

Nadia V. Celis Salgado

La rebelión de las niñas: El Caribe y la "conciencia corporal." Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2015. 321 pp. (Paper €29.80)

La rebelión de las niñas is a much needed reflection on body politics, specifically those regulating the female body in the Hispanic Caribbean. Nadia Celis Salgado seeks to uncover links between real-life limitations for women within Hispanic Caribbean society and their representation in contemporary literature by female authors.

Girl characters are chosen as the focus of this study. By openly exposing the fetishization of the female child and the way in which children are traditionally devoid of social agency, Celis makes it evident that polarizations such as "the naïve" versus "the seductress" female come directly from adult fears and desires. The denaturalization of this dichotomy plays a central role in the book, with Celis proposing to reconsider girls as subjects capable of sexual desire, and suggesting that new female subjectivities could be shaped after them.

The book covers works by Venezuelan Antonia Palacios, Colombians Marvel Moreno and Fanny Buitrago, and Puerto Ricans Magali García Ramis and Mayra Santos Febres. Celis first calls attention to the way girls function as objects, not subjects, within societal structures before elucidating how the female authors studied break with such assumptions. She illustrates the ways in which Hispanic Caribbean writers imbue female characters with a subjectivity, an "awareness of their body" (*conciencia corporal*), and sexual desires that can be traced back to childhood, thus establishing the birth of subjectivity as an event that happens early on rather than in adulthood. She also looks at the female body in a comprehensive and intersectional manner, considering in her arguments the gender, sexuality, race, nationality, and economic status of the characters discussed.

The connections between Caribbean citizenship, sexuality, and coloniality are presented in the first introductory chapter, "*Entre el cuerpo apropiado y el cuerpo propio: corporalidad, subjetividad y poder*," which establishes the book's theoretical framework. Celis's phrasing when writing about "*el cuerpo apropiado*" is spot on: "*apropiado*" can be translated both as "the right kind" and as "appropriated," and such duality in the word is also read in its original Spanish. Thus Celis presents us with a body that obeys the patriarchal orders that "own" it and expect it to behave the right way. In contrast, she offers the idea of a "*cuerpo propio*," a body of our own, infused with social agency.

The second chapter looks at Antonia Palacios's *Ana Isabel, una niña decente* (1949) and Magali García Ramis's *Felices días tío Sergio* (1986). Both novels take place in the first half of the twentieth century and focus on the social and

emotional development of prepubescent girls. The notion of “decency” reveals the precariousness of patriarchal, religious, and colonial traditions, with these heroines serving as precursors for the rebellion against these structures. The characters’ reflections on their childhood as adults, Celis argues, make it evident that female subjectivity, in both its hegemonic and antihegemonic versions, begins early on, and allows for the reconsideration of current notions of female subjectivity.

Chapter 3, on Marvel Moreno’s *En diciembre llegaban las brisas* (1987), explores the literary construction of male sexual violence against females, and mother-daughter relationships. The narrative takes place in the 1970s, challenging progressive ideas about the “sexual revolution,” especially as it portrays issues such as divorce and reproductive impositions upon women. Chapter 4 considers femininity as performance through the analysis of four novels by Fanny Buitrago, broadening the spectrum of female bodies analyzed by incorporating women from all social strata. Here, as in Chapter 5, women are simultaneously objects of desire and of consumption. And yet the economy that emerges establishes women as a symbol of modernity and progress. Celis also challenges our readings of women at two ends of the age spectrum by contrasting both the infantilized woman and the stereotypical Caribbean matriarch.

Puerto Rican writer Mayra Santos Febres is the focus of *La rebelión*’s fifth chapter. *Nuestra Señora de la Noche* (2006) gives way to the topic of the marginalized body through the lens of a black female. The body stands as a symbol of the black and colonial history of the island, as well as a reflection of the long history of sexualization of the Caribbean region. Freedom here is both a sexual and political ideal that is unequivocally entangled with Caribbean economy—a transaction that occurs simultaneously at the national and personal level.

Major themes like child subjectivity and the mutual dependency between the Caribbean body politic and its female body politics are threaded throughout the chapters. Most importantly, the book’s concluding remarks on a Caribbean “*lógica de la negociación*” is an important contribution. The little women in these pages, similar to those of Alcott, are well aware of societal impositions and thus develop “tactics” that allow them to negotiate their circumstances. Most importantly, their “rebellions” tangentially illustrate the way in which the Caribbean has handled its colonial past, making us reconsider both female and colonial subjectivity altogether.

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