the division between the two sexualities: "all concepts of normality are relative, not because homosexuality is normal and natural, but because heterosexuality itself is weird and crazy. Who among us, gay or straight, is capable of defining what is or is not normal?" (1990, 43). As the protagonist of the novel, Minnie,

travels, just like Livia herself did, to Australia to visit her mother and sisters to come out, the overt representations of lesbian desire pervade the narrative, which constantly questions and ridicules the dominance of heterosexuality.

Minnie, the London-based lesbian, hides her sexuality "very well and her family accepted her as an honorary heterosexual. [...] [However, she is] waiting for her disease to show" (Livia 1982, 17, 22). The partition between hetero and homosexuality was so great that, at the time, many gay men and lesbians expected expulsion from their family homes; in fact, Minnie waits for "her family to throw her out" (22). However, this is not the stance which Anna Livia has decided to take in her novel, as Minnie's eventual confession meets with her mother's full approval, and is, in fact, dismissed and deemed as predestined (177). As the title of the novel suggests, an emphasis is placed on portraying lesbian desire as the better option in the existing binary. Therefore, by placing lesbian sexuality at the top of the ladder, Livia emphasises the concept of a coalition of lesbians of different races and cultural backgrounds, as, it may be suggested, it is useful in the battle of eradication of the dominance of gay white men within queer discourse.

Time and again, Livia's characters highlight the (un)importance of men and the need for lesbian separatism. Minnie, for instance, although she believes that some men "have their own unique contribution to make" (23), reduces them to the status of sperm producers. Such attempt at the reversal of gender roles allows women to enter the public arena and to develop their own, independent communities, whilst confining men to the domestic sphere. In *Relatively Norma*, newspapers write about adolescent boys who, in order to replicate menstruation, "cut themselves open once a month so they can bleed like *normal* people" [my italics] (*ibidem*). This clearly demarcates the division between men and women, and in particular between gay men and lesbians. Moreover, as the private begins to be influenced by the political sphere, this gendered role reversal brings to mind a reiteration of the feminist slogan "the personal is political", which undermines the hitherto prevailing family values and the solely domestic and reproductive role of women. Livia returns to the obliteration of this conception in her third novel, *Bulldozer Rising*, where she frees women of this obligation by introducing artificial wombs (Livia 1988, 88).

Shortly after the publication of *Relatively Norma*, the notion of Lesbian Nation became a strain on lesbian-feminist writing, as the once idyllic setting of the reimagined isle of Lesbos began to be signified by the exclusive whiteness of its members. In order to become more inclusive, Lesbian Nation needed to become ethnically and racially diverse, especially in terms of identity politics. The movement of radical feminism, therefore, was in conflict with its two major tenets: the unification of all lesbians based on similarity of sexuality and gender, and the acceptance of differences that may arise as the outcome of those – class, age, race, or physical ability (Zimmerman

1990, 166). Therefore, whereas Livia's first novel is rather utopian in its representation of the lesbian community, her own diasporic experiences made her aware that in order to avoid the mimicry of male imperialism, her portrayal of Lesbian Nation must negotiate the terms of its inclusiveness based on similarities as well as differences, even though this could result in its dissipation into smaller, polychromatic communities.

Such position is transparent in Livia's, as well as Shani Mootoo's, later fictions, as both writers attempt to place their culturally diverse characters within a wider lesbian community. As one of the characters from "Little Moments of Eternity" observes, "all lesbians [are] foreigners; though it might sound exotic to be different, it is hard to have no country, and even the community [lesbians] make, [they] call it a 'ghetto', in case [their] need for it shows through" (Livia 1986, 70). This existence of ghettos, "the ruins of the world" (Livia 1990, 57), instead of a unified place of belonging, arises time and again in works by lesbian writers from across Irish lesbian diaspora. Anna Livia further extrapolates her view of the disparities in the countless lesbian communities by describing a "planet of water and song, harbour for aliens from countless galaxies, countless timezones[...] the planet of song where both of us and all are alien" (*ibidem*). The metaphor of aliens and galaxies transforms Lesbian Nation into what Bonnie Zimmerman refers to as "a microcosm of the dominant culture" (1990, 175). By imposing the views of white Western lesbians upon the rest of the community, Lesbian Nation becomes what it is trying to distinguish itself from: a female version of a patriarchal imperialist nation.

