



Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival

Meredith M. Gadsby

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It is a persistent image in Caribbean literature. But for Caribbean women especially, salt—particularly the image of sucking salt—has long signified how they have endured hardship and found ways to transcend it.

In this study of Caribbean women writers, Meredith Gadsby examines the fiction and poetry of both emigrant and island women to explore strategies they have developed for overcoming the oppression of racism, sexism, and economic deprivation in their lives and work. She first reviews the cultural and historical significance of salt in the Caribbean, then delineates creative resistance to oppression as expressed in the literature of Caribbean women writing about their migration to the United States, Great Britain, and Canada.

From British poet Dorothea Smartt to Edwidge Danticat of New York's Haitian community—and with a special emphasis on the creative artistry of Paule Marshall—Gadsby shows how, through migration, these writers' protagonists move into and through metropolitan spaces to create new realities for themselves, their families, and their communities. Her work draws on critical and ethnographic studies as well as creative works to take in a range of topics, not only considering the salty sexuality of calypso songs and offering new insights into Jamaican slackness culture but also plumbing her own family history to weave the travels of her mother and aunts from Barbados into her studies of migrating writers.

Through these close readings, Gadsby shows that Caribbean women express complex identities born out of migration and develop practical approaches to hardship that enable them to negotiate themselves out of difficulty. Her innovative study reveals that “sucking salt” is an articulation of a New World voice connoting adaptation, improvisation, and creativity—and lending itself to new understandings of diaspora, literature, and feminism.

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