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Consuming the Caribbean: Tourism, Sex Tourism, and Land Development in Nicole Dennis-Benn's *Here Comes the Sun*

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Abstract: In *Here Comes the Sun* (2016), Nicole Dennis-Benn explores the impact of structural inequalities within the space of a fictional vacation resort. Drawing on recent scholarship on the relationship between landscape and power, the function of racial-sexual economies in the Caribbean, and the construction of the Caribbean picturesque, this article argues that sexual exploitation and environmental devastation operate as parallel forces in the text. The article examines how Dennis-Benn depicts tourism and sex tourism as industries that reinforce local and global racial and economic power relations. The essay contends that Dennis-Benn positions the protagonist and her supervisor as perpetrators as well as beneficiaries of extractive and exclusionary practices; homophobia, hotel development, and sexual, environmental, and labor exploitation render the town of River Bank a paradise for tourists and a space of trauma for the majority of residents.

Keywords: Caribbean literature, postcolonial literature, resorts, tourism, sex tourism

> In its happy tourist avatar, the Caribbean has long figured as the utopian respite from the mechanized, work-driven, capitalistic routines of the overindustrialized world.
>
> Supriya Nair, *Pathologies of Paradise: Caribbean Detours* 8

As Angeletta Gourdine asserts in *The Difference Place Makes*, the term "Caribbean" "connotes paradise, relaxation and adventure. Herein the

myth of the Caribbean . . . is born" (81). Also writing on the constructed image of the Caribbean, Amar Wahab finds that the "trope of paradise is an enduring one that continues to stabilize the Caribbean as a site of consumer fantasy" (29).[1] In this article, I explore how Nicole Dennis-Benn's debut novel *Here Comes the Sun* (2016) undercuts the paradise myth through its critical representation of tourism, sex tourism, and land development in contemporary Jamaica. In tracing one woman's journey from sex worker to madam,[2] Dennis-Benn explores the interplay of structural inequalities and questions who benefits from the commodification of land and women's bodies. Throughout the novel, she demonstrates that, although the island is a space of relaxation for vacationers, the central characters' livelihoods often depend on fulfilling tourists' fantasies. I argue that the narrative foregrounds the implications of the protagonist's involvement with sex work to highlight the emotional and economic impact of the extractive and exploitative practices that position Jamaica as a consumer paradise.

Here Comes the Sun frames paid heterosexual sex as permissible while the stigma against homosexual intimacy functions as a form of social control. As I discuss, sex work offers economic and psychic escape for the novel's protagonist, Margot, but comes at a cost. Although Margot gains social and economic mobility as a result of her involvement with sex work, her lifestyle is possible because she exploits others. Most notably, Margot recruits and trains young women to be sex workers and tricks her girlfriend, Verdene, into abandoning her land in the beleaguered fishing village of River Bank to make way for a resort. As Mimi Sheller observes in *Consuming the Caribbean* (2003), the region has a "deep history of relations of consumption, luxury, and privilege for some" (37). My argument extends Sheller's understanding of the tropical holiday as a "safe new means of consuming the Caribbean environment" (37) by reading the service economies in the novel as a set of consumptive industries that are reliant on consumer fantasies.

In *Here Comes the Sun*, land development works not to ameliorate poverty but to serve the interests of the economic elite. While Dennis-Benn takes tourists and developers to task for their destructive practices, she is careful not to depict residents as victims of Euro-American power.

As Supriya Nair notes, the Caribbean "is never a passive landscape only acted upon nor are its residents simply inert victims" (8). Because, as Beth Tobin writes, "most postcolonial work on the Caribbean is so focused on what the colonizers did that the islands' inhabitants never register as fully human subjects" (147), it is important to analyze the local response to the tourist industry. With this in mind, I explore how residents resist others' attempts to control the spaces they inhabit and counter the demands of the island's service economies through their own social, political, and aesthetic means. In the sections that follow, I examine how Margot manipulates consumer fantasies for economic gain and how she, as a lesbian woman, faces censure. *Here Comes the Sun* contrasts the normalization of exploitative practices such as prostitution with the demonization of same-sex intimacy to comment on the ramifications of heteronormativity in Jamaica. The text describes a social environment characterized by pious devotion, exclusion, and the commodification of women. The novel calls attention to the relationship between power, economics, and the surveillance of sexuality and encourages readers to meditate on the racial, sexual, and economic complexities of Jamaica's service economies. In the novel, environmental devastation parallels the trauma of sexual exploitation. As my reading demonstrates, Dennis-Benn uses Margot's move to a beachfront villa and the subsequent eviction of River Bank's residents to position the town as a site of individual and collective trauma.

