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(Un)framing the Caribbean: Spaces and Female Identity

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TITLE

(Un)framing the Caribbean: spaces and female identity

ABSTRACT

Sophie Caco in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) by Edwidge Danticat, Nieve in *Todos se van* (2006) by Wendy Guerra and the unnamed narrator in “Sea” (2007) by Jennifer Rahim present a self that interacts constantly with the space that surrounds it. These spaces reflect the history and cultures of the Caribbean which for years had been dominated by colonialism and violence towards women. However, the main characters in the texts adopt space as a weapon for rereading their history and lives, thus building a fort of resistance. Therefore, my study will focus on the exploration of different interpretations of the Caribbean which help to envision spaces not only in geographically but also in cultural and geopolitical terms. I attempt to engage with the questions of space and identity through Caribbean fiction written by women. Concretely, the present study attempts to shed light on the topic of the formation of female identity through space. In addition, through the perception female characters in the aforementioned novels have of space, this study intends to challenge the patronizing view the West has projected on the Caribbean

Key words: space, female identity, Caribbean fiction, Edwidge Danticat, Wendy Guerra, Jennifer Rahim

TÍTULO

(Des)enmarcando el Caribe: espacios e identidad femenina

RESUMEN

Sophie Caco en *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) de Edwidge Danticat, Nieve en *Todos se van* (2006) y la voz narrativa sin nombre de “Sea” (2007) de Jennifer Rahim se presentan a sí mismas interactuando constantemente con el espacio que la rodea. Dichos espacios reflejan la historia y las culturas del Caribe las cuales han estado durante mucho tiempo dominadas por el colonialismo y la violencia hacia las mujeres. A pesar de esto, los personajes principales en los textos adoptan el espacio como una arma con la que releer la historia y sus vidas. Consecuentemente, construyen una fortaleza de resistencia. Así pues, mi estudio se va a centrar en el análisis de diferentes

interpretaciones del espacio caribeño lo que ayudará a visualizar el espacio no solo geográficamente sino también en términos culturales y geopolíticos. Intentaré conectar con los aspectos relativos al espacio y la identidad a través de la ficción del Caribe escrita por mujeres. Concretamente, este estudio pretende iluminar la formación de la identidad femenina a través del espacio. Asimismo, a través de la percepción que los personajes femeninos en susodichos textos tienen del espacio, este estudio pone en tela de juicio la mirada impuesta desde occidente al Caribe

Palabras clave: espacio, identidad femenina, ficción del Caribe, Edwidge Danticat, Wendy Guerra, Jennifer Rahim

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INTRODUCTION

Caribbean fiction written by women represents an intricate tapestry of layers that never seem to end depending on the perspective(s) that you choose to read the text from. The concreteness of the Caribbean is key to decipher how these novels are constructed not solely because of geographical reasons but also because of the complexity of the nature of its cultures. Due to a history of colonialism and slavery where many cultures were mingled and, followed by independence, a myriad of nuances are going to stem depending on the geographical origin of the text. However, thanks to their common past, many Caribbean writers are going to make explicit the cultural imprint of colonialism as well as its impact on the perception of the landscape and the construction of the current geopolitical space. That is why, through the lenses of Caribbean postcolonial discourse a critical reading of the texts can be supported with the construction of social identities regarding space. Furthermore, the condition of Caribbean women writers offers a layer of a history of trauma, repression, sexual harassment and silence that is going to be embodied in the main characters of their novels.

This study analyses the way space shapes the construction of the identity of female characters in the texts *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat, *Todos se van* by Wendy Guerra and “Sea” by Jennifer Rahim. The construction of their identity is continuously transformed by the interaction they have with both concrete geographical locations and the metaphorical level of space. These works alter the perception of space in binaries such as space versus history or social space versus natural space (Radovic 4) to offer an amalgam that disrupts colonial discourse from the West. Moreover, through the use of female characters who, despite the struggles presented in the novels, endeavour freedom, space is reconquered, politicized and individualized regarding the experiences of each character.

Characters such as Sophie Caco in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* personify the physical and emotional destruction that plantations embody not only because these recall a violent history but also because her mother was raped in a plantation. The absence and presence of her homeland Haiti is key to understand the construction of her identity. In the same manner, Nieve in *Todos se van* comes from a history of family violence. Her nature is trimmed by the roaming childhood through Cuba up until she is established in

La Habana. Her identity is shaped through the blatant desire to escape from the island that politically imprisons and silences her as she is against the ultimate result of the Cuban revolution. Her desire to flee the country is cut eternally but she finds her own freedom through the sea, a space in which she evolves and matures. Likewise, the nameless female narrative voice of “Sea” explains from a personal point of view the implications of home, the island of Trinidad, and how the island and its inevitable partner the sea are filtered through her life experience. The island and the sea are employed to revise colonial history, the Middle Passage and the purge of trauma of a sexual assault.

To analyse how female identity is constructed through space, I will present an examination of different perspectives on the conceptualization of space and identity in the Caribbean. Through the figure of Antonio Benítez-Rojo, the Caribbean space is going to be intrinsically linked to history, culture and literature. He proposes the term ‘*meta-archipelago*’ to conceive the Caribbean as islands that repeat themselves elsewhere. Within this chaotic reproduction of space, the creation of new identities is possible. Furthermore, through the concept of history Benítez-Rojo is able to present the Caribbean that has a common-ground but that is also capable of preserving its own individuality regarding each territory forming the space. On her part, Carole Boyce Davis presents the term ‘Caribbean spaces’ to express the plurality of Caribbean space, sociocultural and geographical locations. In the same line as Benítez-Rojo, she presents a fluid Caribbean interconnected that takes a different meaning each time something new is born in a different location. Through Boyce Davis’ reading of diasporic studies, the hybrid identity of the characters analysed of the novels is going to be understood. As regards diasporic literature, Stanka Radovic is going to reclaim the Caribbean through an autonomous self that is going to be linked to the creation of a new space. Machado-Sáez, however, is going to conceive diasporic literature as a project of rewriting history and fighting back the patronizing gaze contemporary times have set on them. Furthermore, by focusing on Caribbean women’s writing, some considerations about the creation and resistance of new identities are going to be taken into account through Carole Boyce Davies, Alice Braithwaite and Alison Donnell. Because in this study it is also important to understand why identity is linked to space it will be considered Stanka Radovic’s reading of the construction of landscape as “the complex correlation in Caribbean literature between dominated space inherited from the colonial world order

and the imaginative contestations of inheritance” (3). Moreover, by considering Sarah Phillips Casteel’s theory on Caribbean locations, different topoi are going to be interpreted as places of resistance and transformation of the subject.

