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## Sheller, Mimi. *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies.*

Alison Van Nyhuis  
anthuriumcaribjournal@gmail.com

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**Mimi Sheller**

***Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies.***

**London: Routledge, 2003, ix+252 pp.**

***by Alison Van Nyhuis***

The Caribbean has become one of the most discussed locations in the burgeoning field of postcolonial studies. But as Mimi Sheller notes in her introduction to *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*, even though prominent postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said have used the writings and lives of people like Franz Fanon to reconsider the Caribbean's exclusion from historical and sociological narratives of Western modernity, many Europeans and North Americans still do not know how their own lives, nations, and histories are related to the Caribbean. With *Consuming the Caribbean*, Sheller complements recent Caribbean research that focuses on colonial resistance and Caribbean agency by analyzing Europeans' and North Americans' consumption of the Caribbean.

In Sheller's own words, the book links "together the practices of seventeenth-century exploration, eighteenth-century scientific collection, nineteenth-century travel writing, and twentieth century cultural representation and 'area studies,'" in order to "demonstrate how the Caribbean became an object of study produced in Northern academic centres and an object of desire in popular cultures of consumption" (7-8). In an attempt "to identify persistent continuities—as well as crucial fields of resistance and unintended consequences—in the complex flows of material, cultural, and ethical relations" (3), Sheller organizes the book's six chapters and two parts thematically rather than chronologically. In the book's first part, *Natural and Material Immobilities*, Sheller examines how Europeans imagined, moved through, and tasted the Caribbean. Then in the book's second part, *Bodies and Cultural Hybridities*, she examines Europe's "Orientalization" and "Africanization" of the Caribbean, and Europe's "cannibalization" of Caribbean bodies, images, and products. Indeed, Sheller also discusses the United States' role in the transatlantic slave trade, the military occupation of Haiti, sex tourism, the representation of Haitians as zombies and AIDS carriers, the embargo against Cuba, the "war on drugs," and the "banana wars" with the European Union. The appendix even contains a useful two and a half page "chronology of key dates in Caribbean relations with Europe and the United States." Yet throughout, Sheller examines Europe's relations with the Caribbean more thoroughly than she examines the United States' relations with the Caribbean.

Sheller not only critically reconsiders the history of Caribbean consumption by the "North;" she also persuasively demonstrates the need for a contemporary ethics of Caribbean consumption within particular locations ranging from Europe's and North America's governments and academic institutions to their supermarkets and homes. The book as a whole

implicitly supports Sheller's call for material reparations for slavery in the introduction (4); it reminds those living in post-slavery societies that slavery's generation of unequal power relations in the past affects contemporary consumer practices.

Of special interest for scholars of postcolonial literatures and theories is Sheller's analysis of Western academic institutions' appropriation of Caribbean theoretical concepts as a means of discussing global issues of mobility and hybridity. In the final chapter, Sheller both explains the dangerous effects of such practices in a "generic and dislocated notion of creolization" (195), for example, and also the beneficial effects of regrounding Caribbean theoretical concepts in the Caribbean (196) in a recovery of "the political meanings and subaltern agency that have been barred entry by the free-floating gatekeepers of 'global' culture" (196). Across the introduction and body of the book, Sheller achieves her aim of examining the consumption of the Caribbean on material and symbolic levels.

Even as Sheller discusses the consumption of the Caribbean in terms of flows and various landscapes coined by Arjun Appadurai in order to move beyond center-periphery models of the global cultural economy, she periodically reduces the complex exchanges of bodies, media, technology, capital, and ideologies within the transatlantic region to "north/south" or "center/periphery" models. When discussing the "north's" or "center's" consumption of the Caribbean "south" or "periphery," Sheller only briefly addresses how Caribbean individuals or nations alter Europe's or the United States' consumption of the Caribbean. Approximately six-pages, the section entitled, *Colonisation in Reverse*, touches on the "counterflow" of Caribbean bodies and cultures from the "periphery" to the "center" (176-81); however, it raises more questions about the subversive effects of such "counterflows" than it answers, as is also the case in Sheller's failure to discuss Canadian/Caribbean relations. Beyond presenting past positive responses to unethical consumption practices, such as the British boycotts of sugar during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, implicitly endorsing the purchase of Windward Island bananas, explicitly endorsing slavery reparations, and explicating exigencies for an ethics of consumption, the book neither thoroughly nor concretely delineates how contemporary consumers can and should "consume" the Caribbean in a more ethical manner.

Sheller's referencing of government statistics, sociological studies, travel narratives, and a variety of visual media, to name just a few of the kinds of sources cited, reproduced, and discussed from centuries of Euro-American/Caribbean relations, might seem to be an unworkable project for such a slim book. Due to the book's scope and size, Sheller does raise multiple questions that the book does not answer. At times, the chapters' thematic organization results in repetitions across chapters. Yet overall, the book offers a manageable, informative, and interesting cross-disciplinary constellation of representations, data, and theories regarding past and present consumption of the Caribbean. The book benefits undergraduate and graduate students as well as professors and anyone else interested in learning more about the material and symbolic relations of the Caribbean, ethical consumption, slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, and postcolonial theory.