I. Selling Sex

Tourism and sex tourism are multi-billion-dollar industries in Jamaica. Ibrahim Ajagunna and Ann Crick note that sex tourism functions as a separate economic sector and is now a "common practice in many Caribbean Islands" (182). The easy assertion may be that tourism,[3] broadly speaking, is responsible for the rise in sex tourism. Although the growth of mass-market tourism can fuel sex tourism, it is important not to conflate the industries. As *Here Comes the Sun* reveals, the sex tourism industry in Jamaica relies on exoticism and a hypersexualized view of women's bodies.[4] Belinda Edmondson, among others, links the public image of Caribbean women with various forms of nationalism (2). For

the working-class characters of the text, Jamaica "is no paradise" (Dennis-Benn 44). While islands may be associated with tropical fecundity, as Elizabeth DeLoughrey points out, for residents such as Margot, Jamaica is not a utopia (10). As an employee at an all-inclusive resort in a country whose brand image relies on the four s's (sea, sun, sand, and sex)—the key elements that construct the Caribbean picturesque—Margot is one of many in "a country where they [the help] are as important as washed-up seaweed" (Dennis-Benn 9). This conception of identity recalls European representations of colonial lands as places brimming with limitless resources. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin write that "settlers set about rendering them [the colonies] productive and profitable through imported methods rather than by accommodating them to local circumstances" (8). Kamala Kempadoo explains that "territories that once served as sex havens for the colonial elite are today frequented by sex tourists, and several of the island economies now depend upon the region's racialized [and] sexualized image" (*Sexing the Caribbean* 1). *Here Comes the Sun* details how tourists' conceptions of Caribbean women translate into profit for the protagonist, Margot, and her boss, Alphonso Wellington.

Dennis-Benn deploys the protagonist as a touchstone for the emotional implications of sex tourism and land development. Margot's real job is to provide sexual services to vacationers; she later trains and supervises a group of women who service hotel guests. Each night, "she goes to the employee restroom to freshen up . . . and powder her face before sauntering to the client's room. . . . She doesn't see it as demeaning. She sees it as merely satisfying the curiosity of foreigners; foreigners who pay her good money to be their personal tour guide on the island of her body" (Dennis-Benn 10). Here, the tour metaphor affords a reexamination of the longstanding commodification of Caribbean women. Notably, the use of the term "curiosity" reinforces gender, racial, and class divisions. In the narrative, tourists' curiosity is often fed by racist ideology and stereotypical images of Caribbean women. The novel implies that the clients are curious about a black/brown woman's body, curious what the "exotic woman" will be like as a lover. They pay to satisfy this curiosity. The sex tourists in the novel do not leave the resort to meet women;

they call the front desk to order women much like room service. Within the confines of the resort that Dennis-Benn constructs, a space that was redecorated to remove the "vibrant colors, palm trees, and artwork by Jamaican artists" (Dennis-Benn 47), sex tourism is socially normalized. She writes: "[E]ach man has a girl or two—local brown girls . . . [who] sit around the men like decorative flowers, pretending to listen to the conversation as the men absently stroke their bony thighs" (137–38). The women function as props, ornamented bodies positioned just so. By staging these interactions within an environment that replaces local art and food with abstract paintings and Italian and French restaurants, Dennis-Benn calls attention to the impact of appropriation and erasure in Jamaica.

Although the hotel operates as a place of refuge and exploration for vacationers, for Margot, the resort's gate sharply divides the highly cultivated property from her "shabby neighborhood" (the town of River Bank and a former fishing village that lost its industry due to construction and drought) (9). Within her community, sex work is stigmatized and viewed as morally corrupt. Although Margot fears judgment from her community and largely succeeds in concealing her source of supplemental income, sex work affords her a "deep calm, a refuge in which she hides" (59). Amidst a homophobic environment, Margot, a lesbian who is not yet out to her family, is intimate with male clients to support her sister's education. As Sheller notes, racial-sexual economies can serve as "arenas for self-definition, self-empowerment, and alternative performances of the self" (261). Although Margot's involvement with heterosexual sex work necessitates a form of self-alienation, it offers financial gain and relief from the psychological toll of discrimination. She enjoys the fact that men become "unquestioning and generous as children, even protective" when around her (Dennis-Benn 43). Margot feels her clients accept her in a way that is missing elsewhere in her life. The clients' protectiveness may combat feelings of childhood betrayal, the most notable of which occurred when her mother sold her into sex work at fourteen. It is also possible that performing heterosexuality offers her a brief respite from the pressures of being gay in Jamaica. By engaging in heterosexual relations, Margot

can imagine herself as a woman whose sexual preferences do not need to be "fixed."