The aim of this study is to provide an initial exploration of the conception of space in the construction of the Caribbean female self through the characters of Sophie Caco, Nieve and an unnamed female narrator. In particular, I am going to focus on the importance of the construction of identity in Caribbean cultural and spatial connections, as well as on the impact that the individual features of each island has on the characters. This is the reason why, writers from different locations have been chosen: Edwidge Danticat who lives in the USA but has her homeland in Haiti, Wendy Guerra from Cuba and Jennifer Rahim from Trinidad and Tobago. Some widespread topoi in Caribbean literature, such as the sea or the island, are going to be explored and thereby, establish the utmost connection with space and identity. All three texts show an evolution of the characters and space which is going to be the surface where identity is going to be inscribed and transformed. History is going to trim space in such a way that the spatial conception of the characters is going to create a platform for resistance and for a voice that claims a new self that is critical with the constraints of history itself and ultimately politics.

I will organize my arguments around three main blocks. The first one is the contextualization of the Caribbean titled “Terminology and historical contours of the Caribbean”. I will firstly consider the different terminologies regarding the Caribbean as well as situating it geographically. Afterwards, a brief history of the Caribbean and its rereading through the arrival of Columbus, the Middle Passage and plantations will be presented. The second block, the theoretical section, is going to be subdivided in four parts. The first part is going to analyse how from a postmodern perspective *La Isla que se Repite* by Antonio Benítez-Rojo provides a groundbreaking reading of the Caribbean in terms of space through the creation of the ‘*meta-archipelago*’. This interpretation is going to have implications in conceiving the Caribbean as a fluctuating space. The second part is going to explore the term ‘Caribbean spaces’ coined by Carole Boyce Davis. Through it we will understand how the creation of a new identity is going to be envisioned in a rebirth in different Caribbean locations. In the third block of this part, I am going to consider the implications of history and colonialism in the creation of Caribbean culture and at a further extent, of literature. Furthermore, these studies will

help me draw the importance of regaining a lost subject not just in physical terms but also in terms of imagination. Thus, the importance of also paying attention to the process and implications of Caribbean women's writing. Finally, in the last block, the novels *Breath, Eyes Memory* by Edwidge Danticat, *Todos se Van* by Wendy Guerra and "Sea" by Jennifer Rahim are going to be analysed taking into account all the information regarding history, space, identity and selfhood that has been explored previously. The order of the novels has been chosen due to the necessity of studying not only diasporic writers, such as Edwidge Danticat, but also Caribbean writers who produce their literature from the Caribbean. In each novel, I am going to consider how different spatial topics that have been previously discussed affect the construction of female identity. Ultimately, I am going to focus only on the main female characters because they contain a load of information that has been carried throughout many generations and, consequently, the text becomes the platform in which they become unsilenced as the narrator Sophie Caco in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* recollects: "There is always a place where, if you listen closely in the night, you will hear your mother telling a story and at the end of the tale, she will ask you this question: 'Ou libéré?' Are you free, my daughter?" (234).

1. TERMINOLOGY AND HISTORICAL CONTOURS OF THE CARIBBEAN

1.1. Geographical location and terminology

According to the Collins Dictionary, The Caribbean might be described as a sea “which is between the West Indies, Central America and the north coast of South America”. Additionally, we can refer to the Caribbean as the coast-line that surrounds this sea and all the territories such as islands or reefs that comprise it.

Moreover, due to the course of history and geographical distribution, one name or another can be applied to the region. First, the term ‘Caribbean’ is widely applied in a geographical sense. However, in terms of culture, ‘Caribbean’ provides a wide scope of all the territories, physical or imaginary, diasporic or context-based that could be seen through the same filter. Furthermore, it enhances the connection between spaces which share not only a part of the world but also history, culture, literature, music etc. On the other hand, other ways of naming the territory offer a more concrete perspective of the space such as West-Indies, which mostly refers to the Anglophone Caribbean, or The Antilles, that can be subdivided in Greater Antilles and Lesser Antilles. Finally, we can refer to the naming of each country which offers an even more concrete geographical and cultural location such as Haiti, Trinidad or Cuba.

On the other hand, amidst the historical past of the area, some debate has raised getting to the point of even offering a new nomenclature. Colbert I. Nepaulsingh proposes the term “New World Islands” (qtd. in Torres-Saillant 41). According to Torres-Saillant, “he [Nepaulsingh] contends that the new name could enable people in the region’s insular societies to abandon “continental modes of thought” that generally construe continents as inherently “superior to islands” and could also help them to dissociate the region from the “ ‘Caribbean/Carib/Cannibal’ nomenclature”(41). Nevertheless, it could be argued that the term “New World Islands” carries a strong colonial flavour because it sounds as if those spaces had not existed before the arrival of colonisers while the term “Caribbean”, despite the aforementioned negative connotation, offers not only a pan-Caribbean reading of space but also carries a common history of exploitation, resistance and culture.

1.2. Historical contours of the Caribbean

History is one of the foundational elements which are going to shape space, culture and ultimately, identity in the Caribbean. However, history must not be understood from the moment that Columbus sets foot on the Caribbean and thinking he has discovered something. As George Lamming affirms:

If you are trying to think of concepts of the Caribbean, these concepts will undergo change, and will be offered differently according to either the centers of power that are shaping them, or centres of resistance that are re-shaping them. So if you read history, innocently, and hear about a sailor called Columbus whom you receive as a hero and discoverer of worlds, your reading is a concept that has been shaped by some other authority. (1)

Nonetheless, it must be committed to memory that for many centuries indigenous communities such as the Taínos or Caribs had lived there, constructed a society, a culture, a language which was vanished, erased and, therefore, became irretrievable. It is considered, however, that “a pre-Columbian bridge of myth that runs through the Americas” still exists (Harris qtd. in Boyce, *Caribbean Spaces* 3). Consequently, for understanding the Caribbean it must not be forgotten that there is something almost ethereal that is conceptualized in pre-Columbian myths that does not solely unite the Caribbean but the whole of the Americas.

After Columbus arrived, many European countries sailed to the continent and started battling over territories which they would define as ‘terra nullius’. Some years later, the Caribbean was fully colonized, sugar plantations were set and served to underpin future plantations in the USA. The Middle Passage recalls the “transportation of numerous Africans across the Atlantic; difficult and pain-filled journeys across ocean space” (Boyce Davis, *Caribbean Spaces* 68). George Lamming explains that the movement of people from Africa was only to justify the enormous expansion of this kind of business and consequently, “the Caribbean was a landscape remade by the labour force of all those who had been brought into it from one place or another” (3). Therefore, many cultures mingled and it could be argued that there is a link between labour and culture embodied by the “culture of labour” which is one of the things that unites people in the Caribbean (Lamming 3). Regarding culture and history, Lamming portrays literature as a key element to encapsulate history, especially the novel, because

“one of the functions of the novel in the Caribbean is to serve as a form of social history [...] by bringing to attention the interior lives of men and women who were never thought to be sufficiently important for their thoughts and feelings to be registered” (5).

