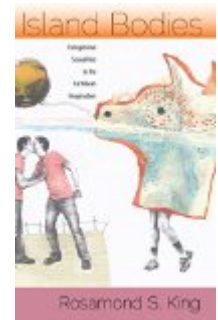


Rosamond S. King. *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014. 275 pp. \$74.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8130-4980-9.



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Published on H-Caribbean (November, 2014)

Commissioned by Jason Michelakos (York University)

Rosamond S. King's *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination* is an ambitious project. King proposes to examine and compare diverse Caribbean sexualities (heterosexual, same-sex, transgender, and interracial) in Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone, Dutch, and diasporic Caribbean communities through multiple genres of cultural productions (including literature, music, film, and popular culture), crosscut with observations and arguments from sexuality research in the social sciences. At the very least, this undertaking must be admired for its unique breadth and scope. Despite much rhetoric about the need to generate more research that examines and compares the diverse linguistic and sociocultural regions of the Caribbean and its diaspora, there continues to be very little published research that addresses important questions of regional similarities, differences, tensions, and transformations.

In her introduction, King foregrounds the importance of the Caribbean imagination in thinking through the possibilities of diverse sexual and

gendered lives in the Caribbean region and diaspora, recognizing its potential as a tool that may be both liberating and oppressing, pleasurable and painful. King also introduces the reader to the concept of “the Caribglobal,” which “includes the areas, experiences, and individuals within both the Caribbean and the Caribbean diaspora” (p. 3), noting that the diaspora includes intra-regional migration as much as migration to and from the global North. Furthermore, Caribglobal is utilized as a framework for both cultural phenomena and specific texts whether they be songs, films, or novels. Once again, the intention to highlight pan-regional and diasporic cultural similarities in transgressive sexual and gendered practices, beliefs, and discourses is admirable, although my anthropological training caused a few warning bells to go off in relation to the potential pitfalls of regional/diasporic sociocultural generalizations that risk oversimplification and/or glossing over complex local historical, political, economic, and sociocultural contexts.

Subsequent chapters focus on trans/gender lives and performances, men who desire men, women who desire women, heterosexual and bisexual women's agency, and interracial relationships between Caribbean men of color and white women. Across this diverse range of sexual and gendered experiences, King develops some important generalizations about the ways in which they are imagined in diverse cultural productions. For example, "the portrayal of trans people is a backhanded one that acknowledges their existence while refusing them the possibility of full lives or citizenship," and in much of the literature and research on Caribbean men who desire men, we see the co-existence of "the open secret" (homosexuality tacitly acknowledged without direct affirmation of its existence) and a trope of visibility related to the hegemonic positioning of men's bodies and behaviors in the Caribglobal public sphere (pp. 20, 65). In the chapter focusing on women who desire women, King challenges the myth of the invisible Caribbean lesbian through the evidence of a sustained, albeit limited, set of representations in literary texts by Dionne Brand, Shani Mootoo, R. Gay, and Marilyn Bobes, as well as their participation in and struggles with women's, gender, and sexual rights groups in various locations (Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba, and the Dutch Caribbean). Perhaps most controversial in terms of its fit in a volume about "transgressive" sexualities is the chapter focusing on interracial relationships between Caribbean men and white women. As King acknowledges, many depictions of this particular sexual-racial relationship reinforce northern/Euro-American racist tropes of and regional Caribbean tropes of hegemonic heterosexual male privilege, but her analysis of texts and films also reveals some of the complex emotional and social terrains in these relationships where romance, sexual labor, sex work, and material realities are interwoven in ways that do not always result in predictable outcomes.

In the final chapter, King returns to imagination as "a methodology for the inclusion of sexual transgression in Caribbean community and nation-building," stressing the importance of "how we imagine our communities" through a Caribglobal lens (p. 195). My only concern with this important directive is in relation to the generalizations outlined in previous chapters. For if we do not also attend to important diversities within local Caribbean communities (wherever and however they are constituted) which produce both pleasurable and painful forms of difference formulated through classed, raced, gendered, ethnic, educational, religious, and migratory experiences as they intersect with gendered and sexual desires and identities, then we risk undermining the density and complexity of Caribbean social, political, and economic life in the twenty-first century.

Island Bodies deserves a wide readership in multiple academic fields, including Caribbean, gender and sexuality, and diaspora studies due to the breadth and scope of its analysis. It is one of the first books to develop a framework that does not just acknowledge but actively thinks through the diverse desires, lives, and experiences of Caribglobal communities.

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Citation: David Murray. Review of King, Rosamond S. *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination*. H-Caribbean, H-Net Reviews. November, 2014.

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