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**THE CONSTRUCTION OF CARIBBEAN MASCULINITY: TOWARDS A RESEARCH
AGENDA - A SYMPOSIUM**

"Unmasking Masculinity and Deconstructing Patriarchy: Problems and
Possibilities within Feminist Epistemology"

by

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Masculinity
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Box

UNMASKING MASCULINITY AND DECONSTRUCTING PATRIARCHY: Problems and Possibilities within Feminist Epistemology

by Patricia Mohammed

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The experience of being a man, of being Indian or African, of being Muslim or Anglican, of being a Trinidadian or a Jamaican, a priest or a fisherman, is never an isolated one. At each point the individual man is a product of a number of constructed identities, confined not only to physical appearance, to interaction with others, but also to the sociological circumstances in which an identity is being expressed. For instance an Indian man attending a traditional Muslim wedding might find himself cut off from the women and interacting with a primarily male grouping. His male bonding behaviour may change drastically when confronted with another situation, say a Carnival fete in Trinidad in which mixing with the other sex is not only more indiscriminate, but expected. Our experience in life is mediated through the material body. A male Ghanian colleague who shared student life with me in the Hague and came from a prestigious background in Ghana, was appalled that when he entered a tram in Holland, invariably people would immediately clutch their bags and purses closer to them. Black women did not have the same experience. In sheltered cities of Europe he immediately represented a class, a race, a group and a sex who were feared for this or that reason. Our material bodies - whether outwardly

biologically male or female, our race or ethnic group, the colour of our skin and the class we typify within a particular culture, constantly inform and mediate our social experiences.

Henrietta Moore writes that "The material world that surrounds us is one in which we use our living bodies to give substance to the social distinctions and differences which underpin social relations, symbolic systems, forms of labour and quotidian intimacies" (Moore, 1994: 71). Each individual, however, does not begin to write on a new slate. The relationship between how we use and experience our bodies to interact with the social is more similar than different for any grouping of individuals within a culture, and in some cases across cultures. One such grouping is gender identification. Nor is it a static process for each individual or group, in that age and experience itself changes us, as does the way in which cultures collectively or individually shift symbolic interpretations or expectations over time. Experience acts ontologically for all of us, but it does so consciously, through a technique of construction. Our identities, whether racial, ethnic, gender, class, national or political, are constantly undergoing construction, but the material base from which this construction takes place is through our bodies. "This process of construction involves a recognition of the role of physical presence in establishing dialogue between individuals and groups. What is at issue is the embodied nature of identities and experience" (Moore, 1994: 3)

One of the major epistemological tasks in feminist scholarship is to reunite the detachment of the individual experience of the body with the larger collective process of constructing identities. Men and women experience their environment differently and this experience itself constructs the knowledges which they formulate about reality. This difference has not been fully incorporated into received knowledge thus far.

Feminist epistemology or a feminist theory of knowledge does not attempt to replace

received knowledge by new knowledge gleaned from a feminist standpoint of experience. What it attempts to do is to challenge received knowledge and add to it. The construction of knowledge in the Western world until the middle of the twentieth century has been heavily androcentric and Eurocentric. Feminist epistemology has begun to establish new parameters of thought, and to contest what is accepted and valued as admissible levels of knowledge, and to confront the keepers and conveyors of knowledge.

From the middle of the twentieth century onwards, feminism began a concerted and accelerated search for 'femininity' in opposition to a received 'masculinity'. Man and manhood was taken as given, the known factor against which a femininity was inscribed as the secondary term, the "Other", the latter coined by Simone de Beauvoir in **The Second Sex**. The project of feminism in the twentieth century, after women had won the vote and recognition of their civil rights, and had begun what is now referred to as the sexual revolution, was to discover the basis on which the subordination of one sex was justified, to understand the origins of patriarchal thought and the persistence of a male dominant ideology. Western philosophical thought set up the binary opposition between men and women as two antithetical sets of characteristics and positioned men as superior and women as inferior. This schema included dichotomies between nature/culture, rational/emotional, assertive/passive, strong/weak, or public/private. These strategic oppositions privileged men in the superior position of the hierarchy and women in the inferior position as the second sex.

Dichotomous thinking was and remains useful for linguistic purposes and appears valid enough in terms of legitimizing human actions, as for example good and evil, or for purposes of description, as for instance white and black, and for that matter was inherited from "scientific" discourses (action/reaction). It has also been used for other unsavoury purposes. The first term generally takes its hierarchy from the position of the second, such that good is better than evil and white is superior to

black. Dichotomous thought therefore entrenches the superiority of the former term over the latter; for example, racially, whiteness was deemed superior to blackness. The hegemony of these ideological discourses can be traced as far back as Plato and Aristotle, who, formulating reason over emotion, and culture over nature, justified the domination of women by men, enslaving women in domestic activities, and excluding them from public life in the voice of reason and objectivity.

