

(DIS)LOCATING THE NORMS: MARGINALIZED SUBJECTS AS PROTAGONISTS IN *HERE COMES THE SUN**

(DES)LOCANDO AS NORMAS: SUJEITOS MARGINALIZADOS COMO PROTAGONISTAS EM BEM-VINDOS AO PARAÍSO

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to reflect on the notions of space and place and, in parallel, on displacement, focusing specifically on the Caribbean space, as outlined by Edouard Glissant (1989) and later Carole Boyce Davies (1994, 2018), among others. The present work is based on decolonial studies that historically situate the origin, constitution and permanence of the modern/colonial power matrix. It is necessary to produce art, knowledge and criticism that move away, subvert, question and reframe colonial, racist and heteropatriarcal normativity, creating spaces for the recuperation, (re)construction and (re)invention of knowledge and ways of being in the world not ruled by Eurocentrism. The focus of the analysis is the debut novel by Jamaican Nicole Dennis-Benn, *Here Comes the Sun* (2016), which transforms characters marginal to the norms into protagonists.

KEYWORDS

Nicole Dennis-Benn; *Here Comes the Sun*; decolonial theory; literatures of the english language; caribbean space.

RESUMO

O objetivo desse artigo é refletir sobre as noções de espaço e lugar e, paralelamente, de deslocamento, focando especificamente no espaço caribenho, como delineado por Edouard Glissant (1989) e posteriormente Carole Boyce Davies (1994, 2018), entre outros. O presente trabalho parte de estudos decoloniais que localizam historicamente a origem, a constituição e a permanência da matriz de poder moderna/colonial. Faz-se necessário produzir arte, conhecimento e crítica que se afastam, subvertem, questionam e resignificam a normatividade colonial, racista e heteropatriarcal, criando espaços para o resgate, (re)construção e (re)invenção de conhecimentos e modos de estar no mundo não pautados pelo eurocentrismo. O foco da análise é o romance de estreia da jamaicana Nicole Dennis-Benn, *Bem-vindos ao Paraíso* (2016), que transforma personagens marginais às normas em protagonistas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Nicole Dennis-Benn; *Bem-Vindos ao Paraíso*; teoria decolonial; literatura de língua inglesa; espaço caribenho.

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There are maps to the Door of No Return. The physical door. They are well worn, gone over by cartographer after cartographer, refined from Ptolemy's *Geographia* to orbital photographs and magnetic field imaging satellites. But to the Door of no Return which is illuminated in the consciousness of Blacks in the Diaspora there are no maps. This door is not mere physicality. It is a spiritual location. It is also perhaps a physic destination. Since leaving was never voluntary, return was, and still may be, an intention, however deeply buried. There is as it says no way in; no return.

Dionne Brand

Movement is an essential part of the human experience. Over thousands of years, people have migrated and redefined the imaginary borders of territories, civilizations, empires, and nations. However, the process of formation of the modern/colonial world, initiated more than five hundred years ago, whose core is still the foundation of contemporary society, resulted in fragmented identities and subjects (dis)located in-between. In the Caribbean, while Eurocentric thought was established as the benchmark of civilization, Africans, who had been forced into slavery after surviving the Middle passage, were not considered part of humanity and the people native to the islands were practically obliterated. Simultaneously, native vegetation was transplanted across continents or cleared to give room to plantations, and later on, to luxury resorts. These ongoing processes of scission are the focus of the Caribbean writer Edouard Glissant in *Caribbean Discourse* (1989). In the collection of essays, Glissant ponders over the lack of historical consciousness affecting the inhabitants of the West Indies. Even though the author focuses on the French Caribbean, his propositions can be transposed to other Caribbean territories that went through the experience of modern slavery, such as Jamaica. Glissant highlights that the

Caribbean is the site of a history characterized by ruptures and that began with a brutal dislocation, the slave trade. Our historical consciousness could not be deposited gradually and continuously like sediment, as it were, as happened with those peoples who have frequently produced a totalitarian philosophy of history, for instance European peoples, but came together in the context of shock, contraction, painful negation and explosive forces. This dislocation of the continuum, and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all, characterize what I call a nonhistory (GLISSANT, 1989, p. 61-62).

