

Racialised Identities, Caribbean Realities: Analysing Black Female Identity in Hispanic Caribbean Poetry

Nicole Roberts

Abstract

The genius of our black foremothers... was to create powerful buffers to ward off the nihilistic threat, to equip black folk with cultural armor to beat back the demons of hopelessness, meaninglessness, and lovelessness.¹

Women do not figure prominently among the revolutionary leaders of the Hispanic Caribbean. In fact, the modern Caribbean society is still largely patriarchal. Indeed, much of Caribbean literature in the 20th century depicted women as sexually passive and subordinate to males. The intersection between race and gender, however, continues to inform Hispanic Caribbean societies, and representations of women, whether clear-cut or stereotypical, still have an impact on them. The 1980s saw a surge in the publication of poetry by women that attempted to develop language, to articulate a new female Hispanic Caribbean identity; specifically, an identity that recognized blackness and sought to present new representations of female sexuality. It portrayed women in various social roles, but mainly centred on the mother/grandmother figure and on female sexuality. This article seeks to analyze representations of femininity in contemporary Hispanic Caribbean verse. In privileging the black female voice, it looks at women and representations of them in the poetry of three contemporary female poets. In a sense, it seeks to inform our understanding of their lived experiences. Further, it examines to what extent the poets see themselves in the role of definers or shapers of Hispanic Caribbean identity. The angst and sense of suffering of women in the Caribbean and the fact that

¹ Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 15.

they are equipped with the tools for survival, as well as the emphasis on female creation, distinguishes these poets as valuable to any study of contemporary Hispanic Caribbean poetics.