The problem with this dichotomy when it was related to human experience is that it misrepresented the relationship between mind and body, reason and emotion, and between culture and nature. It situated human nature as itself dichotomous and within this binary framework, some aspects were female and others male. If mind, reason and culture were considered superior, then logically the survival of human civilizations could be traced back to a superior male - the hunter, who conquered nature by producing tools and weaponry and began to control not only women's reproductive labour but that of other tribes. The role of woman therefore becomes an adjunct - reproduction being a secondary activity, domestication of animals, possibly the origins of early agriculture and grain gathering which provided the staple for the tribe perceived as inferior to the hunt and chase, the danger and physical activity demanded from exploration. A contemporary analogy which comes to mind is the value attached to housework as compared to labour which is considered skilled, such as driving a truck. Housework and childcare is (was) not only considered as non-work, but non-productive work, demanding little skill and no training, and somehow natural to women's lesser capabilities.

Feminist epistemology has attempted to challenge this dominant classificatory scheme of western civilization and in doing so has lent support to the contestation of other dichotomies which have affected the development of society - the racial stereotyping of peoples, and the disadvantages of caste and class divisions by birth. In this sense, feminist epistemology intersects with post modernism. Post modernism calls for a commitment to the deconstruction of universalities and stereotypes. Post modern

thought is rejected by many because of its apparent self-serving nature, its preoccupation with literature, linguistics, psychoanalysis and philosophy. It has become rather fashionable to reject postmodernism as a new fad produced by armchair intellectuals of more 'developed' societies who have no relationship to the real world. Clearly we need to be selective about new paradigms of thought which are emerging. It seems to me that the methodology of deconstruction as well as the fundamental ideas proposed in postmodern thought regarding identity creation - political, national and racial or ethnic, and gender, speak directly to the Caribbean social experience, a precocious experiment in the settling of different groups of migrant peoples¹.

The issue in this paper is why is postmodern feminist epistemological thought useful for us in the Caribbean for understanding masculinity and femininity. For many reasons but two are implicit in the ideas I have thus far expressed. **First**, because what is taken for granted as natural - as for instance a natural sexual division of labor and natural sexual differences, can be seen as constructed over time and therefore be deconstructed. We need therefore to re-examine in our histories and in our ongoing experience, how the natural is persistently being transformed, or simultaneously can have different meanings in a particular culture. For instance, Lady Nugent's diary of Jamaican society in the early nineteenth century depicts a clear distinction between the femininity of the white woman and the "unfeminine" physical strength of the black woman. Childbearing was somehow more "natural and easy" for the black woman who also had to carry out a strenuous work load in the fields. **Second**, postmodern thought allows the researcher to employ the method of deconstruction which strives not to replace one stereotype by another, nor to redefine

¹Long before it was fashionable to speak of postmodern thought a colleague of mine Kim Johnson, drawing on the work of Naipaul and Walcott, argued that the Caribbean experience was a "postmodern" one. Recently Rawwida Baksh Soodeen and Eudine Barriteau who visited the Mona campus to lecture on Feminist Theory also drew attention to the relevance of post modern theorising for explaining the processes at work in Caribbean society.

other universalistic paradigms, as for instance the archetypal Caribbean man, or the Caribbean woman, undifferentiated by class or ethnic group. It allows diversity to explain different historical and social experiences. The simultaneous problem arises - how to translate the many diversities into notions of universality such that differences do not become reified and fetishized, "producing barriers between individuals and groups, leading to a replication of special interest group politics" (Best & Kellner, 1991: 205).

The question therefore which this paper sets out to answer is how do we continue to investigate masculinity and femininity in general, provided as we are with a new set of gendered lens. More pertinent to this essay is how do we examine Caribbean masculinity in relation to Caribbean femininity in particular so that we do not persistently replicate the stereotyped notions we have inherited from our predecessors who wrote us into the anthropological script of the region: the white male as powerful and dominant, the black man as promiscuous and irresponsible, the Indian male as violent and quick tempered and excessively patriarchal in his relation to his household, the white women as rich, weak, or objects of class ridicule, the coloured women as sexual objects, the black women as strong and independent, running matrifocal households and distrustful of their men, and Indian women as passive and subservient creatures and so on.

Gendered lens provide us with a set of ideas and tools which allow investigation from many angles, while providing us with a theoretical framework within which to situate our enquiry. The burgeoning interest in masculinity, as this first symposium on masculinity in the Caribbean attests to, is not a coincidental one. In fact, to many men it is viewed as a reaction to feminism. And rightfully so, as the relationship between the sexes is a constantly negotiated one, whether it is taking place in popular culture as seen in the lyrics of calypso or dancehall, in individual households, in state institutions or in the academy.