The consequence of this 'nonhistory' often fosters the belief that social inequality, racial prejudice, gender bias, homophobia and capitalist dynamics are

inherent parts of humanity. What Glissant emphasizes is that, undoubtedly, the past cannot be recuperated in its totality; however, artists, intellectuals, people committed to (re)creating ties which were severed through the colonial process must set out to dig into memory for traces that are left in order to reconfigure people's mindsets and reconnect Caribbeans with their ancestral roots. There are many roads that can be taken in order to promote this shift. Varied means of expression and knowledge building such as literature, rituals, dance, performances, archive and academic research should all come together to overcome the colonized mind: "[b]ecause the Caribbean consciousness was broken up by sterile barriers, the writer must be able to give expression to all those occasions when these barriers were partially broken" (GLISSANT, 1989, p. 64). Therefore, one of the writer's roles is to create narratives that question stereotypical representations and historical simplifications perpetuated outlined by Western white hegemonic literature.

Caribbean-American scholar Carole Boyce Davies highlights that "Caribbean political and intellectual identity have moved consistently towards a critique of that difficult legacy of slavery and its related structural inequalities and the ongoing oppression created by extractive colonialism and its aftermath, which created intramigrations and also precipitated new migrations and diasporas" (DAVIES, 2018, p. 11). Some of the most prominent contemporary Caribbean writers and intellectuals such as Jamaica Kincaid, Edwige Danticat, Marlon James, Dionne Brand, and Boyce Davies herself, either live in (re)diaspora or have been through the experience. As scholar Elleke Boehmer points out in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (2005), the writing of diasporic authors

explores not only leave-taking and departure, watchwords of the migrant condition, but also the regeneration of communities and selves out of heterogeneous experiences [...]. To find ways 'to begin again and go on' is today's imperative. [...] Decentering the centre in many cases involves embodying, materializing, or giving spatial form to what were previously regarded as one-dimensionally temporal and even ahistorical terms: weightlessness, migrancy, in-betweenness, cultural pluralism, postcolonialism. (BOEHMER, 2005, p. 250-251)

The Jamaican author Nicole Dennis-Benn, whose debut novel *Here Comes the Sun* (2016) is featured in this article, explains in her essay *Unapologetic* (2018) that she found in writing a site of existence. The author states that "[i]n writing I find my voice and use it to give voice to those women who are overlooked because of their Blackness, queerness, immigration status, or otherness. I write for all the women who still feel powerless against three-dimensional, sometimes four-dimensional,

oppression” (DENNIS-BENN, 2018, p. 29). In other words, Dennis-Benn sees in writing the possibility of creating (hi)stories centered on people who, for multiple reasons, are displaced and voiceless.

In order to further the discussion of dislocation, it is necessary to understand the concepts of “space” and “place” applied in this analysis. In *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (1977), humanistic geographer Yi Fu Tuan defined “space” as a location to which human experience has not given meaning, whereas “place” implied a locale that has significance to humans. (TUAN, 1977). In *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (1999), Linda McDowell draws from the definition proposed by Tuan and adds that

[g]eographers now argue that places are contested, fluid and uncertain. It is socio-spatial practices that define places and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion (Massey 1991; Smith 1993). Places are made through power relations which construct the rules, which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial — they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience (MCDOWELL, 1999, p. 4).

Hence, places are always marked by gender norms and expectations. As McDowell exemplifies, inhabitants of the same locale understand it differently, consequently ascribing diverse ideas of place to the same physical space. Thus, feminist theoreticians argue that gender is intimately connected to the bodily and mental experiences women go through in patriarchal societies. McDowell also highlights that other factors such as race, origin, class and coloniality constitute these interactions and must not be forgotten in analysis. Through people’s exchanges and changes in social relations, individual perceptions of the place where they are and where they stand may change accordingly. The idea of the interconnections between space, place and positionality in the Caribbean has long been the core of Carole Boyce Davies’ research. In *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994), the Caribbean scholar explains that