In the novel's only depiction of Margot's sexual relations with a client, Margot draws on her relationship with Verdene, her lover, to navigate a sexual encounter with a client named Horace. While with Horace, Margot pictures Verdene's "feminine lips parting, hungry for more than Margot's body" (60). If the body is a "key site in the exercise of gender and racial domination and resistance" (Sheller 224–25), then Margot's imagined encounter with Verdene pushes back against community regulation of homosexual activity and operates as a compromised form of resistance. Margot is drawn to Verdene because she understands Margot's true nature; Verdene sees "not her figure or the nakedness she so willingly offers to strangers, but something else—something fragile, raw, defenseless" (Dennis-Benn 16). In transposing Horace's and Verdene's eyes, Margot imaginatively remains true to Verdene while affirming her need for recognition. The phrase "hungry for more than Margot's body," in particular, reinforces the idea that Margot craves an emotional connection. Dennis-Benn emphasizes Margot's embodied negotiation of power when Margot sets the terms for the sexual-economic transaction with Horace. Margot refuses Horace's offer to take her to Germany with him. She rejects his generosity and reinforces boundaries for herself. Doing so also allows her to retain a certain kind of independence; declining the proposals made by men such as Horace "keeps them coming back" (61).

In addition to her work servicing tourists, Margot has a longstanding relationship with Alphonso, her supervisor and the white Jamaican owner of Palm Star Resort. Margot's involvement in sex work shifts when Alphonso approaches her with a business proposition. In this pivotal scene, Alphonso says: "The two of us can profit from this. You give me fifty percent of your profit and I make you into a wealthy woman. . . . We'll sell sex. Lots of it. . . . You will recruit and train girls you see fit for the business. You'll be the boss lady in charge" (141). Alphonso positions himself as a partner in selling sex via his use of the pronoun "we," yet the inclusion of "you give me" and "I make you" makes plain the nature of their arrangement. The phrase "I make you,"

in particular, reflects Alphonso's understanding of the relationship. To be clear, the issue is not Margot's pursuit of economic gain but Alphonso's focus on acquisition and his manipulation of the unequal power dynamic that shapes tourism and sex tourism in Jamaica. The moniker "boss lady," for instance, points to the power differential between the two in that Alphonso likely bestows the nickname to encourage Margot's cooperation. Over the course of the narrative, Dennis-Benn explores how Margot is involved in domination as well as subordination. She functions as a sexual agent who shapes and is shaped by the sexual-economic industry. While Alphonso certainly exploits Margot for his own gain, she also engineers dependent relationships.

As the "boss lady in charge," Margot deploys psychological tactics to spur demand for the women she supervises; she exerts power by controlling the availability of the "island girl[s]" (149). Specifically, she renders clients "helpless" when she "tells them that a particular girl they requested isn't available. No one has ever made them feel so dependent" (149). Margot plays on the clients' racialized sexual fantasies and manipulates supply and demand. In terming the women who Margot supervises "girls" and the clients "dependent," Dennis-Benn emphasizes Margot's role in arranging paid sexual encounters. Both parties, interestingly, are reliant on Margot to satisfy their sexual or financial needs. The clients who visit "Margot's girls . . . exit the hotel with long, conquering strides, whistling softly through the lobby. Days later they might return for another round, another hour with an island girl" (149). The young women who are collectively referred to as "island girl[s]" are between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five and the word "conquering" reflects the clients' belief that they have exercised some sort of power. In referring to an intimate encounter as a "round," a term that evokes alcohol and violent sports imagery, Dennis-Benn emphasizes clients' casual and sometimes aggressive attitudes toward sex and sex work. Furthermore, calling the women "island girl[s]" exoticizes them, infantilizes them, and collapses their individual identities. The term, along with euphemisms such as "banana" for oral sex and "sundae" for a kinky sex act (10), emphasizes issues of consumption

and suggests clients' desires to divert attention from the realities of the sexual-economic transactions.

In *Here Comes the Sun*, Margot operates as both a pawn and an influencer. She functions as a madam for the women she trains. She "feeds them, dresses them, [and] teaches them how to carry themselves among moneyed men" but in the next breath reminds them that they are worthless and disposable (145). Far from serving as a nurturing maternal figure, Margot is often emotionally unavailable and distances herself from her work and the women she supervises. Though Margot is largely in control of the young women, she is ultimately under Alphonso's thumb. Through the character of a "boss lady" who was sold into sex work as a teen, Dennis-Benn highlights the traumatic and cyclical impact of sex tourism on vulnerable populations. In focusing on Margot's influence on the young women under her supervision, the novel largely blocks any access to Margot's interiority or self-reflection. Readers are kept at a distance much in the same way that Margot, perhaps as a protective or defensive mechanism, maintains emotional distance from others. Instead, the most notable marker of how sex tourism shapes Margot is the disintegration of her romantic relationship with her girlfriend.