The insights of a feminist film critic are useful and important here. Teresa de Lauretis observed that the construction of gender identities (and the same can be said for the construction of other political identities) at this point in world history has become a self-conscious one². We are far more aware of and conscious of the reasons for difference at this point, if not respectful enough of these differences, than we were in the first half of the twentieth century when racial apartheid was still openly expressed and supported in the Southern USA and in South Africa. Differences expressed by the practices of diverse ethnic groups, the knowledge that there are imbalances in the amount of power and privilege between some peoples of the north and the south, that there are different world views between the east and the west, have become more apparent. Rapid technological change, mass communication, travel, and increased literacy has made us far more sophisticated in knowledge than previous generations could have imagined. This consciousness ensures that symbolic interpretations are not left unchallenged. In Jamaica, Buju Banton's famous dancehall lyrics "but most of all me like me browning" did not go unchallenged by women who resented the insinuation that black was also not beautiful and desirable. His subsequent song made amends. Later, Beenie Man's song entitled "Slam" while reinforcing sexual stereotypes for uptown and down town girls, also validates the sexuality and desirability of the downtown (primarily black) woman for her sexual exuberance. Again the body.

With regard to gender identity, there have been tremendous strides in some countries in the increased access which women have to education, jobs, self actualization and sexual liberation. How we continue to present and represent sexual difference cannot

²Admittedly the language of the post modern discourse has either become too obfuscating or limiting in terms of expressing the fullness of ideas which it embodies. For instance, the construction of masculinity and femininity or identity suggests individual or even group control over the way in which these can be re-presented. Linguistically I am tied to the vocabulary of the social sciences in explaining these ideas, but the field of literature or psychoanalysis in fact offer many possibilities for expression.

be detached from concepts and ideas about sexual equality which have been fought for over the last few decades, in a global thrust of women's activism. The idea of equal education for girls is now so taken for granted, we forget that it is only in the latter part of the twentieth century that education and equal access to employment are available to women in some societies. And we overlook the fact that in others, some girls still do not have access to equal education opportunities, and that practices such as female infanticide indicate a preference for the male sex.

A second insight of De Lauretis is also essential - the ambiguity of gender must be retained. Within the politics of identity, identity has become an overused word, and negative when it implies the repression of heterogeneity to homogeneity. Identity has positive connotations insofar as it involves forging a political identity from one's historical and cultural background and one's gender, class and ethnic status. The articulation of feminine gender identity, framed within concepts of equality, in relation to masculinity, does not mean that difference must be denied. To discard the notion of difference between the sexes is impossible. It assumes that one can disregard the complexity and manifold variety, and thus the richness of human social experience, including that of human ontological experience. The corollary for gender is that male is not the same as female. Biologically, we find the most fundamental difference; only the female mammal can actually physically reproduce the species. What this persistently means for manhood and womanhood, for our ongoing conceptualization of masculinity and femininity, must also be fitted in as another prism of the gender lens.

But the problem is that while returning to the essentialism of the body as male and female, we must also challenge this. Essentialism has proven to be both useful as well as destructive in the creation and retention of hegemonic ideologies which place power in the hands of those who actively retain these ideologies, as for instance essentialist ideas of race, caste/class, or gender. This primary difference between

masculinity and femininity³, prompts essentialists to hold fast to an argument that there are different roles for men and different roles for women in society, that the male is naturally the breadwinner and protector and the woman the dependent sex. Essentialism also views male sexuality as aggressive and dominant, with female sexuality as passive and needing to be controlled. Notions like these actively sustain a particular social order. For instance whiteness is deemed superior to blackness due to nineteenth century scientific claims that larger brain size of Caucasians represented a higher level of evolution. Class structure was maintained on the basis of royal blood lines, and for that matter caste is formulated as a product of birth and not related to an occupational and hierarchical division of Hindu society. Similarly with regard the male and female, men are perceived as physically stronger and intellectually more agile than women and so on.

Constructivism arose as a reaction to the essentialist school of thought in the latter half of the twentieth century and clearly was informed by shifting notions of class (Marxist analysis), race and sexuality. Michel Foucault's treatment of sexuality in his **History of Sexuality, Volume 1**, is a prime example of constructivism at work. Foucault demonstrated that sexuality must be conceived of not only as a natural given with drives and instincts which we have no control over, but as also constructed over time by historical and cultural factors. As a result of constructivist thinking, to exemplify the point, it is no longer possible to locate rape as a crime stimulated by the instinctual sex drive of a man aroused by a deshabelle or tempting female. Instead it could be viewed as the relations of power and dominance embedded in the gender system, between masculinity and femininity, deriving from the sexual metaphor of man as aggressor and woman either as temptress or passively afraid of the male

³I am equally mindful in this statement that biology itself cannot be so neatly divided into male and female and that there exists not only biological possibilities which combine both sexes, but also sexual identities which conflict with biological appearances. How this must be incorporated in the representation of masculinity and femininity into the twenty first century must also be considered part of the feminist project.

instinct. Constructivist thinking also influenced writers like Simone de Beauvoir who coined the famous dictum that "woman is made, not born". Thus was derived the conceptualization of gender which moved away from the word sex. Gender was social and cultural therefore changeable, sex was biological, therefore fixed..