[t]he politics of location brings forward a whole host of identifications and associations around concepts of place, placement; location, dis-location; memberment, dismemberment; citizenship, alienness; boundaries, barriers, transportations; peripheries, cores and centers. It is about positionality in geographic, historical, social, economic, educational terms. It is about positionality in society based on class, gender, sexuality, age, income. It is also about relationality and the ways in which one is able to access, mediate or reposition oneself, or pass into other spaces given certain other circumstances. (DAVIES, p. 153, 1994)

The politics of location Boyce Davies refers to emphasises the multitude and provisionality of Caribbean identities. Caribbean populations have always been constituted by ongoing processes of diasporization. Ever since Christopher Columbus invaded the island nowadays called Jamaica in 1494, the (hi)story of the territory has been one of exploitation, relocation, resistance and reinvention. In 1655, the British Empire defeated the Spanish, took over control of the island and ruled over it until its official independence. As Catherine Hall states in *Histories, Empires and the Post-Colonial Moment* (1996), even though the processes of colonisation in the Americas was similar in many aspects, it is fundamental to take into consideration the particularities of each colonised territory to better understand current realities. Hall explains that Spanish colonisers, the first ones to settle in Jamaica, exterminated almost all its native population; hence, the majority of the Jamaican people are constituted of people who did not inhabit that land originally. Today, the country's population is formed by the descendants of formerly enslaved Africans, Asians tied to indentured labour; Spanish, British, Dutch and French colonisers, amongst others.

Additionally, Catherine Hall points out that 1962 was a crucial year for Jamaica because it became a nation state independent from England. At that moment, new Jamaican identities arose in the wake of a movement that aimed at promoting the decolonization of the island. Halls remarks that Jamaicans who felt strongly tied to Africa through the diasporic experience were eager to recuperate the African roots they had lost. One strategy to do so was to syncretize African culture and the religious discourse of the Christian missionaries.

In the 1970s, Jamaica experienced periods of socialist-oriented governments which invested massively in public welfare. However, the country was not immune to the global oil crisis in 1973 and the population suffered during this period. Unlike the previous decade, the 1980s saw a conservative government which followed economic liberal practices. Some of the consequences were that investments in public health, education and housing decreased dramatically, resulting in the rise of violence. At the same time, private investors were given advantages to take their business to Jamaica, stimulating a frantic building of luxury resorts. To boost the national economy, environmental issues were disregarded; the welfare of the population who lived on those lands was likewise ignored. In *The Poor and the Powerless: Economic Policy and Change in The Caribbean to 1986* (1986), Clive Y. Thomas analyses the economic development in the Caribbean from the beginning of colonisation to the mid-1980s.

Thomas explains that “[p]lush tourist facilities coexist with depressed rural areas, unemployment, poverty and urban slums. The contrast is constant a reminder that the development of the industry at huge financial and social cost has done little over the long run to eliminate permanently the widespread poverty and powerlessness of the West Indian peoples” (THOMAS, 1986, p. 245). This was true in Jamaica. Despite the fact that the abovementioned economic practices resulted in the significant growth of the tourism industry, the country’s debt crises worsened, and so did the life of common people.

By the early 1990s, neoliberalism had affected Jamaica and its people negatively and heavily. The harmful social effects of such economic policies linger on to this day. Jamaican writer Nicole Dennis-Benn in the essay *Unapologetic*, published in the essay collection *Can We All Be Feminists?* (2018), explains that in Jamaica, “[we] were told to look to heaven — a place where redemption, joy, and validation are promised, a place away from the so-called paradise where we lived. For while Jamaica is paradise for many tourists and privileged expats, it’s also where poor Black bodies are regarded (or disregarded) as the mere foundation on which the ruling class build their wealth, their fantasies” (DENNIS-BENN, 2018, p. 25). Literary scholars Sharpe and Pinto (2006) in their studies of Caribbean sexualities also highlight the connection between tourism and exploitation of the local population. They point out that “[t]he ease with which the global North can consume the bodies of black and brown-skinned men and women is linked to a transnational economy in which Caribbean nations are transformed into service-oriented labor centers for Europe, the United States, and Canada” (SHARPE; PINTO, 2006, p. 250). The unrestricted growth of neoliberal policies and predatory tourism resulted in the abuse of working-class racialized people, especially women.

