

BOOK DISCUSSION: *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* by Silvio Torres-Saillant. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006; 304 pages; ISBN 1-4039-6676-1 (cloth); ISBN 1-4039-6677-X (paper).

Diasporic Disciplining of Caliban? Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Intra-Caribbean Politics

Jana Evans Braziel

ABSTRACT: In her contribution, Braziel resists Torres-Saillant's valorization of diaspora as the antidote to national paradigms. As an organizing rubric, "Caribbean diaspora" obscures nationality, class, race, gender, sexuality, and political economy as striating diasporas and diasporic communities; it ignores the fact that there is not *one* Caribbean diaspora but many. Diasporas are fractured landscapes: not only oppressed individuals but also corrupt presidents and even petty but violent Calibans are part of out-migratory waves that constitute diasporic formations abroad, or form the long-arm, transnational tentacles of the nation-state.

Silvio Torres-Saillant's *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* rests on the premise that the Caribbean archipelago, its surrounding sea, and the coastal areas in Central America (Belize, Guatemala, Panamá) and northern South America (Colombia, Guyana, French Guiana, Surinam, Venezuela) share historical, cultural, and literary counterpoints that define the region as unique and distinct, despite the multiplicity of languages (Black Carib, Creole, Dutch, English, French, Goajiro, Hindi, Java, Kekchi, Kreyòl, Maya, Miskito, Papiamentu, Saramaccan, Sranan Tongo [or Taki Taki], Tamil, and Spanish), the diversity of ethnicities (African, Amerindian or indigenous, Chinese, European, Indian, and Middle Eastern), and the religious pluralism (Obeah, Vodou, Santería, Shango, Quimbois, Hindu, Muslim, Catholicism, and Protestantism) marking the region.¹ Professor Torres-Saillant begins from the distinctly "Caribbean" critical point of departure (which he defines as both a tellurian geography and a cultural geography), resisting the theoretical model offered by the all-encompassing and

1. Silvio Torres-Saillant, *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Hereafter, page references are in parenthesis within the text.

indistinct “postcolonial” with all its proliferating codes (hybridity, métissage, creolization, rhizomes, and transnationalism) that have always been manifest in the lived reality of the region, while offering wide-ranging methodological approaches (literary analysis, historical synthesis, autobiographical reflection) on his topic. To do so, he offers the “plantation as paradigm,” defined by slavery and sugar cane production, for understanding the historical, material, intellectual, geographical, and geopolitical specificity of the Caribbean.

Torres-Saillant offers much for Caribbeanists to admire, applaud, laud, and venerate: the centrality of Hispaniola in the colonial, revolutionary, abolitionist, and twentieth-century transformations in the region, as well as the profound impact that Haiti, as the first free black republic and the second free republic in the western hemisphere, resoundingly and undeniably had in the Hispanophone Caribbean islands of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Santo Domingo; later in the Dominican Republic; and in the early Antillean Federation; as well as on the British Caribbean colonies; later the newly independent countries in the West Indies Federation; the French Caribbean islands Martinique and Guadeloupe, still under France’s administrative, political, and economic jurisdiction as overseas departments; the Dutch Caribbean islands of Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten; and coastal areas bordering on the Caribbean sea, from Belize, Guatemala, and Panamá in Central America, to Colombia, Surinam, Guyana, French Guiana, and Venezuela in South America. More vexingly, Hispaniola also poses the conundrum of how to escape the colonialist legacies of nationalism, national patriotism, racism, classism, linguistic division, and fractious geopolitical and geographical borders—in Hispaniola, the one dividing Haiti in the west and the Dominican Republic in the east. As Torres-Saillant astutely notes, “Hispaniola sits stubbornly as a stumbling block on the path of regional coherence” (237).

Historically, the island has been marked by division: the consolidation of Haiti in the west and Santo Domingo in the east under the presidency of Jean Pierre Boyer in 1822; the struggle for Dominican independence that culminated in 1844; the consequent and recurrent border disputes and too-often-bloody battles between the two countries; the Haitian Massacre of 1937 when Rafael Trujillo, or “El Jefe,” unofficially ordered the murder-by-machete and Dominican peasant uprising against Haitian cane laborers in the country; and the deplorable conditions of Haitian migrant workers today in the Dominican Republic’s *bateyes*, or corporate sugar cane farms, which Torres-Saillant lamentably does not mention. That being said, Professor Torres-Saillant’s *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* also has its troubling blind spots, particularly in its metaphorical deployments of Caliban as a salient-if-saturated regional trope for political leadership, and the role of the diaspora as a utopian antidote, or corrective measure, to homeland politics. One cannot help but bemusedly and musingly ask: Which diaspora? Which homeland? Whose Caliban? And whence Sycorax? (Below, I more