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Ethnographic Fiction:
Documentation, Dislocation, and Queer Desire in *Her Head A Village*

In this paper, I demonstrate that the vexed interaction between geography and desire is the key node of Makeda Silvera’s collection of short stories *Her Head A Village* (1994). Silvera is a Jamaican-Canadian lesbian writer and activist. Her stories explore Caribbean identity, the social and economic challenges of immigration, and the possibilities for queer desire. A feeling of geographical dislocation is fundamental to life in the Caribbean and in Canada for the characters in the stories. Circuits of desire and female intimacy undergird the characters’ experiences of spatial dislocation. The same-sex intimacy between women becomes inextricable from what amounts to geographical alienation. The spatial dilemma represents the civic estrangement of the immigrant in the women’s narratives.

The stories in the collection are deeply indebted to Silvera’s ethnographic research on Caribbean domestic workers in Canada. She published this work in the book *Silenced* (1986). I read the short story collection as translation of this earlier record of the lives of laboring immigrants. The collection mimics the structure of the ethnography, and the interviews form the basis for much of the content of the short stories. Silvera recognizes the ethnographic capability of the short story genre because of its serial form and its ability to align the reader with multiple subjects within a culture. The series of case studies becomes a sequence of interconnected stories, but the fictional form allows her to situate questions of desire prominently in the labor narratives. The collection is an extension (and perhaps fulfillment) of the ethnographic form.