Gender theorists immediately latched on to the ideas of constructivism as it allowed the possibility of change. If woman's position was not secondary to man but socially constructed, then there was scope for change. Institutions were viewed as equally responsible for the reinforcement of patriarchal ideologies and continuous construction of gender differences. An example is religion as for instance in Christianity it is written that Eve was made from the rib of Adam and was the temptress in the Garden of Eden, therefore both inferior and sexually untrustworthy and must be controlled by men. Religion itself relies on essentialist interpretations of the text. If, however, we regard femininity and what is deemed femininity as being constructed over time, then so is masculinity, and therefore both could be transformed. The earlier struggle for equality, however, could not have foreseen the difficulty of changing in a relatively short historical time span the ideas built over centuries, and secondly, did not fully appreciate the notions of difference which emerge from the essentialism of maleness and femaleness. If men and women are the same, then maternity leave must be made available to both. If what is masculine and feminine is only constructed, then the future vision for feminism is either androgynous societies or the production of Amazonian women. The dilemma in feminist theory at this point is how do we reject some of the more debilitating aspects of essentialism while still taking account of it? How do we retain the components of constructivism which are relevant - in other words how do we deconstruct femininity and masculinity without falling prey to the idea that everything can be explained by the social and cultural? "What are the boundaries between the social and the individual, both in a psychological and in a sexual sense?" (Wieringa, 1995) How do we employ the theoretical frames of essentialism and constructivism without creating other binary oppositions in thought. Essentialism and constructivism should

not be seen as oppositional, and "indeed many essentialist arguments are contained in constructivist writing" argues Saskia Wieringa. What is needed is the explanation of difference yet the complementarity of both explanations. Gayle Rubin in a seminal essay "The Traffic in Women" suggested the term a sex/gender system to get away from the ideas being developed in feminist theory that sex was biological, and gender was socially constructed and culturally specific. She attempted to demonstrate not only the difference between the two terms but their relation to each other, or in other words to engage more harmoniously the essentialist and constructivist arguments which separated biological sex from social gender. The construction of gender identity becomes a rapprochement with biological sex, between essentialism and constructivism and consequently a rapprochement between masculinity and femininity rather than a perceived (natural) opposition.

The rest of this paper attempts nothing more ambitious than a set of notes and guidelines in the study of masculinity, but these are posited within the ideas raised in the first section of the paper - the application of a gender lens, the politics of identity creation, the concept of equality with difference, the determination of masculinity and femininity as both essential and constructed in history, culture and society and employing the method of deconstruction. The basic structure of the two subsequent sections is first a metaphorical unmasking of masculinity and next a deconstruction of some of the notions associated with patriarchy.

Section 1 - Unmasking Masculinity

There are many ways in which masculinity is viewed by men themselves in their writings on the subject. It is useful to examine very briefly some of these approaches and the ideas being expressed. Geoff Dench in a book entitled **The Frog and The Prince and the Problem of Men** argues that women have more to lose by attempting to reshape common wisdom of what constitutes masculinity and disrupting the natural

harmony between the sexes. For Dench, masculinity is defined by the role of protector and breadwinner, giving men a primary role in society - if that is taken away from them he fears they will become like the frog, ugly and irresponsible, without the kiss of the princess to humanize them and turn them into princes. Dench's argument relies on an essentialist frame of reference, that generations of men and women and human civilization thus far, have worked out a natural division of responsibility, which if reordered can prove to be destructive to continued social relations between the sexes. Women, he thinks, have more to lose by attempting to be more "like men". Part of the misunderstanding which Dench enters this discourse and polemic with feminism is his assumption that feminism is about women trying to ape a dominant man's culture. If women have rejected the paradigm of male power and the opposition of mind and body, reason and emotion etc. then it is hardly likely that they are attempting to replace it by another equally limiting female dominant paradigm?

Michael Kaufman in **Beyond Patriarchy Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change** puts forward a perspective which fits more readily into contemporary feminist readings of masculinity and patriarchy. "Much of the literature by men on male- female relations tends to be at one extreme or another: many look at how men are scarred and deformed by our roles but do not examine men's privileges and power over women". At the same time he places himself candidly in the shoes of men and observes that "What makes feminism a threat for so many men, or at least a source of confusion and struggle, is not only that we have privileges to lose, but that it appears -or at least feels -as if our very manhood is at stake."(p. xiv)

Like Kaufman, Linden Lewis in an essay entitled "Constructing the Masculine in the context of the Caribbean" also makes a valiant attempt to situate himself in both male and female perspectives in the Caribbean context, recognizing the power and privileges which masculinity confers on Caribbean men and the resistance they have to losing ground, while acknowledging that analyses of gender in the Caribbean (and

elsewhere) which have focussed on women, lack serious examination of masculinity. The result is that the masculinity has been conceived primarily in negative terms, in which "Caribbean men are homogenized, and identified as apart of a reactionary backlash against feminist intervention in the region." Lewis notes, and I agree, that this kind of interrogation has failed to promote understanding between men and women, and like Kaufman, he consistently presses for analyses which enhance a relational understanding and not widening the gap with further misunderstandings.