As Lesbian Nation becomes more of an imaginary concept rather than an achievable target, Livia's fiction begins to concentrate on the unification of lesbians as part of a wider, globalised society. *Bulldozer Rising*, therefore, depicts a resistance force of "oldwomen" of various ages, backgrounds, classes, social statuses, and nationalities, who have decided to live above the prescribed age of forty-one. Whereas writings from 1980s Ireland concentrated on equality between men and women, and later between heterosexual, lesbian, and gay persons, Anna Livia, a decade earlier, emphasises inequalities troubling lesbian community that must be addressed first, before lesbians can come together as a whole and assimilate into the wider society: issues of race, age, ethnicity or multiculturalism. Those exact issues recur and reappear frequently in Livia's *Accommodation Offered*, as well as in Shani Mootoo's *Out on Main Street* and *Valmiki's Daughter*, both of which will be discussed later in relation to diaspora, hybridity, and multiculturalism analysed from the perspective of post-colonialism.

Age inequality that Livia describes in *Bulldozer Rising* takes a form of portraying one of the "oldwomen", a fifty-five-year-old Karlin, in a relationship with much younger, androgynous Ithaca. The two women do not only remain together despite Karlin's age, but also maintain to find common-

ground despite their different social positions in an organised society, the structure of which very much resembles the rigoristic rules of the hegemonic patriarchal order:

> A city of scarce resources requires of its inhabitants a jigsaw fit: the antagonistic harmony of the parts which perfects the harmony of the whole. A muscle flexes, another will stretch: without either, the limb fails to function. Zappers stride and nellies trot, the different pace permitting staggered use of walkways. Youngmen it behoves to barrow and billow; demure youngwomen space for a thrusting strut. First principles of concavity and convexity. (Livia 1988, 44)

By depicting the city as a well-oiled machine, Livia ridicules its orderly structure in the larger context of the novel. The aim of *Bulldozer Rising* is to emphasise the exclusion of old and invalid members of the society that can symbolise sexual minorities and the inequalities between the younger and older generations of lesbians. By positioning her characters in the science fiction genre, Livia further accentuates the very preposterousness that may lead to the ruin of the whole lesbian community: a nuclear explosion caused by the young citizens who could not find a way of communication with older women. At the climax of the novel, only a handful of women survive – this symbolises the division of lesbian sisterhood into smaller communities that, without a reconcilement, will not have any power to survive within the dominant society.

Apart from drawing close attention to issues of equality within the lesbian community, Livia also engaged in writing in post-modernist genres other than science fiction. In *Minimax*, she adopts the parody of lesbian Gothic to draw attention to the age divide between the lesbian community, as well as to negate the misconception of the femme/butch paradigm, or the generic, decadent image of a lesbian in pre-Butler sense before she made the distinction between gender and biological sex. This was especially interesting to readers of the time, as the 1980s and 1990s witnessed attempts at re-evaluation of this stereotype (Palmer 1999, 111): lesbians of *Minimax*, instead of visiting barber shops "now go to the ladies' salons and have their nails done and their cuticles removed" (Livia 1991, 13). Livia's fiction rearticulates female masculinity/butch and femininity/femme in order to underline the disentanglement of sex and gender, and to disseminate the butch/femme cliché which she depicts as "a viable sexual practice" (Roof 1998, 33) rather than a mere travesty of heterosexuality. Her aim, therefore, allowed by her diasporic positioning, is to move away from the stereotypical perception of lesbians as imitations of men, and portray the butch/femme paradigm in a new light. Furthermore, Roof suggests that butches were often compared to men to show that lesbian-feminism strived for coalition amongst lesbians against heterosexual patriarchy and the stereotypical characterization of les-

bians (30). As a result, in the second half of the 1980s, issues of racial, class, ethnic and sexual differences dominated the scholarship of lesbian studies, and consequently lesbian fiction. Judith Roof writes that "once racial differences are acknowledged as producing real and viable differences among lesbians, the door is open for a reconception of lesbian politics that no longer insists on homogeneity as a political requisite, but rather on an acknowledgment of differences as a political necessity" (33). This decidedly marks the moment in Livia's fiction, at the end of the 1980s, that witnesses the movement away from lesbian separatism towards the coalition of lesbians within a much broader queer community.

By the 1990s, the distinction between sex and gender was theorised by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* among others. The terminology of queer replaced the limiting ring of the word "lesbian", which was characterised with the association of racial and ethnic differences. The term queer, Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore proposes, "reframes[s], reclaim[s], and re-shape[s] the world […] [through] struggles to transform gender, revolutionize sexuality, build community and family outside of traditional models, and dismantle all hierarchies of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ability" (2008, 6). Whereas the use of this terminology is especially beneficiary in case of my analysis of Livia's and Mootoo's lesbian fictions, the word itself must not be romanticised into being a tool for cutting across differences of all lesbian and queer communities. In fact, many lesbians oppose the term "queer", as it denies them political individuality and specificity for which lesbian-feminists and activists have fought for decades. Similar to Biddy Martin, I also see the use of "queer" as an opposition to lesbian-feminism and failed efforts of creating alliances between lesbians and gay men (1994, 104-105); however, I use the term restrictively, and in compliance with Bernstein Sycamore's definition, in the sense that coalesces lesbians of all ages, races, and social classes.

