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UNDER WOMEN'S EYES:

LITERARY CONSTRUCTS OF AFRO-CARIBBEAN MASCULINITY

THE CONSTRUCTION OF CARIBBEAN MASCULINITY:

TOWARDS A RESEARCH AGENDA

CENTRE FOR GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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"Is a pen a metaphorical penis?" This now-famous question was posed in 1979 to introduce Gilbert and Gubar's exploration of the manner in which patriarchy and its texts have sought to imprison women in silence. **The Madwoman in the Attic** unveiled the subtle strategies employed by nineteenth century female writers to deconstruct the existing cultural paradigms of femininity. Indeed, a major concern of feminist theory has been to expose the collusion between the ideology of dominance, which underlies the social construction of gender; and the cultural practice, which governs our day-to-day interactions.[1] And literary critics have been particularly concerned with what Greene and Khan term "the collusion between literature and ideology, focusing on the ways in which ideology is inscribed within literary forms, styles, conventions, genres and the institutions of literary productions."(5) Today, women writers of the post-colonial world have successfully brought female subjectivity from periphery to centre; they have interrogated ideological assumptions of dominance based on gender as well as on ethnicity and class; they have inscribed in their literary discourses new gender ideologies which are filtering into cultural practice. The pen can no longer be perceived exclusively as a metaphorical penis. But a related issue emerges. Now that women have, by dint of struggle, acquired the didactic and hegemonic mantle of the story teller, what manner of man is being generated within the literary womb of the woman?

A characteristic which Caribbean women's writing shares with the fictions of African-American and African women is its predominantly negative portrayal of men and male/female relationships. In 1975, Mary Helen Washington introduced a selection of African American short narratives with the observation that in many stories:

> .... the relationships between black men and black women are often deadlocked. In the past there was much fighting and knocking of heads (the woman's usually), these antagonisms being brought on, for the most part because of the economic

> and political powerlessness of the black family. The literature of black women strongly implies that in the future the black woman will more and more choose to be alone.(xxvii).

Mordecai and Wilson, in their introduction to a 1989 anthology of women's writing from the Caribbean, contend that the portrayal of male-female relationships in the writing "from the earliest work to the most recent augurs ill. Almost invariably the man regards the woman as an object, neglects, abuses, ill-treats and diminishes her...."(xiv). In 1993, O'Callaghan, also pointing to the predominant negativity of these portrayals, suggests that some female writers display the understanding, that the men are victims of the "social and historical factors that sanction male tyranny"(5). In 1994, I also concluded a cross-cultural study of a substantial cross-section of African, African-American and Caribbean women's novels with the comment that, for the most part, they deliver a devastating judgment on their male characters. A fair cross-section is depicted as weak or blindly egoistic; or if they are strong, they are inclined to be vicious and cruel or complacent; authoritarian and unwilling to listen; or vain and foolish. Perchance, the isolated man may be a caring companion, he nevertheless remains faceless or a trifle unconvincing.[2]

This paper takes a closer view of selected portrayals of male characters in women's writing and poses the following questions: Does gender create an alien and alienating barrier which cannot be breached? Are the portrayals of men merely superficial, displaying no in-depth understanding of the inner feeling of what it means to be a man? Do women possess the sensitivity and the intuitive understanding to get beyond the petty barriers to understand the other? Do differences in gender - and for that matter race, class and sexual orientation create islands in the imaginations which limits the perceiving eye/I to encountering the other, only via stereotypes or external portraits of greater or lesser detail and accuracy?

Some may take issue with this line of enquiry, or perhaps moreso, with its timeliness. To borrow Achebe's term, "it is morning yet on creation day" in terms of literary representations of womanhood. The process of dismantling stereotypes and cultural paradigms is intricate and takes generations to come to fruition. Especially in a multi-ethnic Caribbean framework, the interlocking impact of gender, ethnicity and class makes the task of defining a female identity infinitely more complex and therefore, one might argue, deserving of maximum attention. True. But I question whether we will be able to adjust existing paradigms of womanhood unless we also adjust existing paradigms of manhood. The shift in emphasis from Women's Studies to Gender Studies and our presence here today, is an affirmation of this.