2. THEORETICAL SECTION

2.1. Postmodern reading of the Caribbean space: *The Repeating Island* by Antonio Benítez-Rojo

The Repeating Island is a series of essays by the Cuban writer Antonio Benítez-Rojo which read the Caribbean through a postmodern perspective. His study drives away from the established idea of the Caribbean is a strictly geographical space to consider how history, culture and literature can construct a more ethereal space. He calls the aforementioned invisible space *meta-archipelago* which he defines as a set of islands that repeat themselves and have no centre from which to rebound and reflect themselves but, on the contrary, a “meta-archipelago has the virtue of having neither a boundary nor a centre” (4). This unmarked space is in constant movement in order to re-shape Caribbean spaces: “Unpredictable flux of transformative plasma that spins calmly in our globe’s firmament, that sketches in an “other” shape that keeps changing” (4). Hence, the interconnection as regards culture within the Caribbean

This unstable picture of the Caribbean space is explained through the theory of Chaos whereby “the (dis)order that swarms around what we already know of as nature it is possible to observe dynamic states of irregularities that repeat themselves globally” (Benítez 2). According to this definition, Chaos is going to open a gap through which one can grasp interconnections within a large territory. This chaotic state that establishes a certain pattern is going to enable this study to analyse different texts further while taking the *meta-archipelago* as an invisible threat through which read space and the creation of new identities.

On the other hand, Antonio Benítez-Rojo explains that history is the reason why the Caribbean is seen as an interconnected space. He proposes the Atlantic to be the door towards a sanguinary history which he explains through three machines. Firstly, Columbus is the “medieval vacuum cleaner” (6) who took the richness of indigenous inhabitants. Secondly, following the exploitation line of Columbus, Menéndez de Avilés provided the Caribbean of a complex system of trade to secure and protect what was

exported. According to the author, it was this instance of history in which the territories of this sea were found in an inescapable junction. However, the most detrimental machine he considers is the plantation which had innumerable consequences such as the massive movement of people of Africa, industrial capitalism and African underdevelopment or the growth of sugar islands. As a consequence, Alberto Benítez-Rojo considers that this history is “suppurating, always suppurating” (5). Somehow history enabled the Caribbean to become a common space in which exploitation left an open wound from which many artists are going to reflect their work. Due to history, Benítez-Rojo considers that “[t]he Caribbean is an important historico-economic sea, and further, a cultural meta-archipelago” (9).

For this reason, it is in culture where the Caribbean becomes a full-fledged kaleidoscope through which one can observe its singularity but also its mutuality: “in the Caribbean, the ‘foreign’ interacts with the “traditional” like a ray of light with a prism; that is, they produce phenomena of reflection, refraction, and decomposition” (12). Therefore, in the Caribbean, the local crashes into the alien becoming a “discourse, a language, and as such it has no beginning nor end and is always in transformation” (20).

Moreover, the one thing that provides Caribbean culture of being in constant unrest is the sea. Caribbean culture is portrayed as “terrestrial but aquatic, a sinuous culture where time unfolds irregularly and resists being captured” (11). Despite the importance of images such as the sea in Caribbean culture, “in order to reread the Caribbean we have to visit the sources from which the widely various elements that contributed to the formation of its culture flowed” (12). Consequently, to understand space one must look back not only to history but also to topics such as religion or food to apprehend the formation of identity in the Caribbean.

On the other hand, it is in literature where it can be found the quintessential elements that will compose Caribbean culture. Space will shape Caribbean texts through the trace left by history and society. Furthermore, these remnants are going to open the space through which texts will find a way to be an enclave for resistance and for the creation a diverse creative product:

The Caribbean poem and novel are not only projects for ironizing a set of values taken as universal; they are, also, projects that communicate their own

turbulence, their own clash and their own void, the swirling black hole of social violence produced by the *encomienda* and the plantation, that is, their otherness [...] Thus Caribbean literature cannot free itself totally of the multi-ethnic society upon which floats, and it tells us about its fragmentation and instability. (Benítez Rojo 27)

2.2. Islands, continental locations and diasporic locations: *Caribbean spaces* by Carole Boyce Davis

Carole Boyce Davis in *Caribbean Spaces: Escapes from twilight zones* (2013) provides the reader with a mixture of memories, reflections and personal experiences through which different aspects of the Caribbean are explored.

Firstly, the text revolves around the term “Caribbean Spaces” which is defined as “my way of describing plural island geographies, the surrounding continental locations as well as Caribbean sociocultural and geopolitical locations” (1). The author envisages the Caribbean in terms of diversity through society, culture and geopolitics which are basic to understand how these spaces are constructed. One of the spaces she deals with in depth is the diasporic space. The Caribbean is mirrored in dislocated sites and reproduced in order to establish a resemblance but, at the same time, it leads to the birth of something new: “Caribbean diaspora spaces, in the continental context, refer to those locations in which there are distinctly identified re-creations of Caribbean communities following migration” (1).

Secondly, Boyce Davis shares with Benítez-Rojo the feature of fluidity which emanates from the Caribbean: “The Caribbean, in my vision, is a place of constant new birth” (33). Thus, by picturing a constant transformation of the Caribbean, new identities are created. Moreover, considering that she argues that Caribbean spaces, either diasporic or Caribbean-based, are grounded on a multiplicity that also includes continental and diasporic spaces, the Caribbean is going to be transformed within the place it is conceived: “From each location, the Caribbean is something else, takes on a different meaning” (37). The Caribbean space is understood differently according to each character in the texts that will be analysed further on but, mostly, a different location is going to build a unique subject with the common-ground of the Caribbean.

In the same manner as Benítez-Rojo and George Lamming, Boyce Davis goes back on history as one of the basic constituents of communion of Caribbean identity and of Caribbean culture: “Caribbean culture, that has been produced in spite of and often in response to there is a way of writing oneself out of these various enslavements, through pathways for the reclaiming of the imagination” (34). Therefore, the creative stem flourishes from a soil in which a history of enslavement and violence is buried. At the same time, this stem serves to reclaim one’s history but also to escape it. Consequently, artists are capable of creating outside the mindset colonialism imposed and, therefore, art is positioned in a Caribbean where artists are empowered to find their own voice.

Nevertheless, the author offers a proposal to visualize the Caribbean through “*seeing*”, “*reading*” and “*imagining*” (emphasis in the original, 35). Regarding *seeing* it is significant as it supports the idea to “interpret beyond the given, into the past, in the present, and into the future.” On the other hand, regarding *reading* it is key to “pursuing the signs, the codes, the hidden meanings, the silences, erasures, absences.” Finally, *imagining* is meant to facilitate “the mental process of liberating the mind” so that it is possible to move outside the given reality (35). All these three processes help to envision the Caribbean beyond what is seen on the surface, provide a reading beyond stereotypes and a more accurate analysis of Caribbean texts.