The connection between the precarization of the lives of Caribbean populations and tourism is the central argument in Angelique V. Nixon’s *Resisting Paradise: Tourism, Diaspora, and Sexuality* (2015). The scholar classifies tourism as “one of the most powerful conduits of neocolonial exploitation because the industry not only thrives on foreign investment, thereby affecting economic and political structures, but it also drastically shapes the sociocultural landscape of the region. [...] Tourism reproduces the destructive psychology and race and gender dynamics of slavery and colonialism” (NIXON, 2015, p. 14). Thus, neo-imperialism may be

considered as the macro power responsible for perpetuating modern/colonial structures.

The hierarchically-informed power structures organise society, hindering social upward mobility, by means of the coloniality of power. As posited by Anibal Quijano (2000), one of the main scholars that focused on the decolonial turn, this power dynamic has shaped contemporary societies in America¹. The axes of the coloniality of power include labour control, the separation into social classes, and the fixation of the concept of race as a category that organises difference hierarchically. Furthermore, Maria Lugones (2007) highlights that another fundamental pillar of this system is the coloniality of gender. While Quijano did not pay close attention to gender and sexuality, Lugones showed that the way these are perceived is a product of the modern colonial process and is an indissociable part of the coloniality of power. The pervasiveness of such system is explained by the colonial strategy of, simultaneously, destroying local knowledges, populations and the environment, while instilling the notion that Eurocentric views are the only truth, which preconizes the proper way of living.

Both the consequences of the coloniality of power and the colonial processes, which control the bodies and minds of the people and the country's societal organisation, are evident in Nicole Dennis-Benn's *Here Comes the Sun* (2016). The characters' continued – albeit often failed – attempts to break from the chains of the colonial mindset add complexity to the novel that spans for more than two generations. Dennis-Benn often uses flashbacks as a device to communicate past traumatic experiences; however, the main plot unravels in 1994. The main characters – Margot and her much younger sister Thandi – are pushed to face their condition as colonised subjects. One of their greatest challenges is to navigate between adhering to the hegemonic order to survive – gaining, as some see it, advantages from joining the system – and creating spaces in which hegemonic parameters do not impede their living in ways they had never thought possible.

Set in a Jamaica taken over by environmental destruction, the expansion of luxury resorts, neoliberal practices, and disregard for the impoverished communities, *Here Comes the Sun* chronicles the story of Margot, a black working-class woman who is a member of the Palm Star Resort staff. Margot's main goal is to remove Thandi from poverty. Their mother, Delores, has a strong faith that her younger daughter will

¹ Aníbal Quijano refers to the American continent (North, Central and South) as “America”.

be the one to truly succeed and move them away from River Bank. Just like the characters, the fishing village they live in is going through rapid transformations. Besides a drought that offers no respite, which is ironic considering that Jamaica is an island, they see that the construction of a new resort is getting closer to their houses every day. As a result, most fishermen have no way of supporting themselves and their families with their work. Precariousness progressively becomes more and more the reality of River Bank dwellers.

In *Here Comes the Sun* (2016), multiple oppressions, such as social class, gender, race and heteronormativity, intersect and affect the lives of the characters. Thandi is a teenager who believes her dark skin is what is keeping her from being loved and accepted, especially by schoolmates from the private school that she is able to attend due to a scholarship. The young girl bleaches her skin, only to discover that the reason for her non-acceptance was a lot more complex than she had anticipated. Even though her skin becomes lighter, the middle and upper class people from school and the staff working at the party she had been looking forward to still look down on her or simply do not see her. Such rejection and invisibility are indicative of the structural and multilayered constitution of racism.