The representation of male characters can be approached in several ways - the most obvious being their centrality in the text. Sybil Seaforth (**Growing up with Miss Milly**) and Velma Pollard (**Karl and Other Stories**) have written of male development, with emphasis on maternal interactions with the emerging man. Paule Marshall has penned four stories using adult male characters dealing with the awakening of emotionally impoverished men (**Soul Clap Hands and Sing**).[3] Patricia Powell has explored male homosexuality within Jamaican society in a novel which examines social reactions and the homosexual's dealing with the devastations of illness and death. (**A Small Gathering of Bones**). However, the majority of female-authored texts of Caribbean Literature overtly or tacitly question the male-dominated literature in which female representation is largely stereotypical and/or marginal.

I will begin the detailed analyses with an examination of a male character, who impacts our dreaming and waking reality in a most fearsome manner. What accounts for the making of the criminal as a young man, who becomes younger with each passing day;

who possesses no notion of private ownership, unless it is of his right of enjoyment of that which he has stolen; no respect for life, unless it is his own - young men who would effectively complete a robbery and then hang around to just "pop one" - murder a man for the fun of it? What crucible has created the monster who makes hitherto vexing literary issues, such as the motiveless malignity of an Iago, seem puerile?[4]

In *Country of the One Eye God* and in *The Dispatcher,* Senior examines the nature of Jack Spratt:

> People who say
> overpopulation is the greatest
> curse of the nation should
> give medal to Jack Spratt
> for what we over-produce
> Jack Spratt will reduce
> with efficiency and dispatch (p107)

Jack Spratt, to all intents and purposes, exemplifies an anti-heroic view of pure manhood. His is the culturally-enshrined fairy-tale transformation of the pauper into the prince. He is the poor, ignorant, country boy, who starts with no resources, but comes to town and makes good. He affirms the assumption that hard work, efficiency, and diligence create success. In a society, in which the pursuit of power is an extremely desirable heroic objective, he becomes a repository of personal power and representative of institutional power – "Public servant, contractor, potential medal-earner." He is set on a clearly demarcated and well-travelled fast track, and shows every indication of arriving at the upper echelons of the criminal world, with his characteristic dispatch. Moreover, as the central authority figure, the supreme signifier of his world, he has apparently attained an ultimate human quest objective - the power over life and death:

... Jack Spratt
have the might and the right
to decide who sleeping
in tonight and who outside
in Hope River bottom
or in cold Sandy Gully. (p.107)

The musicality generated by the internal rhyme "might" and "right" and the initial rhyme "in" and "in" ironically affirms the sense of the appropriateness of the order, created by Jack Spratt and his machinations.

The strength of the poem is the extent to which Senior introduces the ironic sense of normalcy into the deviant criminal world. The exploits of Jack Spratt are related dispassionately with a flat ironic detachment as if it were a communally recognised and accepted success story of an eminently powerful man. Surely this must stand as an indictment against a society which measures manhood based on the size of one's car and bank balance; the number and attributes of one's women; and the extent of personal and institutional power, one is able to wield.

Country of the One Eye God focuses more closely on this anti-heroic type within the family group. Here Jack Spratt, with his name now reduced to its diminutive Jacko, fallen into adverse circumstances; returns to his Grannie seeking money to escape from the police. Senior presents multiple perspectives which can account for his making. As far as Jacko is concerned, his outcome is natural and logical, given his upbringing. As it is written of Jack Spratt, so it is with Jacko:

his grannie
did beat him

with supple jack cant done
boy so tough
never cry
Grannie say
is bad seed (106)

The child is nurtured on a steady diet of licks to beat out the bad blood and rejection based on the hope, deferred year after year, of his parents, who have migrated to the promised foreign land, sending for him. The outcome is a man who recognises no constraint of morality or religion, love or duty, decency or social order. His criminal actions of robbing and conceivably killing his grandmother for the burial money, which she jealously guards on her person, are framed in his mind as reciprocity for the abuse and maltreatment, which he received in the name of an upbringing. The effectiveness of dispensing corporal punishment in the home, in the absence of affirmation of love and clear moral and ethical direction, comes into question. For Jacko, the constant beatings merely manifested his outsider status.