On the other hand, the author affirms that “in cultural studies, migration and diaspora discourses have become ways of linking the issues of hybrid identities and shifting locations” (98). Consequently, the constitution of the subject can be read also through the filter of changing spaces which unavoidably is going to entail the concoction of several cultural and linguistic aspects. She also distinguishes three types of diaspora which are going to reach most of the levels of population in the Caribbean. In the first wave of diaspora, Africans and Indians were brought to the Caribbean. Secondly, movements inside the Caribbean to find work and, finally, the migration or exile to the United States or United Kingdom by people from different Caribbean nations. These layers of movement of population enable the reader to dig into a Caribbean text regarding the complexity of diversity in Caribbean spaces.

2.3. Reclaiming the Caribbean and Diasporic literature

Caribbean spaces encompass, as it has been already discussed, a long history throughout which many cultures mingled. Consequently, for understanding Caribbean literature it is worth considering how language plays a key role in the construction of a new voice for writers after the end of colonialism: “Es el resultado de de un proceso histórico de más de quinientos años que ha dado lugar a una realidad previamente inexistente. Al transportar la memoria y el bagaje de los ancestros, incorpora una sabiduría [...] Pero sin olvidar que, por encima de todo, esa forma de expresión mira al futuro de la nación, de la propia lengua y la cultura.” (“Una nueva estética”, Cordobés 56).

As Carole Boyce Davis argued in *Caribbean Spaces*, the Caribbean has been shaped by several movements of migration. These “traumatic dislocations” have implied that many studies have mentioned the Caribbean “as the paradigmatic instance of deterritorialization of culture” (“Reterritorializing”, Casteel 624). Sarah Phillips Casteel emphasizes the relevance of new studies which pay “greater attention to the process of *reterritorialization*” among studies that forsake the Caribbean as possible space of creation.

On the one hand, Stanka Radovic claims that after the end of colonialism, which implied a “historical and cultural but also geographical dispossession” (625), literature has been a silver lining by “bring[ing] into being another form of spatial and historical identity” (qtd. Phillips 626). Consequently, her study, as Phillips states, is not only going to support in the creation of an autonomous space but also is going to boost “an integral part of the postcolonial quest for autonomous self-hood” (626). On the other hand, Machado-Sáez argues that diasporic writers are “a project of counter history” because contemporary discourses, globalization and multiculturalism have exerted a process of dehistoricization which they try to fight back (qtd. in Phillips 629). Furthermore, she argues that this proposal can produce a counter effect through which they feel as if there are “expectations of cultural authenticity” they have to fulfill (Phillips 630). For example, in Edwidge Danticat’s *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* in which she affirms: “Self-doubt is probably one of the stages of acclimation in a new culture. It’s a staple for most artists. As immigrant artists for

whom so much has been sacrificed, so many dreams have been deferred, we already doubt so much” (19).

Despite the fears Danticat presents, academics such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo or Carole Boyce Davis, present a constant transformation of a borderless Caribbean. Due to the openness and fluctuant nature of the Caribbean, Caribbean diasporic writers find it difficult to locate themselves in a space: “They are still a population that must locate itself in the postcolonial binary of home/away” (Braithwaite 144). Through the twofold location a negotiation is established and thereby the assimilation of the new land as well as the preservation of the customs of the native land arises: “identifications with the ‘here’ and ‘there’ remain more mobile and provisional even with a fixed place and time” (Donnell 72).

2.3.1. Caribbean women’s writing

Finding a new identity becomes crucial to many Caribbean diasporic writers as Carole Boyce Davis proposes in *Black Women, Writing and Identity*: “The negotiation of identities is fundamental to migration as it is fundamental to Black women’s writing in cross-cultural contexts” (3). Thus, the borderless nature of the Caribbean is going to be the place from which Caribbean writers will examine how the dislocation of their culture and the assumption of the new one will lead to new self.

On the other hand, women in the Caribbean had to flee their country due to economic reasons (“Escribir en los márgenes”, Cordobés 122). Furthermore, Diasporic women Caribbean writers have found themselves in disadvantage to their male counterparts as they “have been defined as ‘immigrants’, as opposed to ‘exiles’, Caribbean women have not had the privileged relationships to a nation and a narrative that their male predecessors have enjoyed” (Braithwaite 144). In other words, their gender has been problematic when their creative spaces were still to be found. Following the same line, Boyce problematizes identity for Afro-Caribbean/American “women writers [as it] involves a self-definition which takes into account the multifaceted nature of human existence and of female identity” (115). Consequently, their experiences and struggle was not solely linked to their origin and race but also to their gender. Therefore, gender oppression is going to help this study understand how geographical and cultural spaces erode over female identity.

Despite the tendency of recent studies to focus on diasporic literature, many academics have identified the need for reclaiming literature made from the Caribbean. For example, Alison Donnell affirms that “there is an increasing body of work from within the Caribbean documenting a long history of women’s agency [...] Moreover, the focus on migrant subjects becomes of particular concern given that increasingly little attention is being given to the Caribbean region as a site of possibility” (70). Bearing this in mind, this study intends to propose an analysis of female identity through the multiplicity of Caribbean spaces, giving voice to diasporic writers but also to female writers who have decided to remain in the Caribbean to produce their literary work.

2.5. Caribbean spatial imaginary

The Caribbean has plenty of images that have constructed its cultural identity. Moreover, spatial imaginary has been constructed hierarchically and authors try to reverse it. The notion of location in the Caribbean, as it has been analysed, can be problematic especially regarding the traces the Middle Passage and colonialism left: “Narrative configurations of Caribbean postcolonial location thus force us to read, through metaphors of space, the endurance of colonial hierarchy through various institutions and ideologies as well as the struggle for autonomy and independence of postcolonial societies” (Radovic 6). This kind of liberation among struggle is intrinsically linked to the construction of characters in novels because texts also offer the idea of an autonomous self resembling the historical processes their countries underwent.

According to Stanka Radovic, “The metaphoricity and metarality of the island topography in general and the Caribbean archipelago in particular draw our attention to the uneasy yet mutually constitutive relationship between how we imagine things and how they really are” (28). Consequently, it is going to be important to explore how several elements that constitute space are going to be interpreted by the characters in the novels. The different characters that will be analysed through different topoi: the house, flora, the sea, the island and the plantation. For example, the house is said to have an “ambiguous nature, reflected in its being both a material structure and a metaphorical construct” (Radovic 21). Furthermore, flora was at its chore altered to adapt tropical

landscapes to a colonial mindset and European flora. However, in contemporary Caribbean literature “nature tends not to function as a refuge from history but instead becomes profoundly historicized and politicized” (“Location”, Casteel Phillips 481). The sea, on the other hand, has a twofold interpretation. It can either become a “space of possibility” or a “receptacle for the losses of the Middle Passage” (482). In the same line, the island can be said to be “bounded and confining as opening out to the sea and places beyond” (484). Nonetheless, one of the most significant images is the plantation which was a place where oppression, sexual harassment, abuse and force labour were embodied. Therefore, the symbol of the plantation now demystifies the idea of the Caribbean being a paradise and it is portrayed as a ruin used as an “instrument of critique” (485). Reading spaces regarding each characters personal experience is going to enhance the possibility of producing alternative spaces that enable personal practices outside the colonial frame about space.