Livia shows how living in diaspora, despite a lot of stigma connected with the subject, allows one to redefine the self's sexual identity to emerge on different terms to those prevailing in the country of origin. In *Accommodation Offered*, for instance, one of Livia's three main characters, Sadie, who is described as "a homeless derelict, a lesbian, a foreigner" (Livia 1985, 63), finds that many years of national displacement and comparison to other countries taught her to appreciate the freedom of expressing her sexual identity that she has found in England, and she is ready to call this strange country home. Queer diaspora, therefore, at last allows lesbians the freedom and safety of domesticated lives, often away from restrictive laws of their countries of origin: "women were unpacking rucksacks. [...] They were replacing sleeping bags with cotton sheets, [...] waking by reflex not wrist alarm" (52). However, the elimination of inequalities within the lesbian community also means smoothing out the inequalities between sexes and genders within the wider society, thus inviting the prospect of assimilation that was implausible

and uncompelling to the lesbian separatists of Lesbian Nation. Domestication of lesbian relationships becomes similar to the one of the heteronormative order: "being a lesbian was becoming a very common or garden affair, it seemed [...] homogeneity [...] means [...] [that] everyone is getting more like everyone else" (Livia 1991, 44, 139).

As already observed, Anna Livia's fiction is a transgressive tool not only in highlighting the differences and suggesting affinities within the lesbian community, such as age or social position. In large measure, it also concentrates on issues of national belonging, race, ethnicity, and multiculturalism, as all of the above are the limiting factors to achieving equality within lesbian communities, as well as in the wider society. *Accommodation Offered*, Livia's second novel, incorporates the pressing need for the obliteration of those disparities by encompassing into its plot three lesbians of different ages, nationalities, and statuses.

Whereas in *Relatively Norma*, Beryl, Minnie's mother, emigrated to Australia to escape her abusive husband, one of the main protagonists of *Accommodation Offered*, Polly, leaves Ireland to move to England with her new husband, whom she married for financial reasons and under the pressure of Irish tradition, which imposed marriage on young women as the only option of securing their futures: "my father's firm was doing badly [...] and I didn't have any other suggestions" (Livia 1985, 9). Thus, once her marriage proved to be a failure, she decides to explore her sexuality further and answers a newspaper ad to meet with a woman (15). Upon meeting Margot, who is also Irish, Polly embarks on a journey to consolidate identities of her newly-discovered sexuality and her sense of national belonging. Her search for identifying her sexuality is demarcated by long hours spent in various London libraries:

> [Margot] […] showed me [...] a yellow hardback with HOMOSEXUALITY [...] down the spine. We flicked through it [...] "promiscuous lesbians … comparatively rare birds … particularly dangerous … dominant, forceful personalities … weaker, more pliant women …" Far worse than "Mutual Masturbation". "The butch or 'dyke' type, swagger along in men's trousers and parody the normal male … exhibitionistic minority … more discreet deviants …" (25, 26)

The fact that Polly comes across the thirty-year-old *Homosexuality: Its Nature and Causes* by D. J. West, which was first published in 1955, reflects, despite the Women's Liberation and the toils of lesbian activism, the need for a distinctive acknowledgment of the varieties of lesbian sexualities by the larger society, as well as for a rendered historical presence of lesbians. Moreover, Polly's inability to identify with any definitions, highlights, similarly to *Minimax*, the common misconceptions about lesbians caused by their invisibility and misrepresentation in official discourses.

These shortcomings of information in Polly's search are regulated by "the Assumption", which can be read, similar to the city from the *Bulldozer Ris-*

ing, as the equivalent of heteronormativity that is, in large measure, ordained by the Church. It is a patriarchal institution that dictates the desired modes of life and behaviour. Consequently, the "deviants" of West's definition will be, in line with the Church's preaching, not forgiven[1]. Although Livia's fiction was never indicative of being iconoclastic, the connection between the strict rules and the Church, as well as the dominance of men within the religious institution, cannot remain unnoticed:

> The right side. The Assumption. According to the Assumption everyone was white, middle class and heterosexual, aged about forty. They were also male. Of course the Assumption knew that some people were working class, black or homosexual. They were also female. But if a person was walking down the street his skin was 'flesh' coloured, his suit expensive, he had half an eye out for pretty girls and probably voted C of E [the Church of England]. People were men. (Livia 1985, 50)

Livia's stance on sexual or religious identities, however, is not the main focus of the novel. Whereas her other works of fiction are largely concerned with societal inequalities within the lesbian community, *Accommodation Offered* deals predominantly with other categories of social identities, such as a sense of national belonging that, positioned outside of one's place of origin, becomes central to the creation of diasporic identity.