Yet Ma B's consistent beatings of all her children to eliminate bad ways were proffered out of concern, and ignorance of more viable child-raising techniques. Senior intentionally problemitises the situation - had child-abuse been sufficient cause, Ma B would have raised a generation of criminals, not only one. Hence, she searches further afield into her lineage for a cause: "She had coldly cast her mind back to every thing she knew about every single member of the family to discern if there was something hidden in her tribe that betokened this ending, and she could find nothing that warranted such a hard and final cruelty". Moreover, she searches the range of circumstances successfully confronted by her antecedents and her generations: "they had faced deaths starvation hurricane earthquake cholera typhoid malaria tuberculosis fire diphtheria and travel to

dangerous and distant places in search of work."(16) Here too, she draws a blank, for at no time in the past has this series of adversities, produced a hardened criminal. If these characters had sat down to dialogue in a masculinity symposium, the criminal would have posited nurture - that is excessive punishment, rejection, poverty, and adverse circumstances. And the primary nurturer would have posited nature - "bad seed" and predestination; it is written that the youth raise up "the ways of their destruction"(19). Each of these may be a contributing factor, but neither of these is sufficient enough to nullify the individual's power of choice.

A focal point in the story and the poem is the formulation of life's objectives and particularly the personal and culturally-shared correlations between representation and desire. For Jacko, and unfortunately, for a substantial cross-section of our population, foreign represents the culmination of wealth and well-being - it represents the home and comforts that he has never had; the parents for whom he has longed in vain. Even with his impressive credentials as a professional "thief, a murderer, a hired gunman, a rapist, a jailbird, a jail breaker, and now, at nineteen, a man with a price on his head" (p.16), he is poised to shed his grandmother's blood to facilitate his much-longed for homecoming-

"What? Yu plan to go foreign?"

"What else? Dont I have mother, dont I have father in foreign?" (p.21)

The irony is that he shares with Ma B, an essentially irrational response to a life of poverty and deprivation. As she has become disillusioned with life's goals, she too has found a focal point for her hope, so intense, that she is prepared to die in defense of the money to give her an ostentatious burial. In the interaction between the two, Senior uses third person omniscience to parallel the workings of a criminal, irrational mind with the skewed but innocuous thinking of a well-meaning old woman. Both see in her guarded cache of money, their future and fulfillment of their greatest quest-objects. He is

portrayed as coldly, methodically fighting for life without a clue of what life signifies - for him it is the dream-space of "foreign" from which he was excluded. Similarly, despite the grandmother's apparent intimacy with God, her dream-space remains earth-bound. For her, the epitome of life, the final triumph over poverty, smallness and meanness is the resplendent coffin in which she will lie in state to receive tribute to the wealth, beauty and order which she had never acquired in life. Even as she prays desperately "dont let him get my burial money," he levels the gun at her and reasons, "Ma B, for the last time, give me the money. Yu soon dead and lef it yu know. What you want money for? Let it go nuh. I have the whole of my life still in front of me." (p.25)

In the exchange, Jacko reverses the traditional social structure, which privileges respect for the authority of age and for the mother-figure, based on allegiance and gratitude for her sacrificial acts, on behalf of kin. Despite his fear and anxiety as a wanted man running for his life, he retains an albeit illusory stance of a masterful threatening authority figure holding over her the power of life and death. She who treats her excitable seventy-year-old nephew as a child because he had never acquired her calm, is constrained to bow to the evil life force in him, " In the pale light, Ma Bell wondered how such a little boy could suddenly grow so huge as to fill all the spaces in the room. She felt shriveled and light, compressed into the interstices of space by his nearness."(p.23). It is from this position of power that he presents his own reasoning logic and rationale: the issue of justice is subverted for him by the essential injustice of the world. Note that although he is unable to deny the existence of God, he only reasons that he is a one eye God who has aligned himself with the unjust power structure "Him no business with ragtag and bobtail like unno. God up a top a laugh keh keh keh at the likes of you." (p.24) Ironically, like his grandmother, he is a man of faith. Since all power and meaning is vested in the material world, he in turn vests his belief in a God of the materially prosperous, which leaves him free to create his own alternative existential reality as sovereign over a counter-order - a dog-eat-dog-world, in which he can affirm his

masculinity as top-dog.

The irony is that whereas the birth parents have rejected him, the only place of belonging he will ever possess is in the heart of the grandmother who, despite her innate knowlege of his reprobate nature, rejoices when in the process of his flight from the police, he answers the call of blood and returns to her sheltering. He ruthlessly desecrates and despoils the only home that he will ever have, a place in the heart and loyalty of this mother-woman.

