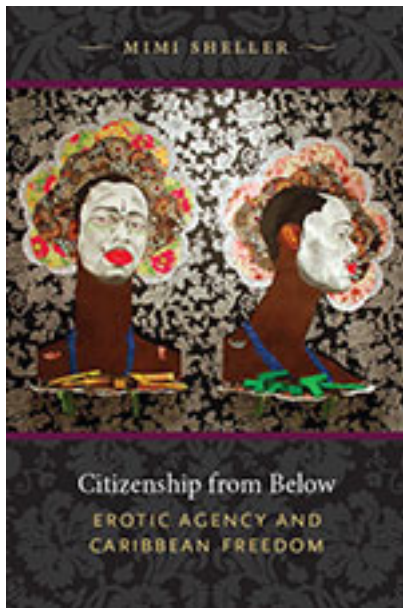


## ***Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom* by Mimi Sheller**

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Mimi Sheller's *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom* is a methodological and historiographic intervention in contemporary research on the Caribbean. Using post-slavery Jamaica and post-independence Haiti as case studies, Sheller offers an original theory of “citizenship from below” that engages critical geography, postcolonial feminist thought, the emerging field of Caribbean queer studies, and historical sociology. She defines “citizenship from below” as the diverse ways freedom has been enacted and exercised throughout the Caribbean, especially by those who have long been excluded from regimes of citizenship. The concept reframes citizenship itself in an extra-discursive fashion, placing particular emphasis on embodiment, corporeality, sexuality, and race. Moving between the local and the transnational, the historical and the contemporary, the national and the diasporic, Sheller threads a previously ignored archeology of resistance and freedom throughout the region. She builds on the work of Caribbean feminist M. Jacqui Alexander and Audre Lorde to privilege erotic agency as the benchmark of citizenship, adding to post-colonial and feminist theories of sexual citizenship. According to Sheller, erotic agency, or the right to bodily control and sexual autonomy, is fundamental to all forms of self-determination and Caribbean freedom.

Indeed, Sheller's groundbreaking methodological approach is the hallmark of the intervention undertaken in this book. She examines non-verbal and non-textual evidence and digs beneath the archive to revise traditional views of history. For example, Sheller analyzes images from the Alexander Dudgeon Gulland photographic album of Jamaica (1865) to underscore the role of women and Jews in Jamaica's Morant Bay rebellion. A thorough analysis of these newly-released photographs forms the basis of the book's challenge to official historical narratives that bolster ethnonationalist, heteronormative discourses and imaginations of national identity in the Caribbean today. It is through such discourses that the state has excluded South Asians, Jews, women, and sexual minorities from regimes of citizenship. Additionally, Sheller offers an incredible study of the place of trees in systems of knowledge, underscoring the centrality of landscapes in the preservation of subaltern kinship formations throughout and beyond the institution of slavery. Whether it is through squatting, capturing land, or using land as sites of ancestral belonging, arboreal landscapes are another example of citizenship from below. Sheller draws upon the work of Henri Lefebvre, Dale Tomich, and others to conceive of citizenship and resistance throughout the Caribbean in spatial terms. Through this refreshing methodological approach, land and trees are treated as archives that perform and preserve legacies of resistance, as well as genealogies of citizenship from below.

Moreover, in her analysis of travel writing, she makes clear the ways Caribbean subjects negotiate their agency and return the tourist gaze. Drawing upon the work of Alexander and Mary Louise Pratt, Sheller demonstrates that Caribbean citizens have long resisted the defining power of the gaze. In her reading of Edward Agnew Paton's text *Down the Islands: A Voyage of the Caribees*, published in 1888, Sheller underscores laughter, staring, and disruption as subaltern strategies and examples of citizenship from below. On the one hand, her methodological intervention is her re-interpretation of traditional archives in ways that ultimately privilege the subaltern voices hiding beneath colonial and imperial narratives. On the other, her emphasis on the extra-discursive is a bold and engaging shift in historiographic methodologies, in that it challenges traditional understandings of what can constitute an archive. This new innovative approach will, without doubt, transform and shape the future of Caribbean history and feminist thought.

This book is valuable both to academic studies of the region and to ongoing local and regional debates. The emphasis on women's political activism in Haiti and Jamaica throughout this book is significant for Caribbean feminist theory because it offers concrete, historical examples of resistance and agency that have been indexed by theorists such as Alexander, Kamala Kempadoo, and Patricia Mohammed. Considering the book's extensive bibliography, which includes the work of Caribbean feminists, post-colonial scholarship, queer studies, and critical race theory, there can be little doubt that Sheller's research will benefit a variety of disciplines and is a model for interdisciplinary approaches to studies of the Caribbean. Her comprehensive critique of the heteronormative scripts that have come to define regional imaginations of citizenship is particularly relevant to the ongoing public debates around the rights of sexual minorities and queer citizens across the Caribbean. Sheller's articulate and nuanced

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conceptualization of citizenship that rejects reproductive heterosexuality as a requisite of citizenship in favor of erotic autonomy is a welcome addition to local voices in the Caribbean pushing for more inclusive societies. This book will be foundational reading for upcoming scholars and researchers of the Caribbean.

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