As I already mentioned, Polly's migration was a result of her financial situation, as well as Irish societal expectations regarding women. She represents all Irish women who emigrated in order to escape the parochialism and insularity of Ireland. Therefore, once in England, Polly can embark on becoming a PhD student, as well as on initiating relationships with other women. Although Irish diaspora dates back to the times of the Great Famine, when between 1845 and 1849 over two million people were estimated to have left Ireland, the new generations of Irish people, and especially women, are motivated by the freedom of their chosen countries of arrival. Along with globalisation, however, where the flexibility of labour markets enhances motives of migrants even further, Ireland is still experiencing large numbers of emigration.

3. Hybrid queer identities in Shani Mootoo's Out on Main Street *and* Valmiki's Daughter

Anna Livia and Shani Mootoo both discuss the problematic identity formations within diasporic queer hybrid settings. Discussions of ethnic and cultural hybridity emerged in the eighteenth century in the context of inter-

[1] There are a handful of passages in the Bible to proclaim homosexuality as sinful – there are two in the Old Testament (Genesis 19, and Leviticus 18 and 20), and three in the New Testament (Romans 1: 18-21, Corinthians 6: 9-10, and Timothy 1: 8-10).

racial contact and fears over the contamination of white European bodies as a result of colonisation and migration, and again in the wake of decolonisation movements (Brah, Coombs 2000, 3; Kraidy 2002, 318). It was in the twentieth century, however, when the term adopted an entirely new meaning owing to the formation of postcolonial African, South American and Asian cultures in the West, and, in the latter half of the century, from the development of national diasporas across the world. Homi Bhabha was the first person to disintegrate the concept from its previous racial meaning. In his analysis of the relation between the coloniser and the colonised, Bhabha emphasised their interdependence. He developed his concept of hybridity from analysing transformation and translation of language, placed alongside cultural theory, to describe the construction of cultural identity. Bhabha's hybridity, therefore, denotes the emergence of a new cultural identity formed by the colonised or, in postcolonial contexts, diasporic subjects in their place of arrival in the West. Those new identities are created in what Bhabha terms the "third space". It is a space that "initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation" (1994, 1-2). It accommodates the articulation and production of new cultural meanings that obfuscate the extent of existing boundaries, thus providing the displaced subjects with new politics of difference.

Nowadays, in times of globalisation, the terminology of hybridity is changing, as the term does not allude solely to postcolonial interactions, but it expands its reach to signify diasporic practices in dominant cultures (Dirlik 1994, 329). In its recent usage, "hybridity appears as a convenient category at 'the edge' or contact point of diaspora, describing cultural mixture where the diasporized meets the host in the scene of migration" (Kalra, Kalhoon, Hutnyk 2005, 70). Hybridity, as the integration of cultural bodies, is now known to deconstruct the inequities of race, language, and nation (Yazdiha 2010, 31). Stuart Hall terms diasporic culture as characterised "not by essence of purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity" (2003, 244). Such approach undoubtedly celebrates difference and ethnicity, de-centralises ethnic or religious totalitarianism, and allows us to create an image of diaspora whose foundations are built on celebrating differences. Recently, however, critics have embraced the idea of rejecting the concept of hybridity as a defining process of creating of diasporic identities, as Bhabha's concept of hybridity has been criticised for disguising cultural differences. Instead of placing cultures within a set special context, the concept of hybridity offers a global solution to transculturation within dispersed communities. Sissy Helff, in particular, believes that hybridity does not seem to be the most accurate term to discuss postcolonial experiences and forced diasporas of marginal society members (2012, 191). Whereas the

concept adheres to colonial/imperial and postcolonial concepts, migration studies scholars purport that Bhabha's term is too restrictive and instead suggest the use of terms such as transmigrancy and transculturality. Both of those terms describe cultures and cultural encounters, and allow for new, transcultural imagery characterised by heterogeneity (*ibidem*). Thus it seems that the assertion of hybridity as a postcolonial condition runs the risk of delocating and de-historicising cultures from their particular temporal contexts.