II. A Loss of Refuge

Dennis-Benn uses Margot's relationship with Verdene to explore how the dominant culture in River Bank vilifies homosexuality and condemns same-sex love. In doing so, the narrative supports Steven Seidman's observation that "sexual behavior that is defined as natural may be celebrated and assigned all sorts of rights, resources, and benefits; unnatural desires are condemned and may be harshly punished" (xi). In *Here Comes the Sun*, the norms surrounding sexual relationships are enforced via the community and enacted through a combination of judgment and unwritten rules that strongly discourage homosexual intimacy. Readers are introduced to Verdene by way of Thandi, Margot's younger sister. Thandi grew up hearing that Verdene "lures little girls to her house with guineps so she can feel them up. . . . Verdene Moore is the Antichrist[,] . . . the witch who practices obscene things too ungodly to even think about" (Dennis-Benn 28). Verdene is depicted as

a predator to be feared; indeed, it is her homosexuality that emboldens her neighbors to imagine predatory behavior. Community members reinforce heteronormativity when they deem her a threat to "little girls." Unlike Margot, who poses a real danger to the "island girl[s]" she supervises, Verdene is vilified for fabricated transgressions. In another projection of anger, a number of individuals who suspect that Verdene is a lesbian invent rumors designed to drive her into exile. By equating Verdene with the Antichrist, community members absolve themselves of any responsibility to be civil to her and draw on religion to vilify homosexuality. Verdene's neighbors understand same-sex intimacy as "obscene" and "ungodly" and collectively police homosexual relations. In *Here Comes the Sun*, heteronormativity is linked with communal pressure; lesbian women who are openly intimate face exclusion and violence from their community. Homosexual intimacy and heterosexual sex work, though, continue in the confines of private spaces. Whether at home or at work, Margot participates in relations that others deem "unnatural."

Dennis-Benn describes the emotional consequences of exile by including characters in the novel who are marginalized by the larger community. Margot, a lesbian broker of heterosexual sex work, craves exile to escape persecution from her community. For Margot, her community's adherence to moral order impacts her ability to be intimate with Verdene and leads her to imagine her own paradise. Margot views migration to a more accepting environment as a means of regeneration and self-identification. She dreams of leaving Jamaica and longs to "get as far [away] as possible[,] . . . maybe America, England, or someplace where she can reinvent herself. Become someone new and uninhibited; a place where she can indulge the desires she has resisted for so long" (Dennis-Benn 14). Due to internalized homophobia, Margot cannot publicly or privately label her bond with Verdene; she cannot "see herself this way" (65). Instead, she refers to her attraction to women via the rather indefinite and emotionally distant term "this way." By repeating the term "uninhibited," used previously when describing Margot's behavior with clients, Dennis-Benn recalls how tourists can be "uninhibited" when away from home and stages an imaginary respite

for the protagonist that imagines paradise outside Jamaica. This vision of paradise, though, is built on false promises, much in the same way that vacationers picture Jamaica. The imagined homeland that Margot constructs fails to acknowledge the fact that, as a black Jamaican woman, she might be subject to prejudice in America or England.

Because Margot struggles to be sexually intimate with Verdene while in River Bank, she dreams of moving to a less restrictive environment: "Her mind races ahead to the possibility of leaving River Bank for a nice beachfront villa in the quiet, gated community of Lagoons—a place far from River Bank where Margot could give freely of herself, comforted by the cool indifference of wealthy expats from Europe and America. It would be like living in another country" (75–76). In this passage, the phrase "cool indifference of wealthy expats" reinforces the fact that foreigners do not care about Margot's emotional wellbeing beyond her ability to provide services. Dennis-Benn positions the expats' acceptance of homosexuality as an antidote to local homophobia. Similar to the fenced-in nature of Palm Star Resort, a space that functions as an invented site/sight of discovery for tourists, the remote place that Margot imagines would allow the couple to live "without the neck strain from looking over their shoulders" (76). Dennis-Benn calls attention to the alienation inherent to all-inclusive resorts by replicating the environment in a residential setting. What others might find isolating is positioned as desirable; Margot yearns for a gated community where she would be left alone. Although she pictures life with Verdene in a beachfront villa away from prying eyes, that dream is replaced with "an office with good air-conditioning, a chair that adjusts to her back as though it is made for her, a mahogany desk with her name on it, a better view of the beach, the ability to slip out of her shoes and wiggle her toes, and a door she can keep locked" (286). While Margot's office provides her with a refuge from direct involvement with sex work in that it offers relative privacy and the physical markers of power, its simple pleasures cannot counter her memories of emotional and sexual trauma.