At the risk of being pedantic at this point, and perhaps somewhat late in the essay, but deliberately so, I want to argue that this inquiry into masculinity in relation to femininity requires a precision with terminology. When we speak of masculinity in intellectual discourse are we speaking the same language as the politician, the journalist, the calypsonian or my mother and yours?. What do we mean by the words male, man, manhood, and masculinity? Can they be interchangeably used?

It might be useful to revisit the lexicon of the word itself and its parent in feminist discourse - gender. Donna Haraway notes that the equivalent words in the different languages are Gender in English, Geshlecht in German, Genre in French, and Genero in Spanish. She observes that " the root of the English, French, and Spanish words is the Latin verb, *generare*, to beget, and the Latin stem *gener-* race or kind. ... The substantives 'Geshlecht, 'gender', 'genre' and 'genero' refer to the notion of sort, kind, and class. ... The modern English and German words, 'gender' and 'Geshlecht' adhere closely to concepts of sex, sexuality, sexual difference, generation, engendering, and so on, while the French and Spanish seem not to carry those meanings as readily" . The words associated with gender in all western languages are entangled with concepts of kinship, race, language, and nationality all of which in the present day discourse, speak to the politics of identity. The puzzlement of gender will no doubt continue in the discourse, but it is perhaps worthwhile to point to a simple clarification in usage. The term masculinity must constantly be weighted and differentiated by class, race and culture. Given the need

to establish both essentialist elements as well as socially constructed ones, a useful differentiation in terminology can be that "male" is a biological referent, while the terms man, manhood and masculinity are more socially ascribed and weighted with constructed ideas of what it is to be not female. Other nuances come to mind with the treatment of the word. Among men, (and women) there is a difference between youth or childhood which might still be termed boyhood, and manhood in which ideas of masculinity shared by a particular culture or group become more formed and entrenched. This kind of differentiation may assist in clarifying the correlation between essentialism and constructivism.

While there are shared and universal ideas and concepts of masculinity and manhood, these also vary from one society to the next, as does femininity. This is a fundamental part of the deconstructive idea of difference. To unmask masculinity, as the title of the paper suggests, and as the feminist project implies, is not to reduce what is deemed masculine or manhood to the known, or to deprive masculinity of its difference from femininity. To unmask masculinity is to remove some of the stereotypes associated with the term.

With the natural division of society into masculine and feminine, nature and culture and other binary oppositions, and in the process of writing the history of man into culture, the idea of masculinity became fixed. What emerged in history was the notion that man was the known quantity, with woman the unknown, to be derived in relation to man. The feminist project has been to reinscribe the woman as existent and to recover her in history. This project has been a self conscious one, with an underlying notion that femininity or the feminine gender identity needed to be uncovered through conscious interpretation, and representation, by examining concepts of womanhood and femininity in different cultures. The point which I want to draw attention to in the construction of both identities (or the dialectic of both) is that, in retrospect, the feminine seems much less problematic and more fixed, perhaps even more timelessly inscribed in some way than the masculine. That

is, feminine gender identity was always more rooted in the ontology of the female body.

For the male, masculine gender identity was always the promise of what a man can do, not what he is. Manhood and masculinity was/are derived from power, status, control, and in the execution of his role of provider and breadwinner. If the male could not fulfill this promise, then he was not a man. Femininity was about bearing children, and her status, class and power linked to that of her mate or male kin. The shift in occupational roles and the capacity of women to be providers and breadwinners have challenged notions of masculinity, while allowing women to extend concepts of femininity. This is perhaps at the root of male fear that they are losing ground, and privilege, that their manhood is threatened when they cannot fulfil the "God given and natural role of men". The extension of this losing ground is an increasing psychological pressure on men to retain notions of masculinity which perhaps were possible under different economic circumstances but certainly are a luxury in today's world. What consequences this has for delinquency among young men, and as an explanation as to why women appear to emerge as the stronger rather than the weaker sex when there is an increase in male unemployment and poverty, is an issue which must be debated in masculinity.