Clearly in the face of unrelenting social adversity, and unachievable economic aspirations, the metropolis beckons as a dream-space in which this nebulous, successful manhood can be sought. It is in "foreign" that we encounter the second character which I have chosen for analysis - Deighton Boyce of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* Paule Marshall's study of the popular stereotype of the black West Indian male, who is unable to prosper materially, and wastes his substance on ostentatious clothing and mistresses. The petted and pampered son of a refined, deserted mother, he repays his mother's sacrifices and high hopes for his future with promiscuity and irresponsibility. His aspirations are constantly being flouted. His personal limitations, insufficient mastery of his current project and the racial biases combine to exclude him from material success. Although he is presented as crippled from youth by the white-controlled Barbadian economy, which distributes jobs and material prosperity on the basis of race and colour rather than merit, yet racism functions as yet another disguise for his impotence. Labelled by his wife as "always looking for something big and praying hard not to find it", Deighton has come to accept that rejection is his lot and is even more fearful of success than of defeat (174).

In drawing this character, Marshall pierces the facade of the black dandy obsessed with his fancy clothes and his women. A new image is superimposed on the perfumed

and bedecked "sweetman". In his daughter Selina's memory, the picture of Deighton leaving for his weekly visit to his concubine survives as a man "stumbling in defeat down Fulton street - the Saturday crowd engulfing him as the sea did later" (268). He inarticulately longs for simpler times when male self-image rested on sexual prowess and brute strength - the ability to flash a knife and bed a whore. The narrative voice frames on his behalf, the puzzle which he is unable to crystallise, "But what of those, then, to whom these proofs of manhood were alien? Who must find other, more sanctioned, ways?" (38). Bewildered, weak and vain, his enduring sense of hope is his greatest virtue.

Deighton retains anti-heroic qualities because he refuses to embrace the prevailing notion of self-worth based on material acquisition; however, he lacks a valid basis of self-perception as an alternative. Whereas chances are that Deighton would have survived in the gentler, slower-moving Caribbean society, he is unable to deal with transplantation into the urban, capitalist environment. Mechanisation and the forces which fuel modern industry emerge as an implacable enemy in Marshall's fiction. Man is portrayed as dwarfed, reduced to enslavement in service of the machines which he has created. In the massive war-production factory, the roar of the machine robs man of his power of expression, a key marker of his humanity. Moreover, mechanisation divorces him from the natural world which is the wellspring of his spiritual well-being. The necessity for continual back-breaking labour also causes the individual to lose touch with his inner being. The new society which is powered by gigantic and impersonal machines is inimical to Deighton's life-force. While Silla's formidable force matches the ugly grandeur of the colossal machine with its frenetic life beat, symbolically and in actuality, Deighton is eaten in its maw which "sucked in his arm as it sucked in the metal to be shaped then spewed it out crushed" (155).

Together, Deighton and Silla represent a reversal of concepts which are traditionally

associated with masculinity and femininity. It is Silla who carries the burden of association with machine, will to power, material productivity, conquest, all of which are traditionally associated with the male quest. Indeed, the grimness of the economic environment, coupled with her husband's rejection of this role, necessitate the sublimation of her softness and femininity, until she even appears to lose her human status and to assume the mantle of deity. On the other hand, Deighton is associated with an imperfect mix of the opposing elements - music, freedom, imagination, dream, which are usually associated with femininity.

Indeed in the eyes of her husband and children, Silla assumes the burden of a terrible mother-goddess. Deighton's favourite retort to his wife's many diatribes is "You's God; you must know" (26). Fleeing in terror from his own failure and from the shy, expectant bride who has been transmuted into a raging, implacable goddess, Deighton eventually seeks the comfort of a non-threatening man-made god -- short, brown, innocuous Father Peace who possesses none of the terrible grandeur of his wife and who teaches:

> The mother of creation is the mother of defilement. The word *mother* is a filthy word. When a person reaches God he cannot permit an earthly wife or so-called children to lead him away. God is all!"
>
> Deighton leaped up from his seat of recognition, trembling, the perspiration coursing past his blind eyes. "So true!" He cried. "So true. I am nothing!" And his arms flew out in a gesture that did, indeed, cancel his entire self. "God is everything. Need you, Father, need you." (168-169).

