

Carole Boyce Davies, *Caribbean Spaces: Escapes From Twilight Zones* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013). 250 pages.

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Caribbean Spaces is a wonderfully entertaining, methodologically intriguing, and potentially useful book for scholars working on questions of space within larger concerns about global demographic movements, transnational memory, and the Caribbean diaspora. Adopting an autobiographical style, Davies transports the reader to the early years of her academic career at SUNY-Binghamton, about which she provides numerous anecdotes of what she calls living in, and escaping from, “twilight zones.” From stories about the architectural similarities between correctional facilities and public education buildings in western New York, to accounts of the complex history of a region where contributions to the Underground Railroad collide with a violent colonial past involving the Native American population, the book uncovers the many features that help build “twilight zones” in the contemporary world. Davies defines these zones as “spaces of transformation from one condition to another, one location to another, one reality to another” (11). Put simply, in Davies’s book the reader will find two types of spaces, Caribbean and twilight. Whereas Caribbean spaces assume positive features in her argument (they are always full of possibility), twilight zones are places that, due to their conflicted and oppressive history, provoke us to escape them. She makes use of a symptomatic methodology to identify those zones of twilight, as well as those Caribbean spaces that have spread globally. Caribbean spaces include the islands, but they also encompass those “social and cultural places (spaces) that extend the understanding of the Caribbean beyond ‘small space,’ fragmented identification” (1).

Among the many virtues of *Caribbean Spaces*, two warrant notice here. The first is the idea of “Caribbean/American” identification for those displaced subjects living in the US. By invoking a missing denomination, Caribbean/Americans, Davies makes apparent a missing category in our contemporary discourse on identities. More inclusive than identities based on a single island-nation (such as Jamaican American, Haitian American, or Cuban American), Caribbean/American covers not only the archipelago but also the continental areas bordering the Caribbean (like northern Brazil) and places where Caribbean people live in the American continent. As a construction, Caribbean/American moves away from a divided sense of belonging to a single island or diaspora by imagining a more fluid sense of spatial identity, thus leaving behind the imperial

legacies of language difference (French, English, Spanish). Davies here joins recent works by scholars articulating a pan-Caribbean perspective who blur the divide between island and continental spaces, including Jorge Duany's *Blurred Borders* (2011), Juan Flores's *The Diaspora Strikes Back* (2007), Myra García Calderón's *Memory Spaces in the Hispanic Caribbean and its Insular Diasporas* (2012), and the works in *The Afro-Latino Reader* (2010), edited by Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores. To this new direction of rethinking space, memory, and belonging in the islands and the diaspora, Davies's book contributes her Africana viewpoint, along with the pan-Caribbean vision of the failed 1940s Caribbean Federation that remains for her a formative childhood memory.

The book's second important contribution is to be found in what the author terms "escape routes," "a set of passages that pursue liberation in different directions" (13). Escape routes are vectors of flight and survival and are key to both the migration of Caribbean peoples across the sea and African-American migration via the Underground Railroad. As Davies points out, the Underground Railroad made possible the transit of African slaves from Florida to the Bahamas and to Key West (a long-held Union enclave in the US South). Davies's escape routes function not only to enable flight but also to connect the Caribbean with other locations where migrant communities have recreated the Caribbean, as they have in "India, Africa, Europe, North and South America, Northern Africa, [and] the Middle East" (3). (In a humorous cul-de-sac, Davies explains that she often conjures Caribbean spaces in her imagination during departmental meetings!) Yet escape routes also mean a way out from dominant frameworks for understanding the Caribbean either in terms of an "island" or a "Nation state" (42). Instead, these passages of freedom reimagine a "Caribbean nation" as something like an archipelago held together by a single cultural nationhood (42). *Caribbean Spaces* provides us with a postinsular, postnation-state vision of cultural belonging.