Simultaneously, at the beginning, Thandi is conflicted because she has feelings for Charles, a boy from River Bank. After a short interaction, the girl ponders, “[i]f only he wasn’t a common boy, the kind Delores tells her to stay away from; the kind Margot would disapprove of because he’s not one of those money-men with homes in Ironshore that even some of her classmates at Saint Emmanuel brag about dating” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 29). Here, it is clear that society values, represented by Margot’s and her mother Delores’ views, measure people’s worth according to their economic status, social position, and potential for mobility.

Still, Thandi falls in love with Charles. The boy, who is genuinely curious about her art, her interests and who constantly reaffirms that her skin is beautiful as it is, gives her a sense of recognition and humanity. Halfway through the skin-bleaching process, before the party, the two teenagers spend an afternoon together inside an empty construction site. Inside the unfinished walls of the hotel, they begin to imagine how it would look once it is finished and who would frequent that place. They imagine people in fancy dressing will dance there and “Charles surprises Thandi by twirling her around in the empty space like they’re a couple dancing to slow music” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 182). Here, the space, still voided of meaning, gives room to their

imagination and they dance joyfully to the beat of no song. The place where they are used to be a village whose dwellers were removed to give way to this hotel. While Thandi fears that the same will take place in River Bank, Charles says they would resist in case the hotel industry decided to advance towards their village; eventually, it is exactly what happens.

While Thandi is caught between letting her inner feelings flourish and following the path her mother and sister have traced for her, Margot struggles to coordinate all her different selves, in the hopes of getting everything she wants. Being a hotel clerk is not Margot's only occupation. At night, the protagonist works as a prostitute in order to provide for Thandi adequately. When the owner of the hotel, Alphonso Wellington of the Wellington Empire, uncovers her side job, instead of punishing her, he sees a business opportunity and invites Margot to run an underground prostitution ring in the Resort. At first, she wavers and does not want to be a part of the scheme. Nonetheless, Margot ends up accepting the position, with the hope that the position of 'boss lady' would be temporary. The protagonist convinces herself that it would only be a means of achieving a higher position, such as hotel manager. For Margot, the hotel is both a site of exploitation and opportunity. She is well aware that tourists objectify her, but she is willing to put up with this exploitative logic in order to move beyond the cycles of oppression she has been through all her life. As a black working-class lesbian woman, Margot has very limited mobility.

Both Thandi and Margot use –albeit in different ways– the same capitalist modern/colonial logic that oppresses them as they attempt to escape from it. Such dynamics, featured in the two main characters of Dennis- Benn's novel, brings to the foreground the lack of consciousness broached by Glissant; a colonial subject who remains limited to the world view imposed by hegemonic forces has a hard time breaking with colonial constraints. Therefore, global capitalism is necessarily linked to colonial models, modernity and Eurocentric thought. During the independence movements, the Enlightenment-inspired discourse of freedom and equality transposed to the colonised territories created the illusion that subaltern subjects were included in those mandates. However, as Quijano (2000) and Lugones (2007, 2010) explain, racialized people were not included in the concept of humanity. This is a key point to understand the protagonist's narrative. Margot pursues freedom and success, unaware that, in fact, they were not meant for her; she is unable to realise how much it would cost her to play by the coloniser's rules.

As Margot sees it, freedom would be involve a combination of having a job of her choosing, living in a big house and having privacy to have a relationship with Verdene, the woman she loves. However, this was not all. The protagonist also felt that success was about having money and exercising power and control over others. Reproducing the hierarchical dynamics of power of the colonial/modern system brings about both success and failure. Even though Margot ends up in a luxurious secluded home, she is utterly alone. The protagonist disregards her sister's feelings and wishes and manipulates Jullete, a vulnerable teenager who was a part of her prostitution ring, in order to get what she wants. She also tries to trick her lover Verdene into giving up her house in order to be able to give Alphonso and his investors what they want. Margot respects no ethical limits as she moves toward fulfilling her ambitions.