The fiction discussed in this final part of the essay accommodates diasporic and hybrid queer identities, or identity formations, that struggle with incorporating various subject positions, such as class, race or gender, as cultural hybridity is an unnegotiable aspect of (queer) diaspora. The cultural diversity of all places bears a mixture of cultures and beliefs from various backgrounds. Combined with the notion of queer, as in the case of characters of Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter* as well as *Out on Main Street*, diasporic hybridity, whether acquired or inherited, poses complications, confusion, and even shame. The notion of queer itself is hybrid in the sense that lesbians and gay men, whom Alan Sinfield considers to be an ethnic group, also need to fight for their rights of inclusion within the society: "recognition that race and ethnicity might be constructed, hybrid and insecure, but yet necessary, has obvious resonances for lesbian and gay cultural politics [...] for [queer] subculture, is certainly hybrid" (1997, 200). Whereas Livia's fiction was confined to multinational Britain and Australia, Shani Mootoo's writing takes her readers to multiculturally-varied Canada and Trinidad and Tobago. Consequently, her fiction incorporates the binary notions of straight/queer, white/coloured, and citizen/migrant, to represent the multiplicity of identities and subjectivities of lesbians of colour in a foreign setting, which is translated into a division in diasporic writing between white and non-white, as well as Western and non-Western authors.

Shani Mootoo was born in Dublin, in 1957, to a white Irish mother and an East-Indian-Caribbean father, where they remained for three months after their daughter's birth before returning with her to Trinidad. Mootoo, who therefore grew up in Trinidad, moved to Canada at the age of nineteen, where she received her BA and MA degrees in Fine Arts and English and Theatre respectively. Between 1994 and 1999, Mootoo lived in New York, creating and exhibiting her visual and video art. Mootoo's close association with Canada can be seen clearly in her poems "All the Irish I know" and "All the Hindi I know" (Mootoo 2001, 95, 96). The poetry illustrates Mootoo's limited knowledge of Hindi vocabulary and culture, which effectively points to her strong link with her new Canadian citizenship. She commemorates that in her childhood she only knew her version of Trinidadian English, and in her late twenties she was actually deprived of her Trinidadian citizenship, as she was not allowed to hold the dual Trinidadian-Canadian citizenship ow-

ing to the fact that she was born in Ireland[2]. In fact, Mootoo feels strongly about her Canadianness, as it allows her to take a stand against discrimination of lesbians in Trinidad, as well as elsewhere, and to represent the queer minorities of diaspora (Helff, Dalal 2012, 74). She states:

> The stories I write, the art I make all speak of the desire to break and simultaneously to braid given identities, to make transformative leaps into [...] a self-defined "other".[...] It is through my writing [...] that [...] I dare [...] to attempt to purse [my] lips and blow at the borders of lesbian identity, create new spaces where [...] the inequalities and discrimination of genders within lesbianism itself get addressed, and where that multiplicity of genders is celebrated. (Mootoo 2008, 83, 94)

This statement does not only portray Mootoo as an advocate of LGBTQI+ rights – it argues, similar to the novels of Anna Livia, for a positive approach to the differences between lesbians across the world. Thus, Mootoo creates an image of queer diaspora, whose foundations are based on celebrating the differences.

She is, as she refers to herself, a "multiple migrant", and this certainly finds reflection in her writing as well as in her art. In her first work of fiction, *Out on Main Street*, the characters of the title short story experience feelings of a concomitant national and sexual displacement. Asvin Kini argues that diaspora in *Out on Main Street* is "not inherently nostalgic for times gone by and places left behind, but rather is formed in relation to the material, racial, gender, and sexual dynamics of colonialism, indenture, nationalism, and globalization" (2014, 186). Thus, the story, portraying a lesbian Indian character in Canada, engages with cultural practices in diasporic context whilst exemplifying other reconfigurations of the term, such as sexuality and gender.

In the story, published in 1993, the setting, an Indian sweet shop on a Canadian main street, could signify the hybrid queer third space, which the narrator and her girlfriend Janet, both descendants of Indian labourers and Trinidadian migrants, visit sporadically to buy *meethai.* "Kush Valley Sweets", as a contact zone of changing power relations between genders, sexualities and nationalities, is "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people separated geographically and historically come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt 1992, 6)[3].

[2] The Irish Consulate General, after Mootoo's reading of "All the Irish I know", said to her: "Madam, whether you like it or not, you were born in Ireland, and you are Irish. There is nothing you can do about that. Or at the very least it would not be easy to renounce your Irish nationality. Ireland does not easily give up its citizens, you know" (Mootoo 2008, 89).