Deighton finds in the Father Peace cult a negation of the concept of the mother

[which is how Silla is referred to throughout the narrative] and a justification of his own failure as patriarch, ruler of the home and family and within the wider commercial sphere. His religion does afford a sense of community, but it is a false community which involves abdication of human responsibility to the extent of denying paternity of his children and transferring his personal bid for immortality unto union with Father Peace. Moreover the Father Peace cult, modelled on the actual Father Divine Movement, is in fact intensely materialistic and egotistical. Father says "So here I stand with everybody adoring, me. So much adoration is worth more than two million dollars. So much adoration you cannot put a price on it" (169). Father, preying on failures, wreckages, casualties of the American dream, substitutes a new version of the religion of wealth, showmanship, adoration which can be attained by those whose wills have been broken and purpose shattered. He represents the subsuming of individual will, the surrender of purpose to the supreme destiny of worshipping Father who brings Peace. Then shorn of individuality, family commitment and all but basic needs, the devotee is free to put his or her labour at the disposal of father's kingdom and his commercial ventures.

Father Peace's creed is diametrically opposed to all that Silla represents: the assertion of individual will towards the accomplishment of material success. It represents a force which lures her husband away from her and displays her failure to control him. It provides Deighton with an aura which makes him immune to her attack. Indeed each venomous onslaught simply affirms his adorable worthlessness and nothingness, his abject sinfulness and the absoluteness of his surrender to Father Peace. Her spiteful betrayal which leads to his deportation as an illegal immigrant and his suicidal leap from the ship, become a fulfilment of her earlier prophecy to kill him. It is intended to rob him of his immunity, his kumbla/cocoon, the triumph of his benumbed peace, his retreat into nothingness and final flight from responsibility. Just as the acceleration of their bitter struggle coincided with the beginning of the world war, its culmination in death is

marked by the cessation of global, armed conflict. On the domestic front, there is no victor.

In closing, I will examine the male characters drawn from Merle Hodge's *For the Life of Laetitia.* This didactic children's novel gives literary representation to a paradigm of manhood extant within the working class Afro-Caribbean framework, the visibility of which, Hodge argues, has been obscured by the existing concept of male marginality and the assumption that the ideal family grouping is the nuclear family.

Arguably, Senior presents a worst case and Hodge a best case of a similar scenario - the parent migrates to the metropolis to seek better economic prospects, resulting in children being left with grandmothers who raise them with varying degrees of support from the absent parent. Mammy Patsy, despite her physical absence has left in the minds of her family no question as to her love, devotion and sacrificial labour on their behalf. Her rootedness in the Caribbean environment is reflected in the ambition to stop mopping hospital floors in America as soon as her financial commitments permit, and return to her garden. Moreover, she has deconstructed in her children's minds, the popular myth of "foreign" as a coveted dream space when she writes, "This place they call New York is not fit for people, far less for people's children." (12)

How are the domestic situations different? Although the power of veto within the family is vested in Ma, Pappy with his philosophical orientation is crucial to the decision making process which also incorporates Uncle Leroy, the physically absent Mammy Patsy and Uncle Jamsie and Tantie Monica who live away from the family home.[5] This pattern of decision making affirms for Laetitia that family interactions based on reciprocity and mutual respect are more desirable than the acquisition of things and even the contents of the inevitable barrel from abroad; and this notwithstanding the poverty,

the limited diet, the smallness and meanness of their home and possessions. This is not to imply that Hodge glorifies poverty and eschews self-advancement. Indeed Lacey's high school attendance is looked upon as a long term investment for the welfare of the entire family.

Most significantly in Hodge's scenario, there is the active participation of men in the full range of familial functions. Pappy and Uncle Leroy, both responsible, caring, family-oriented men, are revisionary portrayals of the role Afro-Caribbean male within the family network.[6] Uncle Leroy is pictured in the bosom of the maternal family unit, providing economically for all by his work in the family plot. A male counterpart to mother-women, he nurtures, cares for and impart values to all the children of family group, (including his own daughter, Charlene, when she comes to visit) bound together by blood and other linkages. He is variously stern task master, instructor, provider, cook, joker, confidante and friend. One of the most memorable scenes of the narrative portrays Uncle Leroy dispensing evil-smelling worm oil, and later, preparing for the thoroughly purged and half starved children an enormous coconut bake with smoke herring and baigan choka.