Michelle Balaev's work on the relationship between individual trauma and cultural forces sheds light on how trauma operates in the text. Balaev writes that "the trick of trauma in fiction is that the individual

protagonist functions to express a unique personal traumatic experience, yet, the protagonist also functions to represent and convey an event that was experienced by a group of people" (155). Margot's numbness can be read as reflective of her experience and representative of the many ways that survivors can respond to trauma. Margot remains haunted by the "memory of what her mother had done to her" (Dennis-Benn 15). As mentioned, Dolores sold fourteen-year-old Margot's virginity to an unnamed cruise passenger for six hundred dollars to "fix her" (260). Sheller observes that the "desire to constrain women's eroticism" involves "both eradicating nonreproductive queer sexualities *and* constraining the over-reproduction of heterosexualities of the working class" (240; emphasis in original). Dolores' quest to eradicate her daughter's homosexuality, then, can be read as connected to hegemonic notions of sexual citizenship and her adherence to the social norms that condemn same-sex love. Dolores attempts to exorcise the "devil" in Margot by making heterosexuality compulsory (260). She rationalizes the sale of her daughter's virginity as the "only way dat [she] could save [Margot] from [her] ways" (261). Similar to Margot's description of her attraction to women as "this way," the word "ways" is a euphemism that emphasizes Dolores' denial of her daughter's sexuality. For Margot, the trauma of sexual exploitation lingers in her memories of "what her mother had done to her" (15). Dennis-Benn uses Margot's experience with sexual exploitation and exclusion to examine the consequences of regulating female sexuality.

If, as Balaev claims, the trauma novel "explores the effects of suffering on the individual and community in terms of the character's relation to place" (160), then the collective loss of land for River Bank residents connects Margot's individual trauma to a larger cultural trauma brought about by capitalist development. Like Dolores, the developers value income over people. The town of River Bank, as a result of hotel development, is transformed from a place of individual suffering into one of collective loss and upheaval. If the landscape is a "referent for the individual's sense of self or identity" (Balaev 161) or a source of dignity, as Frantz Fanon contends (9), then the question becomes whose dignity is being upheld in River Bank. The waterfront area emerges as a site

where the struggle for dignity is constantly negotiated. This location, which is where Dolores sold Margot into prostitution, also functions as a contact zone between residents and tourists. The annexation and subsequent demolition of the River Bank homes, occasioned by the hotel development project with which Margot is involved, is symbolic of her shift to an indirect involvement with sex work. In situating the sale of Margot's virginity in River Bank, Dennis-Benn connects the town with individual suffering and illustrates that nearly everything is for sale, but not to the advantage of locals. It is perhaps because of this connection that Margot is more willing to see the town demolished and repurposed. Her participation in the retail sale of young women and land, which recalls Dolores' actions, situates sexual exploitation and environmental devastation as parallel forces of destruction. Dennis-Benn positions land development as a potentially traumatic process that, for Margot, comes with mobility but results in displacement for the collective. In essence, Margot and Verdene's social alienation precedes the mass eviction of their neighbors. Margot's desire to escape to a gated community contributes to the exile of River Bank residents. At the conclusion of the text, Margot is alone; her relationship with Verdene dissolves after Margot prioritizes the hotel development project over their relationship. Margot, who stands at the top of the hill, hires employees to populate her property because she cannot tolerate living alone. Though Dennis-Benn does not equate exile and mass eviction, Margot's relocation allows the author to more fully explore the collective suffering that comes when River Bank is transformed into a space for tourist consumption.

III. The Expansion of Mass Tourism

In situating the reader as both a literary tourist and a potential critic of the implications of the tourism industry in Jamaica, the novel harkens back to Jamaica Kincaid's indictment of the effects of colonialism in Antigua. Just as Kincaid's *A Small Place* presents a "sustained assault on Europeans' and North Americans' privileged place within the global postcolonial economy" (Huggan and Tiffin 76), *Here Comes the Sun* sheds light on Jamaica's economic divide and the exploitative practices of the country's economic elite. At the heart of Dennis-Benn's novel is

a critical discussion of tourism that recalls the anti-colonial movement in Caribbean literature. Like Kincaid, Dennis-Benn suggests that the "battle is not against development or tourism as intrinsically harmful processes and activities, but rather against the often flagrant human and environmental abuses that continue to be practiced in their cause" (Huggan and Tiffin 79). While tourism is "one of the most important economic sectors for many countries in the Caribbean" (Thomas-Hope and Jardine-Comrie 94), studies indicate that tourism has vast social and psychological consequences for residents (97). Although the hotel industry "requires an endless supply of 'pristine' beaches, 'untouched' coves, and 'emerald' pools, many islands struggle with the water and sewage demands of the hotel industry, and sewage is returned to the same sea in which guests swim" (Sheller 68). The growth of tourism also has implications for natural resources and local economies in that most of the income generated by guests never reaches residents. Scholars such as Huggan and Tiffin recognize that tourism can be positive for communities if their needs are considered, but this is not the case for the residents of River Bank.

