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Topic of Research: Exploring Corporeal Subjectivity in Select Caribbean Island Women's Narratives

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Findings

The Caribbean islands are spaces marred with the history of colonisation, migrations, violence and rehabilitation. These experiences, as this thesis would argue, have been felt by the lived body. Corporeality was at the centre of the colonisation mission. The main objective of this thesis is to uncover the ways in which women writers of the Caribbean have dealt with the subject of female corporeality. In this study, the spatiality of the island is included to witness the iterations produced by such island narratives. The goal is to showcase a redefinition of corporeality which was founded on the many intersections and the lived reality of Caribbean women. The history of European colonization in these islands displayed the far-reaching effects of dualisms which created binaries and unequal power structures. The mind/body dualism was extended to the categories of gender, race, sexuality and speciesism, and these are the focal points that this research targets. Landscape and the human body are the two main victims of colonization and this thesis specifically chose the island and the female body to express these tensions.

The women writers of the Caribbean, chosen for this study, showcase the negotiations and intricacies that take place when the female subject inhabits the space of the island. This thesis examines the works by contemporary Caribbean women writers like Peggy Mohan, Verene Shepherd, Julia Alvarez, Simone Schwarz-Bart and Monique Roffey to understand how female corporeality is represented and contested in the space of the island and how subjectivity is framed through corporeality. The primary resources for this research are: Verene Shepherd's *Maharani's Misery: Narratives of a Passage from India to the Caribbean* (2002), Peggy Mohan's *Jahajin* (2008), Julia Alvarez's *How the García Sisters Lost Their Accents* (1991), Simone Schwarz-Bart's *The Bridge of Beyond* (1972) (translated from the French by Barbara Bray) and Monique Roffey's *The Mermaid of Black Conch* (2020). The chosen texts culminate from the English-speaking Caribbean (Shepherd, Mohan and Roffey), the Hispanic Caribbean region (Alvarez) and the Francophone region (Schwarz-Bart). Through the analysis of these texts, this thesis will argue that spatial settings have an impact on how female corporeality is construed.

This thesis aims to uncover the Western epistemic knowledge attributed to spatial settings like the island, which were previously colonised. Hence the subjects of enquiry, provided by the primary resources include islanders who were forcibly displaced from their homes, those who have migrated to the island through slave ships and indenture ships, those who have shifted from the island to the Caribbean diaspora, and finally, those who reside in between the land and the sea. For this research, the island is a space of multiplicity which produces diverse relations and dynamics of power. In these primary texts, the island is considered to be a critical space which invites various forms of investigation. This thesis is divided into four chapters, where each chapter invites such an examination about the negotiations performed by women in the islands. The following chapters will lay a foundation of the thesis by highlighting the core concepts like corporeality and islandness in dialogue with each other. It traces the ideas of corporeality from a colonial perspective, discusses the far-reaching effects of racist stereotypes hurled on non-European women and draws out a short literary history of Anglophone Caribbean women writers and the themes they pursued. The chapter unravels the spatial politics of islands along with a discussion on how islands were represented in colonial narratives

In the final chapter of this thesis, we shift our gaze to nonhuman actors who occupy the island. The focus is to feature actors with amphibious corporeality for their perspective on how the island and the sea impact the centrality of their being. This chapter argues that Aycayia., the mermaid, displays multiple nonhuman characterisations like the trans-corporeal subject as theorised by Stacy Alaimo, the figure of the cyborg explicated by Donna Haraway and the concept of interspecies theorised by Jasbir K. Puar. The chapter asserts that the island of Black Conch is a field of affective entanglements which exhibit features of Beth Greenhough's concept of more-than-human geography.

The conclusion of this thesis provides a comprehensive view of the broader aims and objectives of this research. Through the analysis of island narratives of Caribbean women writers, there is a complex yet nuanced portrayal of female corporeality. At the same time, the relationship with the island is one which shifts from colonial dualisms.