[3] The word "kush" in "Kush Valley Sweets" in Hindi and Urdu means happy, which is used concurrently with the word "gay", therefore, the sweet shop, essentially, is marked as a queer contact zone (Kini 2014, 193).

Factually, within the short twelve pages, Mootoo reconfigures dichotomous notions of lesbian/heterosexual, Indian/Indian-Caribbean, white/coloured, male/female, and encapsulates issues of gender performativity, as well as those of sexual, ethnic, national, class, and cultural/linguistic disparities. Those, however, seem to be disrupted and in constant flux, as power relations shift constantly to allow the emergence of the "new ways to conceptualizing the self and others" (Gopinath 2007 , 167). Moreover, the connection between images of eating sticky delicacies and the lesbian act of lovemaking further evokes the association of the sweet shop with the queer contact zone, where the protagonists' desires of homeland, tradition, and sexual desire, should all become fulfilled at once. Queer diaspora in this context is associated with the combination of a free expression of sexuality with one's cultural origin, thus providing queer migrants with the sense of inclusion and self-acceptance, which may not have been possible in their place of origin.

First of all, class, national, racial, cultural and linguistic inequalities can be seen in the narrator's description of herself and Janet:

> We is watered-down Indians – we ain't good grade A Indians. We skin brown, is true, but we doh even think 'bout India unless something happen over dere and it come on de news [...] Mostly, back home, we is kitchen Indians; some kind a Indian food every day, at least once a day, but we doh get cardamom and other fancy spice down dere so de food not spicy like Indian food I eat in restaurants up here.
>
> [...]
>
> Yuhask [Indian store clerks] a question in English and dey insist on giving de answer in Hindi or Punjabi or Urdu or Gujarati. [...] And den dey look at yuhdisdainful disdainful – like yuhdisloyal, like yuh is a traitor. (Mootoo 1993, 45, 48)

The narrator's insistence on the categorisation of Indians already portrays that, even at the end of the twentieth century and in a foreign country, the caste system is still the ruling element in dividing *varnas* and *jatis*[4]. However, it is the issue of authenticity that plays a more important role. The unnamed narrator feels inferior compared to other Indians, as her multiplicitous diasporic positioning is preconditioned by her ancestors who were labourers brought to Trinidad during the colonial indenture between 1845 and 1916: "I used to think I was a Hindu *par excellence* until I come up here and see real flesh and blood Indian from India" (47). Although the narrator's textual creole dialect and accent may suggest the putative Indian authenticity, this is

[4] *Varna* and *jati* are the two most proximate terms to portray the caste system in India. *Varna* means "colour" and groups people into four classes: the Brahmins (priestly people), the *Kshatriyas* (administrators and warriors), the *Vaishyas* (merchants, tradesmen and farmers), and *Shudras* (labouring classes). Convergently, *jati*, which means "birth", are people who form more flexible social groups.

soon disproved in an encounter with the shopkeeper at "Kush Valley Sweets", with whom she argues over the terminology of sweets. His victory over the narrator's knowledge of Hindi, however, is short-lived, as the authenticity of the shop's proprietor himself is soon undermined and disproved when he is challenged on racial grounds by two white Canadian customers. As a result, power relations shift back in favour of the narrator as the shopkeeper has to admit reluctantly that he is from Fiji and not India. Anita Mannur suggests that, despite their initial hostility against each other, this experience binds the narrator and the shopkeeper, as they now identify in unison as immigrants of both colour and Indian descent (2010, 45).

Secondly, the portrayal of the lack of a defined ethnic identity in the narrator and her girlfriend can be observed in the comparison of her own family and ascendancy to the one of Janet's, as they were one of the first families to convert from Hinduism to Presbyterianism. Janet's knowledge of the origins of certain Hindu customs is vague, and her name itself is the result of her mother's defying the traditional Indian ritual, which, instead of being performed by a reverend of the mission, Janet's mother decided to undertake herself. This does not only problematise the fixity of Hindu culture, but also emphasises the multiculturalism of Trinidad as well as Canada, thus pointing to the heterogeneity of the culture that is infused with diasporic discourse, and Mootoo's emphasis for the need of coalition based on difference and dispersion.