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The now legendary thesis of man the hunter and woman the gatherer has taken firm root and transformed itself into both an explanation as well as an argument for the timeless persistence of a normative and natural sexual division of labour within society. Explanations provided by feminist interpretations of this thesis gives useful food for thought among men themselves and certainly among women who unquestioningly support these notions. While the sexual division of labour clearly changes over time - and in keeping with the demands of the existing mode of production, it is uncertain why the task of the hunter is deemed more important than that of the gatherer and nurturer. Is this an interpretation of contemporary human consciousness and hierarchical ordering onto the past? In both the previous modes

of production and at present, the burden of breadwinner must always have been a difficult one for the man to bear, and certainly this essentialist idea has been appropriated by capitalism to pay a family wage to the man, with the assumption that the provider is always male.⁴ Even a cursory understanding of the history of Caribbean societies refutes the idea that women have been solely dependent on a male breadwinner. Both sexes have contributed continuously throughout development to the support of the family. Research on the family in history has recorded that among many systems of production, for example the peasant family, there was no real division in a practical sense. Either through collectivities or in extended families which included household helpers, both men and women performed tasks which accumulated surplus for household survival⁵. This idea is summed up neatly by anthropologist Eleanor Bushe Leacock "The notion of a somehow separate "woman's role" hides the reality of the family as an economic unit, an institution as crucial for the continued exploitation of working men, as it is for the oppression of women" (Burke Leacock, 1979: 13).

The privileges accorded to men were and are also based on class, status and power, and impoverished men have equally been the victims of other men.. In the thirteenth and fourteenth century the rights of the lord over his tenant extended to droit de seigneur or prima nocte - the right to have sexual relations with his newly wedded wife. The dishonouring of a man and his masculinity through the female body has been and still remains literally a blow below the belt for masculinity. And in general, this is carried out by other men. In this sense, masculinity is a public

⁴This point is made by Michele Barrett in her book **Woman's Oppression Today**, Verso, 1980

⁵This idea was developed by Martine Segal in her analysis of love in the peasant family in France in the fifteenth century.

more than private arrangement , between men and men, rather than primarily a relation between men and women. This point will be amplified in the final section of this essay.

Masculinity as a social construct is fashioned differently at different ages. Anthropological insights offer a wealth of illustrations on the wide cultural variation of what can be considered masculinity in more "primitive" cultures as seen for instance in the works of Maurice Godelier, Margaret Mead and Eleanor Burke Leacock. The notions held in western society are not universal ones. History also reveals tremendous differences in the trappings of masculinity, in dress style, length of hair, the use of adornment and so on. In contemporary society of the twentieth century the re-emergence of the long hair and pony tails among men signified either a challenge to bourgeois society, or a willingness to bend gender lines of demarcation. My idiosyncratic reading of the rastafarian hairstyle for men, is that it reaffirmed biblical notions of manhood, control and power while also being mimetic of the symbolic Lion, the personification of strength. Hair therefore symbolised among African men the reclamation of identity, of Blackness, of origins, of defiance against a history of colonization which weakened the patriarchal base, and of regaining control over women of the tribe. It's appeal to men not only of the Rastafarian faith, and appropriation by other cultures outside of Jamaica suggest that this message is a universal one for many black men through out the western world.

The willingness to challenge notions of masculinity in a culture seems to also change with the chronological age of the individual man, in negotiation with individual women. While symbolic notions of masculinity may be retained outside of the intimacy of the household, within the closed environment, many changes are negotiated, such that household chores become more shared, men may openly profess to like cooking, in some households I have known a division of labour in which the man does all the cooking and so on. But interestingly, this seems to come with the

age, experience and confidence of maleness which a man possesses so that his "feminine" activities will not be misinterpreted by his peers.

Finally several questions suggest themselves in relation to the study of masculinity in the Caribbean. What is Caribbean masculinity if such a thing exists? What are Caribbean men if they are not irresponsible and emasculated as a result of their history of colonization? How do we move away from the stereotypes which have been associated with manhood in the Caribbean and which itself creates the psychological barriers, in my view, to change in gender relations? Are women in the Caribbean really antagonistic to men or is it towards the ideas of masculinity which inform male behaviour? Do Caribbean men fully understand the additional burdens which women feel by being labelled independent and strong? These are the questions which the ongoing deconstruction of masculinity must respond to. One thing is certain, that the unmasking of masculinity also requires a deconstructing of patriarchy. In my view the ideology and practice of male dominance, while privileging some men, also keeps masculinity imprisoned behind bars.

Section 2 - Deconstructing Patriarchy

In this essay "patriarchy" retains its original meanings as well as incorporating the additional interpretations developed in twentieth century feminist thought, all of which are germane to this discussion. The archetypal patriarch is generally conceived of as the dominant father or powerful man who rules over the household or community - including women, younger men, sons, daughters and slaves. Patriarchy itself can be defined as a prescribed power relationship in which the patriarch or father rules over the others for the benefit of the household or clan. Thus inbuilt into the notions of power and control by the father or leader of a clan is the idea of a "benevolent patriarchy" at work. Anthropological findings have revealed that the rule of father over sons, or older men over younger men, was, in many

cases, not so much benevolent, but more so to ensure that power remained the hands of the older men. A parallel in female/female relationships can be seen between mother in law and daughter in law in the Indian household. What power and resources do men gain by controlling other men and younger men.?

