Jamaica's Difficult Subjects

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“Sheri-Marie Harrison has written an impressive book that will have a major impact in Caribbean literary studies. She critiques postcolonial criticism in general, and postindependence Jamaican criticism in particular, for excavating heretofore excluded raced, gendered, and sexual identities and adding them to a growing list of sovereign subjectivities. The problem with such a critical practice, she argues, is that our critical questions remain static—about recovery, additive, identititarian politics—regardless of the answers we derive or even whom we add to the equation.” —Donette Francis, University of Miami

Recognizing that in the contemporary postcolonial moment, national identity and cultural nationalism are no longer the primary modes of imagining sovereignty, Sheri-Marie Harrison argues that postcolonial critics must move beyond an identity-based orthodoxy as they examine problems of sovereignty. In *Jamaica’s Difficult Subjects: Negotiating Sovereignty in Anglphone Caribbean Literature and Criticism*, Harrison describes what she calls “difficult subjects”—subjects that disrupt essentialized notions of identity as equivalent to sovereignty. She argues that these subjects function as a call for postcolonial critics to broaden their critical horizons beyond the usual questions of national identity and exclusion/inclusion.

Harrison turns to Jamaican novels, creative nonfiction, and films from the 1960s to the present and demonstrates how they complicate standard notions of the relationship between national identity and sovereignty. She constructs a lineage between the difficult subjects in classic Caribbean texts like *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys and *The Harder they Come* by Perry Henzell and contemporary writing by Marlon James and Patricia Powell. What results is a sweeping new history of Caribbean literature and criticism that reconfigures how we understand both past and present writing. *Jamaica’s Difficult Subjects* rethinks how sovereignty is imagined, organized, and policed in the postcolonial Caribbean, opening new possibilities for reading multiple generations of Caribbean writing.

Sheri-Marie Harrison is assistant professor of English at the University of Missouri.