ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

Beyond the Limbo Silence
Elizabeth Nunez
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Elizabeth Nunez, Beyond the Limbo Silence explores a young woman's journey to maturity through fully embracing her cultural heritage. It's 1963, and Sara, a young Trinidadian woman, is awarded a scholarship to a small college in Wisconsin. Early on, the opportunity seems a mixed blessing. America can drown you, her grandmother warns as she recounts the lynching of Sara's uncle. Yet, it was Americans who gave Sara a polo vaccine that saved her life.
In the dorms, Sara meets Courtney, a black woman from St. Lucia who practices vodun, and Angela, an East Indian woman from British Guiana, who yearns to assimilate into the all white dorm and the all white community around her. The two come to represent in Nunez's work the choices that Sara could make in order to survive in Wisconsin—embracing her African heritage or denying her ancestors? past in order to fit in.

Nunez interweaves Sara's maturation with details of the raging civil rights movement in America. Through Sara's relationship with an African-American named Sam, Nunez explores artificial separations between African Caribbean peoples and African-American peoples. The struggle against white oppression is the same, Nunez's work suggests, for both Sam and Sara hail from worlds dominated by whites. It is imperative for both to remember their histories as African peoples in the New World in order to recognize that the liberation of one group heralds freedom for all. "The spirits connect you and me and Sam and Mississippi and all the black people in America," Courtney points out. "Remember that."

Sam never accepts the oneness of their struggle; hence, he and Sara don't stay together. However, as Sara begins to accept vodun as a viable religion, she allows herself to become empowered by her African heritage. With the spirit of their aborted child, she is transported through dreams and memory into the Deep South to experience and embrace the civil rights struggle as her own. Beyond the Limbo Silence is an anti-colonial text—jarringly so at times—and a brilliant manifesto, lyrical and skillful in its exploration of the difficulties of growing up black in a white dominated world.

"All a person has is who they are," says a Miss Chancy, a family friend, "It's dangerous

when you forget. Nunez never allows it. Sara does initially, but Nunez redeems her heroine through allowing her to remember and accept her past. Like other Caribbean writers, Nunez deals with the pain of maturing and holding on to home, particularly when you emigrate. The work is reminiscent of Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory and more recently, Powell's The Pagoda. As in those works, Nunez reveals how important it is to claim the lost or hidden self in order to come into your own.

Lisa Archibald