Feminism revealed another dominant side of patriarchy as societies progressed into the present time. Both ideology and practices served to control female labour, female reproduction and female sexuality. A contemporary deconstruction of patriarchy requires a revisiting of the term patriarchy - moving away from the taken for granted or glibness with which we have come to use the term in feminist discourse ⁶ The recognition of patriarchy as ideology and dominance, led feminism into a search for origins, a search which though proving inconclusive, has still been necessary and worthwhile.⁷ The findings suggest that if patriarchy has been constructed through history, then it can also be deconstructed.

Several important components embedded in the concept of patriarchy have surfaced through feminist scholarship. First the universality of its ideology and practices. Again anthropology has revealed more similarities and differences between cultures in this respect, despite the few exceptions which have been uncovered. Second has been the tenacity of patriarchy once it took root. In an attempt to illustrate the

⁶ It must be noted that Kate Millett's earlier work published in 1970 retained both notions of patriarchy as the rule of older men over younger men, but Millett looked more systematically at the way in which patriarchy defined the ideology and practices of male dominance as it was manifested in the twentieth century. In subsequent developments of feminist perspectives, patriarchy attained the stature of a key conceptual advance in feminist theory. Radical feminist viewed the ideology of male dominance as key in the subordination of women while socialist feminists looked at the intersection between patriarchy and capitalism in ensuring male dominance in society.

⁷Foremost among the scholars who have carried out research in this area is the work of Gerda Lerner, **The Creation of Patriarchy**, Oxford University Press, 1989

concept of patriarchy to a colleague, an insightful postgraduate student of mine⁸ made use of a very graphic and penetrating metaphor which can be appropriately used here. Patriarchy is not fixed or the same during all historical periods, rather, like an amoeba, it changes form and takes different shapes under different historical moments. This very transformation and division in fact accounts for its persistence overtime.

In the Caribbean a popular notion is that patriarchy was introduced by the white colonial ideology, as if it did not exist in previous communities which inhabited these islands or within the cultures from which the major migrant groups were derived. This point of view is a very limiting one. It puts the blame for the subordination of women and the emasculation of men squarely in the hands of another greater patriarchy and not on the gender relations negotiated between men and women as these societies continue to undergo additional transformation. For instance in his paper cited above, Lewis writes

Based on a developed and sophisticated European system of patriarchy, colonial rule in the Caribbean inscribed male domination into the culture and political economy of the region. This male domination of the social relations within Caribbean society laid a foundation for the institutionalization of gender inequality in the region. Though excluded from control over resources and from participating in the exercise of power with their European counterparts, African men, and later Indian, Chinese, and Portuguese men were all socialized by, and ultimately internalized, these patriarchal standards

Lewis himself observes prior to this comment that "the nature of social relations of

⁸ This observation was made by Michelle Rowley, a young Trinidadian student who is one of the candidates in the first M.Sc. in Gender and Development Studies being offered by the Centre for Gender and Development Studies at UWI, Mona, Jamaica.

men and women in Caribbean society before the advent of the Europeans is yet to be seriously investigated." In deconstructing patriarchy the the social relations between the migrant men and women who came or were transported, and the gender systems which emerged within these groups need closer scrutiny.

I can draw on two key examples of deconstructing gender relations within an ethnic group, areas in which I have carried out research, to make this point clearer. Indian men and women were largely brought as individuals, even though some migrated in families. The shortage of women in the earlier periods of indentureship in the nineteenth century allowed a flagrant challenging of the rules of kinship which bound both sexes to family, monogamy and sexual mores. The outburst of violence against Indian women at this time was the Indian male response to a challenge to the dominant patriarchal notions in India which had placed Indian women in subservience to the male. The Indian female was in short supply and she had greater opportunity to choose and desert a male partner who did not fulfil her sexual or material needs. The result was a major disruption in Indian family patterns and in the gender system. Indian patriarchy suffered a major blow. The suicide rate among Indian men was also very high and worrisome to the colonial officials. Indian women emerged during indentureship as threatening the internal patriarchal order of the group, and as independent women. This tendency went into reverse in the later and post indentureship period when a reorganised kinship system, family pattern and institutions such as religion and the panchayat began to enforce norms which had been established for centuries in Indian society, but which was also undergoing changes there.