3. ANALYSIS OF WORKS

3.1. Breath, Eyes, Memory by Edwidge Danticat

From the very first line, the text introduces us to the landscape that is going to represent both Sophie Caco and her mother Martine Caco: the daffodil. This flower, in the text, embodies the connection between daughter and mother because it is the flower, precisely, that Sophie choses to be in the mother’s day card. In spite of the fact that at this stage Sophie identifies her mother figure in her aunt Atie, the Daffodil was her mother’s favourite flower: “your mother, she loved daffodils” (21). Additionally, this flower is a plant that recalls colonial times as it a flower not natural in the Caribbean. It is its uprooting nature what Martine loves about daffodils: “my mother loved daffodils because they grew in a place that they were not supposed to. They were European flowers, French buds and stems, meant for colder climates” (21). Thus, it could be argued that the fact that Martine mirrors herself in this flower is caused by the uncomfortable situation she experiences in Haiti. However, this flower too, has mingled with Haitian nature and climatic characteristics to become something else by changing location. Therefore, the flower does not represent solely the reminder of colonial times but also the transformation in Haiti becoming almost as something that is identified with home: “they acquired a bronze tinge from the skin of the natives who had adopted them” (21). That is why Sophie, when she leaves to New York to meet with her mother,

grasps a new life opening in which daffodils have no place: “A red dust rose between me and the only life I had ever known. There were no children playing, no leaves flying about. No daffodils” (31).

Consequently, one of the most significant spaces in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is going to be the negotiation between the concepts of home and away. It must be remembered that Sophie was raised in Haiti by her aunt Atie after her mother left to New York City, and she is asked back by her mother. The city is going to represent the transformation in Sophie: “I looked at my red eyes in the mirror while splashing cold water over my face. New eyes seemed to be looking back at me. A new face all together” (49). Once in New York, the area reminds her of Haiti: “The streets along Flatbush Avenue reminded me of home” (50). Nevertheless, the reproduction of Haiti in New York is not sufficient to protect the character from racism directed to the Haitian community: “My mother said it was important that I learned English quickly. Otherwise, the American students would make fun of me or, even worse, beat me” (51). Therefore, the city is going to have an ambiguous position in the construction of Sophie’s identity because it is both a shelter as it recalls home but also it is a space associated with racism.

However, one of the most important items that is going to be travelling along with her, to New York is sexuality and the way it is perceived and controlled. Martine states while talking with her boyfriend Marc: “She will have a boyfriend when she is 18” (56). The theme of sexuality is recurrent in the novel. Nevertheless, it is important to look back on Martine’s story because it is going to shape the development of Sophie’s identity throughout the novel. Sophie only gets to know the story of her conception throughout her mother because aunt Atie had not wanted to tell her such a crude story. Martine explains: “ ‘The details are too much’ she said. ‘But it happened like this. A man grabbed me from the side of the road pulled me into a cane field, and put you in my body’ ”(61). Rape had intoxicated Martine’s life forever more as it would derive in depression and suicide instincts embodied in nightmares were her rapist and Sophie’s father appeared. Back in Haiti, it is a custom to test girls after the first menstruation to ensure their purity and provide protection of rape and family honour. This testing is carried on by Martine in the USA to Sophie after she falls in love with Joseph. However, Sophie takes the pestle in which her mother crushed spices to cook Haitian food and she says: “My flesh ripped apart as I pressed the pestle into it. I could see the blood slowly dripping onto the bed sheet” (88). Therefore, the violent tradition of Haiti

is transposed in a foreign territory that is going to be reshaped in the same manner and, from then, it is going to constitute a hostile space. Sophie needs to escape and she marries Joseph and leaves to Providence. After giving birth to her baby girl, she needs to reencounter some of the essence she had lost, or at least find answers to the reasons behind testing and sexual phobia.

Due to the trauma provoked in her adopting country, Sophie returns to Haiti with her daughter Brigitte. At her arrival she confesses to the taxi driver: “I need to remember” (95). Therefore, she tries to recover her childhood, the concept of home and the relationship with her mother and, consequently, understanding the consequences of her rape. The woman in this family are identified as strong and through each generation, their blood is continued: “The tree has not split one mite. Isn’t it a miracle that we can visit with all our kin, simply by looking into its face?” (105). This union is going to be embodied by the Caco bird that “when it dies, there is a rush of blood that rises to its neck and the wings, they look so bright, you would think them on fire” (150). After Sophie confesses her sexual problems to her grandmother, she offers her the answers on why girls are tested and, for the first time, she recognizes all the pain this practice inflicts: “ ‘My heart it weeps like a river,’ she said, ‘for the pain we have caused you’ ” (157). Thus, the island of Haiti becomes a space of healing despite its history of violence and harassment towards women. Haiti is still a space where Sophie finds the chance to find answers but not the chance to transform and, consequently, to stay.

After her encounter with Martine in Haiti, they return to the USA. Sophie confesses that one of the most severe consequences of her sexual phobia is bulimia. However, in the ignorance of her mother, food is cooked to heal Sophie. Funnily, it is not Haitian but spaghetti and tomato. After what seemed a curfew between daughter and mother, Martine commits suicide shortly after her nightmares worsen. Dressed in red, just as the Caco bird, she returns to her final trip to Haiti and she is given the strength of her people, the one that lacked after the trauma of rape.

Sugar cane plantations are going to be a key space to understand how Sophie, despite the absence of her mother, is going to carry a life without the pressure of keeping her alive. The plantation is going to appear throughout the novel not only as a landscape in the same Haiti but as a landscape in family history. Firstly, Sophie’s grandfather died in sugar cane field and it is where her mother was raped. In her last trip

to Haiti, Marine prepared her mother's funeral and her wish was to be buried in a place called Guinea¹ that recalls a past as African slaves. Moreover, Sophie affirms that it is "[a] place where all the women in my family hoped to eventually meet one another, at the very end of each of our journeys" (174). Accordingly, Martine is going to be buried in Guinea to have the chance "to be free" (228). Furthermore, during the funeral this freedom is adopted by Sophie too. Ascending to a higher place, offers her perspective, not only over the landscape but also over life. There are the plantations down the hill: "From the top of the hill, I saw our house, between the hills and the cane field. [...] There were only a few men working in the cane fields. I run through the field, attacking the cane" (233). In this attack of rage, aunt Atie asks Sophie: "*Ou liberé?* Are you free?" (233). There is no answer to the question. However, silence is going to embody the possibility of transforming, of becoming someone else away from sexual phobia and bulimia for Sophie. Consequently, Haiti becomes a space of possibilities, but given the fact that there is no answer it cannot be ensured that Sophie will be free from the constraints space and sexual trauma have ensnared her in.