Even so, this is not all that there is to Margot's story. In the book *Bread Out of Stone* (1994), the Caribbean-Canadian writer and scholar Dionne Brand has an essay entitled "This Body for Itself" in which she presents a critical analysis of the representation of black women and their bodies in contemporary Caribbean literature. Brand concludes that, frequently, the overall concern for respectability and the attempts to avoid colonial stereotypes of the oversexualized exotic black bodies both lead to a mis/underrepresentation of black women. The scholar highlights that, quite often, those literary representations are extremely limited and only account for the colonised versus coloniser dynamics. As a result, instead of decolonizing the tropes of representation, these fiction writers end up reinforcing hegemonic binaries. Therefore, the goal for writers is to develop black women characters whose bodies are not constrained by such parameters. In order to do so, Brand argues that it is essential to allow these characters to experience sexuality for themselves.

Dionne Brand exemplifies what she proposes by analysing literary anticolonial, antipatriarchal texts, such as those by Jamaica Kincaid. Brand remarks that "the texts reject these conventions and talk about what we really are concerned with in our daily lives: not only external, the encounter with 'whiteness', but the ongoing internality" (BRAND, 1994, p. 44, author's emphasis). Therefore, the building of a decolonizing narrative requires that the subjectivity of black women characters and their relationship to their bodies be marked not only by gender/racial violence, but also by pleasure. Brand further elaborates on her propositions by arguing that one way of birthing such characters would be to add the lesbian experience to their narratives. As we see it, Dionne Brand seems to use the notion of lesbian affection in a broader sense, as

Adrienne Rich had done in the previous decade in the essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (1980). Both authors propose that affection between women that is aimed neither at pleasing a man nor at reproducing the structures of patriarchal power allows for other ways of being. These relations, sexual or otherwise, reject the norm and make room for these bodies to exist, love and feel for themselves, (re)creating their places in the world.

Although encounters with whiteness are crucial in Margot's storyline, there are also complex multi-layered descriptions of her feelings, sensations and musings. In the braiding of her sister's Thandi hair, Margot finds peace. The ritual, which started when Thandi was a baby, led Margot to discover that "in the braiding she found escape from various men's untying, unclasping, and unbuckling. It was in this soft, delicate texture that the roughness of the other touches faded" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 34). This kind of private affectionate moment is a representation of the liberation that Brand (1994) proposes in the relations among women. What is more, in Margot's encounters with Verdene, she feels truly alive for the first time in her life. Nicole Dennis-Benn seems to have conceived Margot as a kaleidoscope made of shards of glass. Even though her actions may seem ugly, there is more than meets the eye at first. The reader must look inside and, whichever way they look, they will encounter different images, some of them beautiful. The author of *Here Comes the Sun* wrote an article in 2016 entitled *Breaking Taboos and Loving the Characters We Fear* in which she talks about the process of writing. In the piece, Dennis-Benn reveals that giving herself permission to let her creative process flow was complicated. The writer confesses that for some time her own fears and insecurities hindered the process of writing the novel. Nonetheless, she did find a way of creating characters whose lives are permeated by what she qualifies as Jamaica's biggest taboo—homosexuality. Dennis-Benn comments that the work of authors such as Toni Morrison and Jamaica Kincaid inspired her to be true to her art. In the article, she explains that "their beautiful literary work documenting sexuality, especially female sexuality, gradually gave me permission to write my own" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016b). It is fair to say that the reading of anticolonial, decolonial literature helped her in the course of decolonizing her own creative process, which resulted in the complex characters from her debut novel.

Furthermore, Nicole Dennis-Benn's main characters in *Here Comes the Sun* are far from linear. Their attitudes, perceptions and maturity are revealed and shift throughout the novel, embodying a lot of what was preconized as anticolonial by

Dionne Brand in *Bread Out of Stone* (1994). Besides Margot, another example is the character Verdene Moore, the protagonist's secret lover. Ms. Moore's life is a cartography of (dis)location. She is a stranger wherever she goes. Most residents of River Bank make a point to treat her as an outcast for her transgression of the norm: she is known as the woman who likes women, and, more than that, as a witch. Verdene is also the only major character who goes through a diasporic experience. After being caught in bed with another woman while attending a university, Verdene is sent to London to live with her aunt Gertrude, a devout conservative Christian. Verdene's lesbianity is seen both as a menace and as an illness. Her aunt, believing that she can be saved and cured, pushes her to marry a man. Verdene obliges but cheats on her husband with multiple women. In spite of being shamed and repressed, Moore stays true to herself. Only after her mother's passing is she able to go back to her homeland. If at first she did not want to change her mother's place, in the long run, moving back seems to be both a way of resignifying the space of the home she had lost and an attempt to go home to herself.