Lastly, Mootoo's text questions discourses influencing the construction of diasporic queer identity by shifting the power relations from heterosexual to lesbian, and from male to female. Gender and masculinity/femininity are disrupted as the narrator bases her gender performance on the femininity of gay men:

> Walking next to Janet, who so femme dat she redundant, tend to make me look like a gender dey forget to classify. Before going Main Street I does parade in front de mirror practicing a jiggly-wiggly kind a walk. [...] I jiggle and wiggle in mih best imitation a some a dem gay fellas dat I see downtown in Vancouver, de ones who more femme dan even Janet. (Mootoo 1993, 48, 50)

Whereas the racist incident imposed by the white males bonds the customers of the café as Indians/foreigners, the power relations shift again after their departure – the shop owner and his brothers, back in their familiar environment, return to the roles of sexist males, imposing their staring glances and touches on their female clientele. This establishes a gendered unity that replaces the previous unanimity, and women begin to solidarise against male tyranny. However, their unison is short-lived, and clearly based on the presumption of the narrator's and Janet's heterosexuality, as the arrival of two white lesbians, friends of the narrator and Janet, soon realigns their solidarity with the proprietors: "well, all cover get blown. If it was even remotely pos-

sible dat I wasn't noticeable before, now Janet and I were over-exposed [...] insteada any recognition of our buddiness against de fresh brothers, I get a face dat look like it was in de presence of a very foul smell" (57). It can be assumed, therefore, that the narrator's will to achieve class privilege is manifested in her attempts at "passing" as heterosexual, feminine, and Indian (Wall 2011, 11-13), which points to the multiplicity of areas of affiliation to non-normative sexuality.

The fact that the story ends with a rhetorical question: "So tell me, what yuh think 'bout dis nah, girl?" (Mootoo 1993, 57), leaves the reader with a choice of "the recognition and acceptance of the difference of the other rather than through an attempt to narcissistically mirror the self in the other" (Gopinath 2007, 189). Essentially, Mootoo's own diasporic experiences, similarly to Livia's, allow her to position lesbian desire across more than just one location. She discusses it from a global point of view, where an individual, concomitantly with homo-/lesbophobia, has to face other barriers conditioning the power struggle of self-identification. Whereas the short story is set in Canada, Mootoo's third novel, *Valmiki's Daughter*, is an astute testimony of what fate meets sexual "deviants" in Trinidad.

The embodiment of the consequences awaiting lesbians in Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter* is seen in its minor character, Merle Bedi, who was banished from her family home and now lives on the streets trying to survive. It is said of her that her prostitution is actually a better option than her same-sex desire and that it "might cure her" (Mootoo 2010, 23). In fact, homosexuality in Trinidad is still illegal. Men can expect a lifetime in prison for the crime of sodomy, whereas lesbians are subject to the maximum of five years of imprisonment. Furthermore, homosexual people who are not citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are denied the right to entry. Not surprisingly then, characters of *Valmiki's Daughter* hide their desires and do not discuss them publicly, excluding even their closest friends or family members. However, the connotations of the androgynous name Merle, as it can be given to a man as well as a woman, crosses the boundaries of gender and sexuality, and symbolises knowledge, intelligence, and wit. Therefore, Merle's existence on the streets, even though she is a social outcast, is not portrayed as hopeless. Rather, it can be supposed that her knowledge gave her freedom, which she would not be able to experience had she stayed at her upper-class family home to fulfil her daughterly duties of becoming a wife and a mother. Merle Bedi is a constant reminder of the consciousness of Valmiki's daughter, Viveka, whenever the latter fantasises about women.

The novel comprises of two stories of same-sex attraction of first Valmiki, and then Viveka. Valmiki's story constitutes an introduction to later events of Viveka's affair with her French lover, Anick, who is married to the son of their family's friends. It can be said that by the juxtaposition of characters of different sexes and ages, Shani Mootoo challenges and calls for the revision

of the Trinidadian laws introduced by the "buggery" (Section 13) and "gross indecency" (Section 16) acts of the 1986 Sexual Offences Act, which have only been strengthened in the year 2000. Additionally, such stance reinforces the notion of modernity and globalism, especially when considered from the point of view of the close proximity of Trinidad to countries of North America, where the LGBTQI+ rights are some of the most advanced in the world, and where the laws of Trinidad and Tobago seem outdated and barbaric.

Valmiki Krishnu, a respected doctor of one of four Trinidadian major municipalities, San Fernando, works hard to earn himself a title of a womaniser in order to hide his same-sex passion, of which he became aware in his early adolescence. Societal and familial pressures prove to be so insistent, that after graduating from medical college in Canada, Valmiki decides not to pursue an affair with the love of his life, Tony, but instead returns to Trinidad to fulfil his expectations of becoming a husband and a father, and congratulates himself about what it "publicly confirm[s] about him" (Mootoo 2010, 69). With time, however, the duty that he feels towards his family recedes, and yet again he pursues to initiate sexual relations with a man. Therefore, upon his realisation of Viveka's feelings for Anick, he begins to worry that his daughter may have to face a similar existence of denial and shame.