Despite the escape that the confrontation with the plantation means for Sophie, she regards space as an intrinsic part of herself and that all the things that are carried within cannot be washed away: "I come from a place where breath, eyes, and memory are one, a place from which you carry your past like the hair on your head." (234).

3.2. *Todos se van* by Wendy Guerra

Nieve, the main character of *Todos se van*, feels displaced in Cuba. Even through her name, she comprehends that a thing like snow has no place in the country. In the prologue, Nieve states: "Allí siempre fui un adulto; fingía ser una niña, pero no era cierto: demasiado adulta para el Diario, demasiado niña para la vida real" (11). Therefore, in the diary, we encounter a displaced subject and a "sentimiento análogo y a la vez distinto del que se proyecta sobre la vida civil" (Mesa 150). The diary itself represents a space where the main character finds a shelter from all the restrictions Cuba sets upon her regarding politics and, consequently, the policies that follow. She is

¹ In the short story "Sea" the narrator presents as an ideal place to be buried as Guinea too: "The sea is Guinea. I did not know this then, but now it seems to me that the sea finally got its chance to welcome her into Guinea" (144).

critical with the government of Cuba not only for the loss of its starting revolutionary status but also because it imposes a strict regime that dictates citizens' lifestyle and, therefore, limits their freedom to choose.

Accordingly, the space that is going to outline mostly the character of Nieve is the island personalized into Cuba. Cuba, due to political reasons, is a bubble on its own because of international isolation and embargo. Therefore, as Nieve explains, Cuba has built her identity given the fact that she has been neglected the knowledge of an outside world as well as trapping her inside this inescapable sphere: "Nacer en Cuba ha sido mimetizarme en esa ausencia del mundo al que nos sometemos. No he aprendido a usar una tarjeta de crédito, no me contestan los cajeros. [...] Afuera me siento en peligro, adentro me siento confortablemente presa" (12). Consequently, the cause of such ignorance is triggered by a highly militarized state that is going to impregnate the understanding of freedom in Cuba: "No es posible vomitar tantas verdades y quedarse a vivir en Cuba" (170). Nieve, in her teens, is going to follow in the steps of her mother by going to art school. Through the filter of art, the island is going to convey a sterile land for creativity because art in Cuba must follow the lines of the ideology of the government: "Hace unos meses encerraron a unos poetas de Matanzas. [...] Se dice que es una represalia por la sinceridad de lo que escriben" (166). The space of the island, even if representing an enclosure for the construction of the female self of Nieve, is going to be the surface in which she is going to envisage the desire of her future in a foreign land. Hence, the acquisition of liberty.

Nevertheless, freedom in the island is obtained through fantasy as the difficulty of escaping from Cuba cannot be overcome: "No me hace falta viajar: vivo en una Europa inventada en medio del Caribe. Si quiero sentirme en «el mundo» debo permanecer en este círculo y no decepcionarme, mucho menos flaquear. [...] Allá fuera existe otro país que una muchacha como yo no puede ignorar" (212). Due to the aforementioned repression in Cuba, many people have fled the country. That is reflected in the novel through the absences people leave on the island and on the life of Nieve where they almost become like ghosts: "Ya no puedo marcar esos números. Nadie me contestará. Casi no hay gente conocida en la ciudad. Todos se van. Me dejan sola." (223). Somehow through the relationship with Osvaldo, a Cuban artist that has returned briefly to the island, the narrator constructs the island as a binary that she had not acknowledged before. The island and la Habana are idealized from the perspective of

the exiled: “Él hablaba de otra Cuba, de otra Habana y de otra Nieve” (192). The hopes of Nieve to leave Cuba are ultimately shattered after a police search. They seize her passport and, consequently, the possibility of changing her life outside the country: “se me escapaba ese documento gris, que ya no estaría apuntalando mis esperanzas” (261).

In spite of the fact that the island represents almost a claustrophobic spatial presence, the self of Nieve is nomadic throughout her life. The background that configures the unstable location of Nieve goes along Cienfuegos, Escambay, Cienfuegos again, a reeducation centre, Cayo Carena and, finally, la Habana. The most interesting place to analyse is the space of the capital city of la Habana as it can be read differently through the different lifetimes of Nieve. For her, as a child, it was exciting to think about the city and desire to lead a life very different from the one she carried as a child: “Estoy loca por conocer la Habana” (73). The child pictures the city as a space in which she is going to be free to lead her life. However, the city embodies a hostile landscape of poverty and destruction which causes the build-up of the critical mindset of Nieve: “No quiero garabatear más la ciudad. Ya la ciudad es distinta con tanto verde olivo y tanto balcón caído. Tantas vallas y consignas, tantas órdenes exhortándonos desde los carteles políticos”. Moreover, as the previous quote illustrates, the city is going to be crowded with politics. On the other hand, Nieve discovers the other side of la Habana through Osvaldo, a richer city: “De pronto me vi atrapada en un lugar de otro mundo” (189).

Having lived in so many places, for Nieve, it is unbearable to conceive a positive image of the home, embodied in a house. From the very first moments, the narrator establishes a consciousness, encouraged by her mother, that she cannot love any house: “Mi madre no quiere que me encariñe con esta casa ni con ninguna. Vivimos prestadas, ésa es la verdad” (15). Along with this lonesome perspective of the house, while living with her father, the house becomes a symbol of violence because her father hits her Nieve continuously: “Cuando entro a la casa estoy más en peligro que cuando estoy fuera” (61). After she is able to abandon the brutality inflicted by her father², Nieve goes back to her house in Cienfuegos with her mother. However, she has no space for

² Throughout the novel there is a strong violence towards women. Nieve’s mother was beaten by her husband. Furthermore, when Nieve is in a military school, it is seen how she and her mother have absorbed violence and gender inequality: “Según mi madre, la liberación de la mujer son las latas de conserva para salir rápido de la cocina, una Buena lavadora eléctrica para poder lavar la ropa sin esfuerzo, y lo demás lo pone una” (141). Male characters also try to show control over Nieve by taking her Diary out, the only resource she has freedom of thinking.

her and is redirected to a reeducation centre as “[n]o me dejaron quedarme en mi casa” (81). Consequently, the identity of Nieve is created by uprooting her from any place where she could start to form a full-fledged identity outside the pages of the diary. Despite la Habana is going to represent the transformation of Nieve into a grown woman, the little flat where she lives with her mother is decrepit. Furthermore, the intimacy required by her adult self is shattered as many friends of her mother stay there because they do not have another place to go in the city: “No tengo intimidad, no sé lo que es andar desnuda en mi propio cuarto. [...] La casa cada día se vuelve más inhabitable” (169).