The privatization of the coastline that occurs when hotels are constructed stresses the asymmetrical power relations at play. *Here Comes the Sun* focuses on how hotel development threatens the community of River Bank and denaturalizes the landscape while renaturalizing the island as a paradise. The loss of beach access that happens when resorts such as Palm Star are built is represented by one developer's disregard for local residents. At the center of development in River Bank is Alphonso, the hotel owner turned developer who partners with lawyers to evacuate residents. Dennis-Benn uses Alphonso, a white Jamaican whose family hails from Canada, to draw attention to the local and global hierarchies that largely ignore the needs of vulnerable populations. River Bank is thus turned into a space of anxiety, a place where racial and economic tensions play out while the trauma generated by a range of exploitative practices is replicated. Importantly, the hotels along the coastline, largely indistinguishable from one another, become spaces for tourists to understand their position relative to the "other" and for residents to understand their own place.

Here Comes the Sun problematizes the impact of mass tourism and the use of development as social control. We would be remiss to forget that "at the center of Jamaica's ethnic and political complexity is race. . . . [T]he social and economic division between mostly white 'haves' and mostly black 'have-nots' runs deep" (Torregrosa). This is reflected in the fictional resort at the center of the novel. The resort property stands in for a host of projects dotting Jamaica's coastline. Hotels like Palm Star Resort attempt to bring order to the landscape by visually and geographically appropriating the land of non-European peoples and shaping the identity of the surrounding environment. Palm Star Resort is a false paradise that capitalizes on tourists' desire for a performative cultural experience in a controlled space that caters to their needs. In the novel, tourists "dress like they're going on safari, especially the men, with their clogs, khaki apparel, and binocular-looking cameras" (Dennis-Benn 17). While it is not evident who or what tourists are photographing with their telephoto lenses, they eat "fried fish[,] . . . their backs, shoulders, and faces red from sunburn, their tour buses parked out front" (106). Dennis-Benn depicts tourists who do not fit in; their pale skin cannot withstand the harsh rays of the Caribbean sun. They come to document (through photos) and be chauffeured from stop to stop in a tightly controlled itinerary. They misunderstand the culture in that their dress is more suited to an African safari than the Caribbean. It is clear that readers are not meant to identify with the tourists but, like imagined locals, to laugh at the tourists' clothing, behavior, and lack of belonging. In passages such as this, Dennis-Benn destabilizes the imperial gaze to position tourists as objects for readers' amusement. If tourism "can be understood as a form of embodied encounter between foreign travelers and local people that involves corporeal relations of unequal power" (Sheller 210), then Dennis-Benn's use of the counter-gaze is particularly significant. Throughout, she inscribes tourists with potentially laughable qualities and questions the hierarchy that situates the tourist as viewer and the resident as object of that gaze. By invoking touristic relations of looking, Dennis-Benn foregrounds the island's occupants and pushes back against a picturesque view of Jamaica.

Although the novel illustrates how Jamaican women are sexualized and othered in relation to white, foreign tourists, it also counters that image with an exacting view of tourists and tourism. At hotels such as Palm Star Resort, Jamaican chefs are fired and foreign ones are hired because "tourists want to eat their own food on the island. They don't come to eat Jamaican food wid all dat spice" (Dennis-Benn 111). Palm Star Resort, a space that emphasizes cultural and economic differences, is built on an old plantation property. If landscape can be read as history, as Wahab suggests, then it is revealing that Dennis-Benn stages the repurposing of a site of oppression with the construction of a site that perpetuates exploitation. The resort affords vacationers time to "lie flat on their backs and bellies in the bright sun while maids dash in and out of rooms with mops and linens" (Dennis-Benn 285). The relaxation that tourists enjoy is dependent on the exploitation and near-invisibility of lower-level workers. Palm Star Resort, while fictional, is an example of how all-inclusives are "built around security [wherein] the guests arrive and they are on property for most of their stay" (Hall 62). By situating the narrative at a resort and depicting touristic encounters from the perspective of locals, Dennis-Benn levels a critique against neocolonialism and external influence in the Caribbean. Here and throughout, she disputes the trope of the "lazy native"[5] by focusing on the labor of working-class Jamaicans.

