

ABSTRACT

“DIS YA TIME NO STAN LIKE BIFOE TIME”
(RE)THINKING A NATION’S LITERATURE:
CONSTRUCTIONS OF WOMEN IN BELIZEAN LITERATURE
1953-2003

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This thesis aims to be an informed, historically contextualized study of the development of Belizean writings over the past fifty years, with specific attention being paid to literary constructions of women. I discuss the various socio-historical and cultural influences that contributed to its stages; the complex multi-cultural inputs and the emerging thematic, narrative and linguistic patterning of this literature. My theoretical analysis is based on an examination of some of the Caribbean scholarship, informed by the general principles of feminist and post-colonial theory, which I relate to a discussion of Belizean literary constructions of women and the important contribution of women’s writing to Belize’s literary development.

In chapter one I give a historical overview of Belize’s literary development through the discussion of four stages: the oral tradition, the evolution of Belizean poetry, the pioneers of Belizean drama and the “golden age” of prose fiction. In chapter two I provide the context for reading women in Belizean texts by addressing the complex socio-historical and cultural inputs into this literature. I analyze Belize’s multi-cultural society, the culture of gender relations and the role of women in relation to slavery, colonialism, the Nationalist Movement, Independence and education.

The next three chapters focus specifically on literary analysis. Chapter three outlines the criteria used for the selection of texts and discusses from a feminist post-colonial perspective the methodology used to analyze the texts. I discuss the linguistic input of Belizean Kriol as a medium of literary expression and provide telling examples of the oral tradition. Chapter four defines “Creole” within the Belizean context and examines three constructions of Creole women: matriarch, single mother, *bembe*. Chapter five discusses thematic, narrative and linguistic patterns which emerge from this charting of selected texts. I revisit central questions posed in the study and discuss what contributions the study has made in relation to Belizean literature and Belizean women. My conclusion points to a (re)definition of Belizean literature in order to demonstrate that Belizean women have played and continue to play significant roles in Belize’s literary development and nation building.

Keywords: Belizean literature; Women; Feminist and Post-colonial theory; Gender; Creole and Kriol language.