Even as it strives to make an important contribution to the field of Caribbean studies, however, the book shows significant drawbacks. For example, Davies stops short of fully explaining her conceptual frameworks, failing to address directly the difference in scope and effectiveness between twilight zones and, for instance, Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "borderlands." For Anzaldúa, borderlands are not reduced to actual borders or land but extend to psychic zones and to anomalous states of mind. Whereas twilight spaces for Davies seem to be related primarily to locations produced by history, Caribbean spaces function in both material and psychic registers. Like Anzaldúa's *Borderland/La Frontera* (1987), Davies's book mixes autobiography, cultural analysis, and the

political critique of US expansion into the Caribbean. That assessment is most clearly articulated in chapter five, under the heading, "Middle Passages," where Davies critiques new forms of US colonialism in the Caribbean while reminiscing about trips to Cuba, Haiti, and Martinique. But it is precisely in this chapter that one wonders about the salient differences between Caribbean and continental borderlands. If, in her view, "the Americas" are an "evolving space" (13), then how do borderland, American, and Caribbean spaces differ from each other? In fairness, Davies attempts to answer this question by listing essential ingredients of Caribbean spaces: Caribbean migrant population, businesses tailored to these communities, dances, block parties, newspapers, blogs, e-journals, loud talking, public male-female flirtation (1-2). While extensive, this list fails to clarify conceptual distinctions between critical concepts for the analysis of culture in the Americas. Moreover, these traits also raise questions about the utopic dimension of Davies's idea of Caribbean spaces: Are they conflict free? Are these harmonious locations that suppress existing national identifications in the Caribbean? How do these spaces, which apparently take shape by suppressing conflict, deal with the return of the repressed? Because it develops the problematic of spaces as zones of conflict, Michel Foucault's key concept of heterotopic spaces would have helped to qualify this utopian impulse.

A further example of Davies's blindness towards the particularities of Caribbean space results in her understanding of Puerto Rico as a US colony. If Caribbean spaces are in Davies's view locations of possibility, this claim falls flat when it is measured against the history of anomalous political arrangements challenging the ideological norms of either nationalism or colonialism. Puerto Rico's political status is precisely the institutionalization of a cultural nationhood designed to escape both colonialism and the nation-state. Still, for Davies, Puerto Rico represents less a Caribbean space than a twilight zone. Do Caribbean spaces of possibility function ultimately as normalizing zones? For a Caribbeanist scholar to ignore the historical contexts of particular islands raises questions about the accurate foundation of her vision. Lastly, we are also left to wonder what, if any, are the implications of a Caribbean/American influence on the Caribbean. That is to say, how does return migration affect Caribbean islands? Do Caribbean spaces become more Caribbean/American over time?

The book comprises an introduction, 13 short chapters, and a postscript. Whereas the introduction reads as a sweeping review essay of scholarship on Caribbean spaces, it leaves one wanting a much deeper engagement with concepts developed by influential Caribbean thinkers such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Edouard Glissant, and especially, Wilson Harris. As their titles indicate,

the chapters cover a wide range of concerns, from “Reimagining the Caribbean” and “Spirit Scapes” to “Circulations.” Most of these do not develop conceptual arguments but rather provide accounts of Davies’s many travels in western New York, Africa, the Caribbean, Brazil, the UK’s port cities of Liverpool and Bristol. Yet in those accounts we rarely hear other voices; it is as if a single consciousness were moving from place to place in its endless crossings and numerous reclaimings of Caribbean spaces. That effect tends to hollow the diversity, subtlety, and complexity of the very spaces she would enumerate. Unlike V. S. Naipaul’s *A Turn in the South* (1989), where otherness shines through in a rich dance between traveler and local subjects, in Davies’s chapters the Caribbean seems merely ventriloquized through a single voice that some readers will find enchanting: “So I too travel again south—south, to the end of the United States and look over the edge where sunsets are magnificent and unimpeded. The water beckons. Cuba—ninety miles south. Caribbean Space!” (225).

Davies’s use of personal narration is tactical and political, a strategy she spells out in her intention to “move between the autobiographical and the conceptual, the experimental and the theoretical, in order to disrupt the logic of exclusionary academic discourse that often denies the personal” (6). At times, the text’s inward-looking gaze reminded me of an interesting memoir published by eminent Puerto Rican political thinker Juan Manuel García-Passalacqua, *Vengador del silencio* [Silence’s Avenger] (1991), which narrates the main events of his career and his role in fomenting a Caribbean consciousness in Puerto Rico. As with García-Passalacqua’s book, I felt immersed in the twilight zone of Davies’s life story, and although her chapters were useful in reimagining Caribbean spaces long forgotten or underappreciated, I still felt an equal need to escape from the solipsistic world of *Caribbean Spaces*.