IV. Land Development

In addition to zeroing in on the cultural impact of tourism, *Here Comes the Sun* showcases the environmental implications of hotel development. In the text, landscape operates as an instrument of power as well as a "cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolizing surroundings" (Daniels and Cosgrove 1). Palm Star Resort exists because the Wellington family (originally from Canada) arrived in Jamaica after Alphonso's father "fell in love with the country, and stayed" (Dennis-Benn 108); like the tourists who frequent his resort, Alphonso's father was mesmerized by the image of Jamaica as unspoiled paradise. By crafting a hotelier who is a second-generation immigrant, Dennis-Benn calls attention to the economic division on the island and

the privilege of a family who had the means to relocate and pursue their attraction to a foreign land. The Wellington family's work attempts to control the landscape and forcefully removes residents from their land. Throughout the novel, Dennis-Benn highlights the connection between colonialism's history of "forced migration, suffering, and human violence" (Handley and DeLoughrey 4) and development practices that fail to prioritize the rights of residents. The residents' displacement becomes clear when they are met with "no trespassing" signs: "The construction workers with their tools aren't on site today. There is a sign that reads NO TRESPASSING on the beach. . . . The hotels are building along the coastlines. Slowly but surely they are coming, like a dark sea" (Dennis-Benn 120). In this passage, residents are painted as trespassers who are denied access to the coast. By depicting the sprawl of resorts as an invading "dark sea" that takes over the beach, Dennis-Benn positions hotel development as the ominous force that blocks residents from accessing the beach while repopulating the space with foreign, often white, tourists. The term "dark sea" can be read as an ironic play on residents' loss of coastline access, the denaturalization of the landscape, and the loss of the beach itself.

The repercussions for residents extend beyond the loss of beach access. As the narrator remarks, "Little Bay, which used to be two towns over from River Bank, was the first to go. Just five years ago the people of Little Bay left in droves, forced out of their homes and into the streets" (120). With little regard for the families who live there, the developers, who used to "wait for landslides and other natural disasters to do their dirty work" (120), now utilize force to clear entire towns. By repeating the term "dirty work," which is also employed during a discussion of Margot's occupation, Dennis-Benn questions who is really engaging in unsavory practices. Is it the sex worker who sleeps with foreign clients, the developers who displace residents, or both? Her use of the phrase sheds light on the emotional and cultural costs of development. In the above passage, locals are represented collectively, perhaps to illustrate how residents and developers function as differentially empowered groups. Residents resist through physical force by "blocking roads with planks and tires and burning them" and steal construction materials

"to rebuild homes in other places" (120). These examples of resistance restore the dignity of displaced characters and recall the historic struggle for land and resources in the Caribbean.

The town of River Bank functions as a space where competing interests play out. Developers bemoan the difficulties of extracting people from their homes and seek a government contract to enforce their commands. The construction equipment wastes away in the sun, battered by the elements and the natural environment, which rejects those who attempt to exercise power. Despite residents' assault on the construction tools, the bulldozers appear overnight. Dennis-Benn writes: "[T]hey stand in place like resting mammoths, their blades like curved tusks. It's as though they landed from the sky or were washed ashore. One by one they begin to knock down trees in the cove and along the river. They also take a chunk of the hill, cutting down the trees that cradle the limestone, which they chip away" (289). In this passage, the bulldozers function as alien figures that systematically erode the landscape. Perhaps an ironic representation of the hordes of tourists who invade the island's beaches, the bulldozers remove the natural defenses of protected spaces. In short, the bulldozers represent the way that those in charge (the developers, and most notably, Alphonso), relieve themselves of responsibility. The bulldozers give those in power a way out by partially alleviating their discomfort. Like Alphonso, who mediates his relationship with sex workers by installing Margot as their supervisor, the developers do not directly operate the bulldozers. Instead, they can point to foreign workers as the catalysts of destruction. In both cases, however, it is rich white men who act exploitatively and damagingly. Dennis-Benn uses their deeds to reference the region's colonial history and imagine resistance to such behavior.

In the text, the primary consequences of hotel development are environmental destruction and the displacement of residents. The narrator observes that "the men fold the earth. . . . [B]its and pieces of rock scatter as trees are uprooted. When they collapse, the earth shakes. . . . The clouds gather together, and the sun stands still and watches her world crumble" (289–90). In contrast to the previously examined passage, the link between men and environmental destruction

is clearly delineated. It is worth noting that Dennis-Benn specifies that men rather than machines lay waste to the landscape when they "fold the earth." When the destruction of their homes is imminent, "people begin to snatch their things from their shacks, forced into the unknown. . . . Those shacks are marked to be destroyed" (290). Intriguingly, the force that stops the bulldozers is a woman's wild hand gestures, which direct the construction workers to stop. The workers read her as an obeah woman[6] when the earth begins to tremble. As a result, "the men clutched their helmets and searched for safety. They ran for cover, diving behind bushes and under sheets of zinc. . . . Later it was reported that what they had experienced was an earthquake. They decided to halt the construction until a later date" (290). The moment offers a temporary counter to the razing of the Jamaican landscape. The bulldozers, left in place, serve as a warning with their "engines baring their teeth like a threat" (290). The developers deploy machinery as an ongoing reminder of the threat of displacement; the "teeth" of the machines are visible for all to see. Much like the yellow tape all over town, the static bulldozers alert residents that "in a matter of weeks, River Bank will be no more" (290).

