
**Oceanic Borders and Postcolonial Identity: A Blue Humanities Study in
Monique Roffey's Novel *Archipelago***

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Abstract:

This paper aims to study the notion of oceanic borders and post colonial identity through Blue Humanities in the novel *Archipelago* by Monique Roffey. Blue Humanities accentuates the relationship between ocean and humankind in literary works. In the context of the nature of the Ocean, there are no fixed boundaries for oceans, seas, and rivers. Although, they have geographical limits, they also possess their own physical space that often transcends human boundaries. The ocean can break the borders created by humans and move across cities, houses, and roads. Oceanic borders tend to change frequently due to natural movements such as tides, currents and its navigation. This study argues how the ocean challenges the traditional boundaries and evokes the post colonial identity in the Caribbean islands. It encourages people to rethink their identities through colonial history, indigenous history and cultural memory. The sea functions as a form of healing therapy. The novel begins on Caribbean Island, a region historically shaped by European colonial and marked by colonial rule, slavery, and displacement. As a result, the Caribbean region reflects multicultural identity. When Gavin sails through Caribbean Sea, he encounters different communities showing that, even after colonialism hybrid cultures continue to exist. This indicates that postcolonial identity is shaped by the oceanic space and its connections. Therefore, the study analyzes how the ocean connects islands, histories, and cultures through the lens of blue humanities.

Keywords : Oceanic Borders, Post colonialism, Healing, Connectivity, identity, Cultural Hybridity.

Introduction

Monique Roffey is an award winning Trinidadian - born British writer of novels, essays literary journalism, and a memoir. The novel *Archipelago* won the OCM Bocas Award for Caribbean Literature in 2013. She also received the Costa Book of the Year Award for her novel *The Mermaid of the Black Conch*. Her works often explore themes such as myth, memory, displacement, Human- Ocean interconnection, and Environmental awareness. At present, she serves as a her lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University.

The Caribbean Sea plays a significant role in literature. It carries the history of transatlantic trade which contributed to the formation of hybrid cultures and the connection between islands. Later, many writers explored themes such as myth, migration, colonial power, hybrid culture, and the relationship between humans and water. According to Steve Mentz, "Oceanic thinking reminds us that water connects spaces that land maps try to divide". Oceans may have geographical boundaries but they also possess a border less space that connects groups of islands. Now- a days, the field of Blue Humanities study has been gaining vast and wide open attention among the research scholars. Many literary works use the seas oceans, rivers, and the other water bodies as symbol as well as a background settings. For instance *Odyssey* by Homer, *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, *The Sea*, *The Sea* by Irish Murdoch, and *The Black Water* by Joyce Carol Oates all present water bodies as important settings for their narratives. Other than settings, these works also demonstrate the interconnection between human and oceans. Similarly in the novel, *Archipelago* Gavin's journey through various islands not only connects different Islands but also brings together diverse cultures and communities. Through this oceanic space, European colonial powers historically shaped cultural identities, and the sea continues to influence the formation of postcolonial identity.

The Objectives of this study are to understand the importance of Blue Humanities and to examine how the Ocean provides a space that connects islands. It also explores how the ocean not only shapes human experiences but also influences postcolonial identity. The researcher aims to analyze how oceanic space functions beyond a mere geographical boundary and connects various islands in the Caribbean sea? The study further examines how the ocean shapes the cultural identity through colonial history? In recent years, the research has increasingly focused on Blue Humanities, analyzing how the Ocean plays a central role in literary works and how literature is connected to oceanic spaces. In the novel *Archipelago*, the protagonist Gavin Weald begins his journey across the Caribbean sea after enduring a devastating flood that takes the life his infant son. Unable to escape the trauma of his loss, Gavin travels various islands in the Caribbean sea, where he encounters strangers and pirates. This journey demonstrates how the ocean connects different islands, heals

Gavins trauma, and gives him the strength to hope for the future. The Caribbean sea also carries a long and complex history shaped by European colonial powers particularly through transatlantic trade. Gavins journey through this Oceanic space reflects how the sea not only connects islands but also contribute to shaping cultural identity.

Oceanic Borders

Generally land has fixed and rigid boundaries. The ocean also has geographical boundaries, but it can break human-made borders and pass across cities, roads, and houses. After a devastating hurricane Gavin's family endures great pain. He decides to undertake a journey across the Caribbean sea with his daughter Ocean and his dog Suzy. During the journey, he crosses various Islands and witnesses dangerous storms, suspicious sailors, and strangers on different Islands. The Ocean seem beautiful, spacious providing a space that helps them heal their emotions psychologically. At the same time, it also threatens them with its vastness, and power by bringing dangerous storms. Even its calmness hide great danger. This demonstrates the the ocean does not have a fixed boundary but instead functions as dynamic and active force.

The word *Archipelago* refers to a cluster of Islands connected to one another. Geographically these islands may seem separate, but physically they are connected through the ocean. The mobility and fluidity of the ocean symbolically connect one Island to another. In the novel *Archipelago*, the central character Gavin Wead takes a travel to across the Caribbean sea to escape from his trauma. This movement represents the Ocean as a border less space and highlights the interconnectedness of the Caribbean sea. During his voyage, he encounters various sailors, Islanders and he sails along side other seafarers. These interactions illustrate cultural connectivity between islands, as people exchange their histories, traditions, and experiences emphasizing the shared and hybrid nature of Caribbean cultural identity.

This study incorporates the Black Atlantic Theory in the analysis of this novel. The theory was developed by Paul Gilroy in his book, *The Black Atlantic*, where he states, "The Atlantic is a system of cultural exchanges". The Ocean not only functions as an active force but also provides a space for the formation of to cultural identity. Both this theory and Blue Humanities demonstrates how oceanic spaces connect, shape, and influence cultures and histories.

Postcolonial Identity

The Caribbean sea has a complex historical background shaped by European colonization. In particular, Transatlantic slave trade played a significant role in shaping the identities and cultures of Caribbean, African, and American communities. During colonization, colonizers

forced enslaved people to work in the Caribbean region and in America. Millions of people were enslaved and transported across the Caribbean sea and other parts of the world. As a result, the Caribbean region developed a hybrid culture due to colonization.

Postcolonial theorist such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak, Stuart Hall, and Frantz Fanon have discussed about migration, culture, history, and postcolonial identity in their works. The term *Hybridity* refers to “A new culture or identity formed by the combination of two or more different cultures”. Based on Homi. K. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, the Caribbean sea encompasses diverse cultural communities, including American, African, and European influences. According to Paul Gilroy, the Atlantic Ocean connects various parts of the land. Similarly in the novel *Archipelago*, the Caribbean region provides a space for colonial slave routes, migration, and blending of cultures. This connectivity links clusters of islands and fosters cultural exchange.

Gavin encounters fishermen, strangers, sailors and pirates on the Caribbean Islands which shows the persistence of cultural hybridity even after colonialism. His interactions with island communities illustrates the postcolonial identity of the Caribbean region. His journey connects various cultures, histories, and identities through the fluidity of the ocean. The mobility of the ocean connects different communities and fosters interaction between diverse cultures.

Conclusion

This analysis reveals that, the ocean represents a central figure in the novel. Its mobility connects various islands and creates a borderless space. Even after centuries, the cultural hybridity of Caribbean region helps to illuminate postcolonial identity. This shows that the ocean not only connects physical borders but also reflects the cultural histories of different communities.

Although, the Islands appear geographically separate, the fluidity of the ocean links them together, and maritime journeys continue to shape and evolve postcolonial identity. The ocean enables the readers to re-imagine Caribbean as a region with Cultural histories and identities that extend beyond national borders.

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