The move to England is a suggestion of Verdene's mother, Miss Ella, who fears for her daughter's life. Once Verdene is outed, she is no longer safe in the village she grew up in. Here, Moore, a trespasser of the heteronorm, fears imminent violence, which lingers like a cloud over her head. She manages to evade gender violence; however, her college sweetheart, does not have the same luck. After going back to her hometown, Akua is raped by men who claim they would fix her ungodly behaviour. Compulsory heterosexuality is imposed by the means of the violation of the rebel body. The message is that this woman is not the owner of her body; rape as a tool of domestication replicates the *modus operandi* of colonisation. Akua survives and, afterwards, marries a policeman. In a letter to her former lover, the woman claims that God has cured her.

It is interesting to think of the idea of space and place in Verdene's and Akua's cases considering Susan Stanford Friedman's propositions in *Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora* (2004). The scholar defines that "to inhabit the body of the stranger is to be never at home. But what if home itself is the site of violence to the body? Home may in fact be constituted upon an act of violence against the body, even as that body travels, migrates or go into exile, Safety might reside neither in home nor homeland but only in flight" (FRIEDMAN, 2004, p. 198). From this perspective, Verdene and Akua are punished for taking ownership of their bodies. Then, they are

forced to leave their true selves behind. Regardless of where they were, they would constantly be labeled as foreigners. Akua's spirit is broken, she is stripped of autonomy and subjectivity as she is welcomed back into the community. Akua is the representation of the docile colonial subject tamed by violence. Meanwhile, Verdene goes through geographical dislocation and, the unwanted marriage aside, she manages to utilise her mobility to survive. Even when she feels the weakest, she finds ways to gather her strength.

For Verdene, going back to River Bank is not the same as returning to a loving home. Most dwellers of the village still remember and fear her. They also make sure to pass their prejudice on to their children. Nonetheless, the time spent in England had provided her with what she calls "foreign privilege". Even though the villagers dislike her, they do not dare to touch her. Upon her return, except for Margot, Verdene's body is the sight/site of repulsion to the community, but her abjection also allows her a degree of freedom.

Once Verdene is back in her hometown, she and Margot start a romantic relationship. Since non-heterosexual behaviour is considered evil in River Bank, their love story takes place inside Verdene's house. The demonization of behaviour that rejects the heteronorm is a part of the process of colonisation, which created the category as it is nowadays. Maria Lugones observes that during the colonial process "[t]he behaviors of the colonized and their personalities/souls were judged as bestial and thus non-gendered, promiscuous, grotesquely sexual, and sinful" (LUGONES, 2010, p. 743). Once the power matrix of Eurocentric thought was established as natural and normal, both coloniser and colonial subjects carried out the task of persecuting whoever transgressed those norms. Therefore, the pink house, which used to belong to Miss Ella, is the only safe locale in which Verdene and Margot are allowed to exist fully as lesbians.

In the first moment when they meet again after many years, Margot is enchanted by the vision of Verdene, and focuses on her eyes. "She can never get them out of her mind, for they're the only ones that see her. Really see her — not her figure or the nakedness she so willingly offers to strangers, but something else— something fragile, raw, defenseless. The kind of bareness that makes her shiver under the woman's observation" (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 16). It is evident that Verdene's gaze is not motivated by consumption. Unlike the hotel clients, the woman does not objectify Margot.

Verdene wishes to connect with Margot in a spiritual, passionate level, living out her love and desire truthfully and jointly. However, for Margot, accepting and understanding her own feelings and bodily sensations was not an easy process. The constraints of the heteronorm seem to tighten as Margot goes through the process of decolonizing her body in the company of Verdene. Although Margot expresses her wishes to be intimately connected and further their level of intimacy, she often retreats. It is interesting that a character who works as a prostitute cannot complete the sexual act with a love partner of her choosing. The deconstruction and waning of normative control of her self causes Margot's body to produce erratic reactions: she shivers, shrinks, and is in shock.