V. Conclusion

In *Here Comes the Sun*, Dennis-Benn foregrounds extractive practices to challenge imperialist modes of dominance and shift representations of the Caribbean away from stereotypical depictions of paradise. The commodification of female sexuality perpetuates exploitation, the censure of homosexuality engenders feelings of exclusion, and hotel development robs local residents of refuge. In positioning Jamaican citizens as perpetrators as well as beneficiaries of these practices, Dennis-Benn disrupts the colonizer/colonized binary and explores the impact of intersecting systems of oppression. For the women in the text, sex work can provide social mobility, but often at a personal cost. *Here Comes the Sun* concludes: "[E]verything glitters in the new sunlight, just like Margot had always thought it would. Except for her lone, grainy figure on the water's surface, dark in the face of the sun" (345). The natural elements of the sea and the sun represent the forces that threaten the

Caribbean environment and its residents. The sun, aptly referenced in the novel's title, bares the truths that Margot wishes to ignore. As an agent of development and someone who is implicated in the hotel's sex tourism ring, she cannot escape the rays that expose her sense of alienation.

For Margot, as well as the town of River Bank, commercialization has taken over. In pursuing economic gain, Margot loses everyone dear to her. To become rich and successful, a goal that Dolores deemed impossible, Margot must facilitate the exploitation of young women. In the end, she is reviled by her sister and her colleagues, just like Dolores, for privileging success over all else. Dennis-Benn positions Palm Star resort as a place of false refuge for tourists and a space of exploitation for the majority of residents. She uses the mass eviction of River Bank's residents to detail the trauma of environmental devastation. Alphonso is described as a hotel owner/developer who is "CHANGING JAMAICA FOR [THE] BETTER" (333). Throughout, Dennis-Benn calls readers to question the veracity of that characterization and to consider the implications of the consumptive nature of Jamaica's service economies.

Notes

1 Also reflecting on the construction of paradise, Sheller finds that "contemporary views of tropical island landscapes are highly over-determined by the long history of literary and visual representations of the tropical island as Paradise" (37). Sheller argues that "the picturesque vision of the Caribbean continues to be a form of world-making which allows tourists to move through the Caribbean, and to see Caribbean people simply as scenery" (62). In *Routes and Routes*, DeLoughrey explains that "the construction of isolated island space is an implicit consequence of European colonialism and has a tremendously complex history" (9). DeLoughrey also argues that the contemporary island economies that privilege tourist consumption of resources are connected to the patterns of the colonial era (10).

2 In discussing the trade of intimacy for money or goods, I use the term "sex work," coined by activist Leigh in 1978. Scholars such as McClintock argue that sex work "is a form of work that is variously shaped by the diverse social contexts out of which it emerges. The sex industry itself is scored with labyrinthine imbalances in social power" (9). For more on sex tourism/sex work, see Showden and Majic's *Negotiating Sex Work* and Parent and Bruckert's chapters in *Sex Work*.

3 Thompson notes that "the origins of how the English-speaking Caribbean was (and is) widely visually imagined can be traced in large part to the beginnings of tourism industries in the British West Indies in the late nineteenth century" (4). She argues that the "wedding of tourism and national progress continues in the contemporary Anglophone Caribbean" (12). See her *An Eye for the Tropics* for more on the politics of visual representation in the Caribbean.

4 The hypersexualized image of the Caribbean relies upon an understanding of Caribbean sexuality as excessive, pathological, and unruly. As Sheller and Urry observe in *Tourism Mobilities*, "the sexualization of 'exotic' bodies has become a standard tool of Caribbean tourist promotion, and feeds into the development of sex tourism in the region" (19). Drawing on the work of Sánchez Taylor, Sheller and Urry find that "sex tourism packages Caribbean people as 'embodied commodities' by turning the long history of sexual exploitation under colonial rule into a lived colonial fantasy' now available for the mass tourist consumer" (19). Kempadoo stresses that "prostitution in the Caribbean is inextricably tied to the power and control exerted by European colonizers over black women since the sixteenth century" ("Continuities and Change" 5).

5 For more on the trope of the "lazy native," see Tobin's work on highly tropicalized and touristic imagery. Tobin finds that "this trope of tropical bounty and the attendant trope of the lazy native—both socially constructed products of the much celebrated Eden-like landscape—recur in narratives about the Caribbean" (153–54).

6 In "The Implied Obeah Man," Beck notes that obeah "has been defined in many ways: as witchcraft, sorcery, black magic. It is broadly considered to be the practice of a supernatural craft. . . . The roots of West Indian obeah reach back to an African heritage" (23).

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