Anick, a French citizen who met her husband, Nayan, in Canada, and moved to Trinidad to allow him to pursue his career in the family cocoa business, had had previous intimate relations with women. It is interesting to see Trinidadian homophobia at work, as Nayan's attitude towards Anick's past changes from fascination to disgust as the couple moves from Canada to Trinidad (233). To avoid shame, Nayan forbids his wife from any contact with people who may accept, or even encourage her "sexual deviance" (252). The status of a newcomer allows Anick to describe her own, as well as Viveka's and Valmiki's, sense of exclusion and entrapment within their own desires by comparing Trinidad to a prison, from which there is no escape (177). Truthfully, when Viveka and Anick's relationship becomes known to some of their family members, the former is aware, just like her father was, of her obligations:

> She had a glimpse of who she was, of what her desire looked like for her: she wanted to feel again and again all that she had with Anick. [...] But with this ephemeral knowledge came another thought: the dreadful possibility of losing her family. Which was greater, she wondered – to be all that you were, to be true to yourself, or to honour one's family, one's society, one's country? (326)

Other than evoking the threatening notion of heteronormative nationalism, the above passage is also an astute portrayal of one's inability to merge their national and sexual identities. However, whereas the battle for an all-inclusive identity is already more or less resolved on the pages of Irish lesbian fiction, as Ireland enters into a new era of globalisation and trans-

nationalism, Mootoo's characters revert to (compulsory) heterosexuality in order to protect themselves and to preserve their families' good names.

Just as Ireland needed generations of writers to emancipate lesbians from their narrational invisibility, so do other authors from non-Western countries have to endure their sufferings in order to accommodate, and speak freely of, lesbian sexuality. "Going away won't solve a thing for us" (335) says Viveka, mirroring Mootoo's own views, as she realises that although emigration may resolve the predicament of a queer individual, it will not be sufficient to save the entirety of Trinidadian queer population. It is a role of the author, as the queer migrant, to convey their message to the wider public, and to reiterate and highlight the differences in the LGBTQI+ politics between their country of settlement and the country of origin. Therefore, writing from diaspora is an important aspect of lesbian writing, as it allows one to invent worlds and scenarios in which writers' creativities imagine possible realities: "I am interested in fixing things and making them beautiful. Suddenly I can see the possibilities in how you can use words and I get trapped in that. [...] I can fix and I fall into [...] exoticising my own landscape" (Helff, Dalal 2012, 81). Viveka's remaining in Trinidad signifies her stand against its gender and sexual oppression, which "becomes a way of [...] working to dislodge its heteronormative logic" (Gopinath 2007, 14-15). It is her conscious decision to overturn the dominant heteronormativity of Trinidad by battling it from within its source, and Mootoo's encouragement to lesbians to remain in their countries and fight for their rights, especially countries where lesbian desire is still outlawed either by their respective governments or heteronormative social structures.

Although written in 2008, *Valmiki's Daughter*, owing to its Trinidadian setting, is not as progressive in terms of representation of lesbian equality as writings about Ireland were at that time. Compared to Emma Donoghue's *Landing*, for example, Mootoo's second work of fiction highlights the advancement of homosexual and lesbian laws empowering LGBTQI+ communities in Ireland, in line with, if not ahead of, other Western countries. The time of the economic boom in form of the Celtic Tiger, aided by globalisation and interdependency, created a new Ireland, which became a country of immigration, rather than emigration. As a result, Ireland now hosts nationals from over hundred and ninety countries and is considered to be as inclusive and as multicultural as the US, England or Canada (Onyejelem 2005, 71).

4. Conclusion

The diasporic experiences of Anna Livia and Shani Mootoo, allowed those writers a greater freedom to discuss and problematise issues encountered by lesbian communities. Mootoo's and Livia's problematisation of lesbian issues

within their own communities allowed those writers to shift away from the notion of the restrictive and separatist Lesbian Nation, and towards a more inclusive notion of queer solidarization and integration, however, as I noted, without losing the emphasis on the distinctive lesbian identity and individuality. Recently, when the Schengen agreement was threatened by the influx of immigrants from other continents, and as the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland faces a reinstatement following Brexit, it is vital to emphasise the importance of diasporic and migrant writing as the re-appropriation of lesbian existence across the world. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes: "As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races)" (2012, 102). Therefore, it is not just the fiction written from the Republic of Ireland, but also from outside its borders, that is crucial to the ongoing negotiation of lesbian identity within the State, as Irish migration reinvents and rearticulates the notion of lesbian desire across Irish and global histories.

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