In a previous paper entitled "Fragments of the Colonial Legacy: The Representation of Masculinity in Caribbean Thought" I asked and attempted to answer the questions - why is it that the brutal system of slavery resulted in an emasculated male and the strong independent female who single handedly was and is responsible for the well being of the family? What is it about slavery and colonialism which brought on a

legacy of antagonistic relations between men and women of African descent in Caribbean society? In a recent selection from the Thistlewood diaries circa 1775 compiled by Neville Hall I was struck by the plurality and diversity in intimate relations within the slave population itself. As with Indian migrants, the African slave population also suffered serious disruptions in their internal arrangements as a result of the uprooting and displacement of norms and traditions. The slave population at this time exhibited a marked degree of inconstancy - both men and women changing partners, baby mothers and baby fathers, with consummate ease, even though it appeared possible to develop long term and binding relationships in this plantation if they wished. This area requires indepth investigation to substantiate the point I wish to develop. Nonetheless, my reading of the diary extract suggests that while one of the reasons for male irresponsibility can be attributed to the licentiousness of the colonial masters themselves, there was a startling parallel in gender relations among Africans themselves under slavery, to that of Indians in the early stages of indentureship. The breakdown of kinship rules and tradition allowed more flexibility for both men and women during slavery, and in so far that this could be exploited within slave society, African men and women were not indifferent to the possibilities.

A parallel between these two experiences, of shifts in patriarchal dominance, and a reshaping of an internal gender system, was echoed by an Australian colleague who had knowledge of gender relations among some aboriginal tribes of Australia. She pointed out that colonization had disempowered both aboriginal men and women. In the post colonial state. Women, nonetheless, emerged as independent, strong and responsible, while the Aboriginal men were largely seen as irresponsible, weak, and quick to drown their sorrows with the bottle. Again the connections between the essentialism of biology and the constructed nature of social gender needs to be questioned here across cultures. Why is it that women emerge as independent and resourceful in the face of adversity?

While this reading of gender relations within ethnic groups presents one facet of

deconstruction, we also need to examine how patriarchy is being reformulated continuously by the interactions and power relations between the different groups. If we look at Jamaican society after emancipation a new patriarchal order between men and men is being formed. In Jamaica we have the emergence of a white dominant group, creole society, coloured society and black marginal male grouping. In Trinidad, after indentureship a similar hierarchy was created with the dominant white male, the French creole grouping, the middle class coloured group, the emancipated African descendents and the Indian male at the bottom of the ladder. Within each group there are gender relations to be negotiated between men and women, but the dominant patriarchal group provides the rules for the creation of a new order which becomes the meeting ground for new negotiations between men and men for power, status and privilege- all of which eventually define their masculine identity and their overall status in the particular culture. In deconstructing patriarchy, therefore, we must also see masculinity as being negotiated between men and men in the public spheres where visible signs of power are observed, political power, money, status and privilege. In this respect calypsos and dancehall lyrics are a powerful medium through which symbols of masculinity are being traded. Sparrow's famous Jean and Dinah is one of the most potent examples of how the patriarchal order in Trinidad begins to take shape - "The Yankees gone and Sparrow take over now".

In Jamaica, Errol Miller's work on the "marginalisation of the black male" has resonances with the "emasculatation of slavery" in which men are again the victims of the dominant colonial order - black men must not be educated to challenge their masters. The problem with this is that Miller works within a paradigm of male dominance, assuming that this ideology is a natural one which must obtain in society. He places the burden once again on the backs of women for emasculating men. While Miller accurately observes that Jamaican women have taken advantage of educational opportunities and have achieved greater mobility than men, he does not question the notion of manhood itself and the way in which this may be at variance with the requirements of the changing education system. In so far as capital will persistently

draw more on female labour, then patriarchal notions of manhood will also have to undergo a significant shift. The answer does not lie in resorting to the opposition and antagonism against woman⁹.

From the perspective of feminist scholarship, a further question arises? How does the power relationship between men and men impact on the relations between men and women? Anthropological studies indicate such benefits to older men as that of controlling joint households and property, of controlling family labour and of controlling the sexuality of females, including the assurance that younger men do not have access to their women. There are also different readings of the way in which patriarchy is entrenched in the the construction of multiple identities. For example, in the post indentureship period in Trinidad, Indian men collectively relied on the recreation of a feminine gender identity recalled from India, to reestablish the boundaries of ethnic identity and community among Indians in the society. Politically, ethnic identity could then became more visible to others outside of the community as the classic patriarchy from India regained its ground.

The point to be noted carefully here is that patriarchy is above and beyond all a relationship about power, between races, classes and genders, and the continued deconstruction of patriarchy remains part of the agenda of a feminist struggle and foremost in the project of unmasking masculinity.

Conclusion

Some of the present attempts at male discourse on patriarchy and masculinity appear

⁹ I owe some of these insights to the work of two of my graduate students at UWI, Mona; Keisha Lindsay who has been developing a response to Miller's marginalization thesis and Michelle Rowley, previously acknowledged in this paper.

to do little more than reinscribe the old order rather than create a more equitable one. It is therefore necessary and strategic for feminists to enter this discourse fully with men, especially so since it may be impossible for patriarchy to engineer its own demise. Ultimately, the feminist project may depend on the creation of new essentialist ideas of human nature, undifferentiated by sex, but celebratory of difference.

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