Eventually, Margot decides to stop resisting her impulses and initiates the sexual act; the narrative voice states that “[i]n all the years Margot has seduced others, she has never been fully aware, fully invested in savoring every moment of intimacy” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 101). The protagonist is finally invested in her inner desires, brushing aside all the worries connected to the outside world. When sex is not just business, “Margot pulls Verdene between her impatient thighs and arches her back to receive not only the thrill of Verdene's body, but a deeper understanding of what it means to feel connected to a whole person” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 101). Verdene is also transformed in her encounters with Margot. Forced to make herself invisible because of the rejection of the community, her lover is the only person who sees her, the only one who gets to know her deeply and intimately.

After they have sex, Margot remarks that Miss Ella's presence in the house is overbearing. Verdene keeps picture frames of her mother in every room, and cares for her mother's objects, like the pot, as if it were her mission to preserve her mother's house intact. Unsurprisingly, Verdene had never noticed how strong her mother's presence still was. Admitting her guilt after the university episode, Verdene says she is scared of disturbing and disappoint her mother, even after her passing. Nevertheless, after consummating her love with Margot, she is ready to make room for her lover in the house and removes her mother's pictures. Once the photos have been put aside, Verdene notices that the “room appears empty without the pictures, but now there is space for Margot” (DENNIS-BENN, 2016, p. 105). At that moment, in the hopes of changing her life, what Verdene did was to resignify the space in order to make it into a place they both would share.

However, this is not what happens. Determined to climb the social ladder, Margot betrays her lover's trust. Despite unlearning some of the colonial teachings by releasing her body to live out its sexuality, Margot does not transpose that to other areas of her life. She is convinced that if she achieves material success, she will find comfort in her personal life. This perspective is connected to the notion that whoever has money has power. Conversely, Thandi and Verdene prefer to seek their own truths and hold other values such as trust and loyalty higher. Margot meticulously planned strategy backfires, as she does not anticipate that the models of hegemonic success were not meant for the underprivileged.

As Nicole Dennis-Benn writes in *Unapologetic* (2018), “[t]here’s nothing more painful than being dismissed by your own group— be it the sisters you look to for community, the brothers who deem your sexuality a threat to their manhood, or the culture you claim that doesn’t claim you back because you’re gay” (DENNIS-BENN, 2018, p. 29). Verdene’s story shows that the complex intersections of oppressions manifest themselves differently and in varied degrees, contingent to factors such as positionality, as proposed by Davies (1994) and McDowell (1999). Even though Verdene is rejected by her community time and again, she makes a point of fighting against the building of Alphonso’s new hotel where River Bank is.

The rampant growth of tourism haunts all the dwellers of River Bank. It serves as background to the novel, but it is present in every aspect of their lives. The rapid change of scenario and the disregard for the impoverished communities show how the local population is dependent and disposable in the process of turning Jamaica into a paradise for foreign tourists. They struggle to find a sense of self, since they experience the dissolution of their homes. This, however, is not new to the region and its inhabitants. Such processes have been constant since early colonial times.

What Nicole Dennis-Benn does in *Here Comes the Sun* is to show that the notion of a “happy ending” is too simplistic to account for the stories of colonised subjects. When the parameters are the hegemonic normative binaries, characters need to be written in due complexity, bearing their own contradictions, as kaleidoscopes made of shards of glass that reveal both beauty and flaws. Eurocentric thought relegates non-white, non-heterosexual, non-European/American characters to the periphery of literature, with specific functions inside the narratives, instead of their own stories. Deconstructing what Angelique V. Nixon marks as “the continued cultural colonization or the lingering effects of slavery and colonialism on Caribbean identity”

(NIXON, 2015, p. 14), Dennis-Benn makes protagonists out of the marginalized subjects represented in *Here Comes the Sun*.

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