Even if most of the spaces treated in the novel are presented in a negative light, the sea, as it is going to be observed in the short story “Sea”, represents the unchaining space for Nieve. Even being a child, she is mimetic with the elements of the sea in which she finds peace: “Yo soy un pez en la corriente, ella me quiere arrastrar pero me resisto y demoro mucho en llegar a la playa. Me quedo flotando quieta, me dejo guiar al lugar en que empuja” (16). Furthermore, within the fury of the paternal figure, Nieve tends to vomit and when she sees the toilet she is reminded of the currents of the sea and the peace it brought her (57). Additionally, the sea is presented as a space completely depoliticized unlike the rest of spaces. The sea here is presented with great fluidity that later on is going to metaphorically represent the several transformations of the self of the main character. At the end of the novel, when Nieve is still accepting that she is going to remain in Cuba for a while she goes to el Malecón and jumps into the sea:

Cada vez me acercaba más a la luz; me regresé a la superficie, pues allí soy yo. Emergí poco a poco, mirando alrededor, pero preferí sucumbir hasta que la línea de agua tapara mi cara, separando, desprendiendo mi suerte de la realidad. [...] Pero una vez helado el mar Caribe, no hay posibilidad de llegar a ningún sitio. De este lado sigo escribiendo mi Diario, invernando en mis ideas, sin poder desplazarme, para siempre condenada a la inmovilidad. (263)

Therefore, in the sea she finds her true self, the one allowed to think, the one that wishes to escape. But in this moment, it snows in the Caribbean sea, metaphorically freezing all the perspective of Nieve to create a self without the constraints that Cuba inflicts on her.

3.3. “Sea” by Jennifer Rahim

The short story “Sea” by Jennifer Rahim is a meditation around her islands and the elements that constitute it and, as a consequence shape the voice of the narrator identity. This personal reflection by a female narrative voice takes place specifically in Trinidad as the narrator makes clear, at the very end of the story, places such as “Carenage Main Road” or “St. James” (145).

The island is one of the most important topoi in the short story because it is identified as “My home” (139). The narrative voice makes explicit that she lives there while others have to take home “in a suitcase” with culture-specific items such as “a bottle of pepper sauce” (139). Therefore, the island reproduces itself elsewhere through cultural objects that emanate the essence of the concrete space. It is not a hegemonic reproduction of space in the light of the *meta-archipelago* but it focuses solely in Trinidad. Nonetheless, the I, has no necessity to transport these things as her island is “not a world in my head like a fantasy” even if all her body is constituted by it and she “never want[s] to leave” (139). Furthermore, the island is the only location the narrator conceives as space of possibility for the self that she is constructing while others think that “life can only happen somewhere else” (139). Meanwhile, the inhabitants of the island adopt the potential of the island in order to construct themselves: “They fall and rise again” (140). Consequently, the identity of the narrator is going to be deeply rooted in her island not only for residing there but also through the interaction the self has with the land itself. The island is going to be portrayed as a vivid space that emanates fluidity which is going to be mirrored in the narrator later in the story: “I reach down to touch my land with my naked hands, hold the living earth in my hands and then give it back, amazed” (139). Through this reconstruction, the narrator is able to present a space in which rebirth is possible precisely because loved ones are buried in the same soil she is developing her life: “People I have loved a great deal [...] are buried under its surface, becoming life again – for me, for everyone”. Despite Trinidad has an immanent flux, the I sees the island as a microcosm: “my island is a world” (140). Within it, people are constructed in parallelism with natural elements that constitute the island and ultimately are going to embody their identity: “There are people here with the largeness of trees, the permanence of mountains, with mercy like the depths of the sea” (140).

The fact that the narrator lives on an island, however, is also shaped by an external point of view: the diasporic one. Her cousin, living in New York, provides an objectifying gaze on the narrator as she is seen as the other, not fitting into an American

atmosphere. He sees her as an “island girl” whose language is “choppy” (141). Furthermore, even if this adjective recalls the brokenness of discourse, it also evokes a certain nature of the sea in which there are small waves due to wind. Therefore, being Caribbean, another basic constituent in the identity of the narrator is going to be the sea, as she admits: “my language was the sea. Neither he nor I knew the largeness of that meaning” (141).

The narrative voice situates her home geographically between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean whose clash gave birth to islands like hers. The sea is presented in a twofold nature as the narrator was at a point both terrified about it and dazzled due to its purifying effect on her. The narrator affirms that “when I was a little girl I was afraid of the sea” (141) because its depth was threatening. Nevertheless, the figure of the father helped taming the fearless nature of the sea due to its positive portrayal in the text: “He was the sun I waited for when my world was a terrible darkness” (141). As it has been mentioned previously, the narrator is deeply rooted in her island and as a child it was scary to leave it behind to jump into the sea up until: “Then one day, as I stood washed by my own tears that were as salty as the big sea where my father swam, my feet said farewell to the land. [...] My body had remembered that the sea was my beginning.” (141). The sea is a tissue through which the narrative voice conquers her own fears triggered by a painful life experience. She does not need her father’s support to jump into the sea anymore but diving inside helps her build an independent self which has the potential of beginning again through the cathartic power of water. Furthermore, thanks to the inevitable connection of the island and the sea due to their geographic features, the I constitutes the sea as an inevitable force to clean issues that are hooked into people living in islands “so that your life can begin again” (142). The process of a sea bath is pictured almost as a ritual through which the self is transformed, renewed to keep carrying life. The narrative voice is a seamless element along with the sea: “slowly becoming one with the bay that lies before you, flat and smooth as a mirror” (142). Therefore, the self the narrator projects on the text, conquers a natural space that is going to be comprised in herself in order to dissolve the traumas she carries within. The sea also unfolds as a borderless force that is going to take the self into unimaginable places that are going to shape her identity too.

These places are taken as a way to reclaim imagination as well as history. These locations are embodied and filtered through space to obtain the construction of the

narrative self through common history and individual history. Firstly, the narrator politicizes both the sea and the island to reclaim a history that was marked by the arrival of European colonizers. Despite the imprint colonisers left on Trinidad, the female narrator achieves to reverse history: “islands are places that were discovered en route to other places where the pickings were plenty better, only the discoverer got lost and had to settle for what he had found – not India or El Dorado, only small places with beaches and not-so-hostile natives that could be tamed or eradicated” (140). The expectancy the colonizer had set for the supposed land to be found was not the one they had expected but they saw that the climatic conditions of the island, “a good deal of hot sun” would be ideal for growing crops such as cocoa and sugar. Nevertheless, its exploitation was “for the sole purpose of making the comfort of others possible” while enslaving the inhabitants of the islands. Furthermore, the reconquest of the territory is basic for the narrator but does it with caution because “their realness must be guarded, jealously, like love” (141).

