

Healing the Wounds of the Colonised Body: Writing Back in Twenty-first-century Works by British Caribbean Women Writers

Thesis abstract

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Black women's position within the world of male superiority and white supremacy came to be characterised by the term "double colonisation". Both patriarchal and imperial social order focused on their corporeality to justify their subjugation. Accordingly, black women writers came to conceptualise their experience of colonisation and slavery as wounds suffered by the black female body. They thereby use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house.

Their "writing back" – a means of healing the body – constitutes a multi-level response to both sets of mythologies as well as other types of marginalisation and othering, which the two involved, such as sexual, territorial or discursive. It results in the construction of a complex space – a healing vision – which is not dissimilar to Homi Bhabha's empowering theoretical concepts.

However, while providing such progressive literary vision, black women writers also maintain connection with reality, where, as Gayatri Spivak argued, there is no space from where the subaltern sexed subject can speak. Their broad historical and geographical perspective, which is a product of the multi-levelness of their oppression, enables black women writers to take up a unique position on both the continuum of "theory – praxis", as well as that of "silence (Spivak) – voice (Bhabha)".

These larger issues are examined by means of a narrow focus on twenty-first-century works by British Caribbean women writers, more particularly Grace Nichols, Jean Binta Breeze, Dorothea Smartt and Andrea Levy. Methodologically, this thesis is characterised by what came to be called a "hands-on approach" – close study of the individual works, which precedes the use of secondary sources. This approach, however, is not employed at the expense of theory. Apart from Bhabha and Spivak, works by other theoreticians will be discussed, among them Sara Suleri, Ch. T. Mohanty, Edward Said, Hayden White, or Paul Gilroy.