The sea, on the other hand, is portrayed as a natural element with a secretive background which constitutes the story of “all who live within its [the island] borders and those who come home for vacations, or write letters when they cannot return” (142). The narrator’s identity starts with the story of those brought to the Caribbean from Africa through the Middle Passage: “I began with the sea, with people who came in ships from many places” (142). Furthermore, her identity is constituted by: “people who enslaved other people and the people who were enslaved” (142) because her grandfather, was a Portuguese sailor. The pain that carried and still carries this historical event to the female voice is almost unbearable and “[t]here is no other explanation” but the greed of the colonizers. The sea, as it has been analysed, has a purifying effect in the narrator. In the same manner, the sea is also a way of dealing with history, facing it and accepting it: “under the water, you can hear the dead talking each to the other” (143). The reason why she can hear dead conversing is because they decided “that they needed a sea-bath” because it might have been the only way to return to their homeland. As the narrative voice affirms: “My island is a home that some people did not want to accept because it would mean losing their very selves. A home must be a place where you *choose* to live” (143). Therefore, the narrator reads the deaths along the journey to the Caribbean as people who rejected the idea of obligingly forsaking their home. Similarly, she parallels the story of the slaves to all those that emigrate nowadays from the

Caribbean because “(Sometimes it is necessary to repeat a story until a door opens to another beginning)” (brackets in the original, 142). The sea becomes a space through which the female narrative voice is capable of envisioning history in such a way that focuses on the the unknown story of all those that suffered the Middle Passage and their feelings rather than facts, data and concreteness of a grand narrative. The fluid nature of the sea enhances a way of possibility through which the narrator recognises her identity and its implications while politicizing it. Furthermore, she acknowledges that the problematic journeys to and from the Caribbean have not stopped nowadays and by envisioning the first trips, she frames the pain that leaving home means.

Through common history the narrative voice is able to underpin her personal story. For the narrator “[t]he sea is a language I am forever learning”. As a child, she was raped by someone close and she was enclosed in a complete silence: “When I was a child, someone who was supposed to love me as family stole my tongue, said to me that if I spoke I would no longer be a good girl” (144). In addition to a violent historical past, the narrative voice life is tainted by extreme violence and repression. She did not dare to ask questions because she could be punished. Her condition as a little girl in front of an older man, disabled her to voice her pain and struggle. She “believed that story” (144). However, through the knowledge of who her blood family is, she is able to affirm “Knowledge about myself comes to me in fragments” (145).

Moreover, she presents a paradox of self-knowledge through the island: “Many things about me that I know and things I do not know are held within its borders” (145). It could be argued then that the island is a symbol of the confinement of her identity as well as the fragmentation her story contains. On the other hand, through the sea and “its currents moving back and forth”, she is able to establish a continuity with all those who share her common history and with the people who had to search for a new home elsewhere. Nevertheless, this encapsulation of love to the island “ is my only healing” (144). The narrative voice concludes the short story by stating: “My home is a word without end, and its meanings thunder like the arrival of the sea” (145). A sense of wholeness of the Caribbean identity is established through the endless perception of the home and the complexity of its meaning which comes slowly like the waves of the sea but collide on her strongly, like thunder.

CONCLUSIONS

Reflections around space unavoidably are present in Caribbean postcolonial discourse. This study has explored how space can be interpreted as a rich soil in which new identities can be created. The Caribbean provides a multiple reading of spaces. That is to say, that space is not solely perceived as a geographical and geopolitical location but also as a ground that can be transformed into a metaphor that enables to read the Caribbean historically and culturally regarding space. Due to the impact of history in the Caribbean, space has been moulded along with the encompassment of events. Hence, the facilitation of the creation of new identities that escape the ties that were cemented by the Western perspective.

The Caribbean is an interconnected territory as terms such as the '*meta-archipelago*' or 'Caribbean Spaces' demonstrate. However, through the different authors and novels it can be observed that despite that there is a quintessence that is shared, each island preserves its locations, culture and language. Furthermore, dislocated locations appear due to the emigrants that had to flee the area to search a new life far from home. In these places, the Caribbean is reproduced and adopts a new form to create something new. Therefore, there is a body of literature that is going to encapsulate the problematic nature of space, of history and at a larger extent, of female identity.

Sophie Caco, the main character and narrator of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* offers through the daffodil an appropriation of a colonial symbol to empower her native identity as an Haitian. However, the dichotomy of home and away is used as a way in which sexuality is established in another location. But, like in Haiti, testing conforms a veil that condenses not only the purity of the daughter but also the protection of a rape. However, this proves to be counter-productive as Sophie develops sexual phobia and bulimia. Despite the static state that traps Sophie, the violent space of sugar cane plantation offers the plausible way into liberty.

Nieve, in *Todos se van* by Wendy Guerra, is a character whose identity is shaped by the government of Cuba and a family history of violence and absences. She uses her Diary as a space where she can form herself in the way that is forbidden on the outside

world. Despite the island, the house and the city of la Habana are repressive towards the main character, she constitutes an independent self through the sea because it is a space that is appropriated for herself. However, her identity is stuck eternally in this island amidst rules, restrictions and dreams that are not going to allow her to construct a free self outside Cuba.

The female narrator in “Sea” by Jennifer takes elements from her homeland Trinidad to win back space both for herself and to rewrite history. Specifically, the island is empowered as a space of possibility which, anyway, many inhabitants chose to leave. Moreover, the Caribbean essence of the island is transported elsewhere to retain the notion of home. On the other hand, the sea is seen as a space of transformation of the self not only because the narrator is able to cleanse her traumas but also because it is the space through which colonial history is reclaimed and revised. In the same line, the island is taken as the scope through which one can observe the reversal of the role of the colonizers and of the plantation. All in all, the female voice, constructs her own identity mirroring space through a path of self-knowledge, perspective and new possibilities.

In the three texts space is used as a pillar through which the main female characters are both empowered and silenced. However, the authors of these novels achieve voicing the violent story many women, like their characters, have written on their skin. History or past proves to be inescapable. However, through the appropriation and renaming of traumatizing events and spaces, the characters achieve to open a path in which they have the chance to break the frame that, for many years, had entangled Caribbean spaces.

Through the exploration of Sophie Caco, Nieve and the nameless narrator, a number of topoi and spatial features of the Caribbean have been considered. There is the need of studying the Caribbean cross-culturally given the multiplicity and connection of the space. A Caribbean without cultural, linguistic or even politic borders provides a richer interpretation of its literature. Furthermore, it is necessary to study writers that write from the Caribbean and not only, as it has happened in recent times, diasporic literature. Through space, a new field has been opened from which identity can be static and fluid regarding the connection each character has with the location. Space is reclaimed, transformed and adopted to shatter all those inscriptions that have been set since the moment a man from a foreign land set foot on the Caribbean. Outside the

Western frame, Caribbean spaces become a way of enforcing resistance and voicing all those messages that got lost in a beach, in a house, in wave and now break on the shore unsilenced.

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