Demonstrating that biological parenthood often does not necessarily equate paternal care, Laetitia's father, Mr. Cephas, is presented as a foil to Uncle Leroy. The point is made decisively, that the existence of the nuclear family does not automatically lend to its participants, the security and sense of well-being which human beings need to flourish. In fact, there is an implication that the male bread- winner, female care-taker model which obtains in many nuclear families can entrap the male in empty postures of authoritarianism and dominance, as readily as it can entrap the female in repetitive, unrewarding domestic chores, boredom, and lack of human companionship. Although his home is fairly prosperous and based in the town, Mr. Cephas's home is desperately

lacking for any central core. Frequently absent, he swoops in to exert "headship" by futile acts of patriarchal dominance. Mr. Cephas holds to rigid gender-based division of labour and is so paranoid about masculinity, that he is convinced that washing dishes will somehow permanently impair his son's manhood. He maintains no real understanding and meaningful communication within the family. Wife and son alike are desperately insecure and Lacey desires nothing more that to escape this loveless, imprisoning domestic enclosure.

The text is a fictional representation of Hodge's belief, that a more complete portrayal of kinship interactions, indicate that men portrayed as delinquent and absentee fathers in relation to their own progeny, can and do play an active role in the care, nurturance and economic provision for children, within the kinship group. In the process, she deconstructs the notion of working class Afro-Caribbean male marginality within the family network. In an unpublished interview (Morgan 1996), she elaborates:

> This notion of male marginalisation is related to the whole misconception about what family is. As long as you insist that the only arrangement you can call a family is a man, his wife and his biological children, then of course you would see men as marginalised, but if you recognise what the Caribbean family really is, then you would realise that men have a very large role indeed. Men feel more loyalty to their maternal family than to their women. They often don't see a woman as their family. They see the children as her family, but men are very active and functional in their mother's house, among their sister's children. There is also that phenomenon of not splitting off from the biological family as soon as we reach seventeen. A lot of grown people live in their maternal homes, like I do. We all travel all about the world and return to our mother's house. And we bring our children with us.[7]

Hodge achieves in this novel a much needed corrective to the traditional, patriarchal, Euro-centric paradigm of the family, the limitations of which are reflected in the kinetic image of the teaching aid of the blond smiling happy family, which despite the

best efforts of the teacher keeps falling down. This jab at the devices used through the education system to entrench dominant cultural aspirations, parallels Toni Morrison's deconstruction of the Dick and Jane introductory reading Primer used as a framing device for *The Bluest Eye,* which dictates that for black, working-class children in North America, to enter into literacy is to imbibe unreal, cultural paradigms and iconography; moreover, to read is to read themselves as written out of the text and into invisibility.

I agree with Rahim's conclusion:

> The Afro-Caribbean man has seldom appeared in positive nurturing roles. Hodge makes visible a dimension of Caribbean manhood that has been little examined, or in many instances has been subject to sweeping generalisations. The irresponsible, philandering black, working class man is absent in this novel. Pappy and Uncle Leroy in particular are characters that subvert the negative stereotyping of their race, class and sex. Hodge also embraces the wider and even tragic ramifications of misconceived manhood. She exposes the evil of patriarchal oppression in the character of Mr. Cephas, as well as Anjanee's chauvinistic father and brothers. Indeed the injustice of sexism traverses races and cultures. (11)

But I have a reservation. Female writers have explored the stereotype of the irresponsible male at length. Hodge's exploration speaks authoritatively to a particular omission in their literary constructs of Afro-Caribbean masculinity. It is concise, effective and fulfils the fictional contract of its genre - didactic children's literature. Nevertheless, perhaps it is simplicity and clarity acceptable within this genre which allows it to credibly create silences of its own. Whereas Morrison goes on in *The Bluest Eye* to deal with brutal frankness with the weaknesses within her fictional family, Hodge's text can read as an idealised, uni-dimensional view of a complex socio-cultural scenario. It de-centres the issue of the man's relationship to his lover and mother of his children. Indeed, it introduces only oblique mention of tensions encountered by Charlene's mother, and it frames these in terms of ethnicity and mother daughter conflict - Maharajin's initial desire to throw out her daughter who is making a child for a 'kilwal' man. For the moment, the exploration of the nurturant, caring, father/lover/provider in all of his multifaceted

dimensions, remains on hold.[8]

Let me return then to the questions posed at the beginning of the paper. There are undoubtedly female-authored Caribbean fictions which marginalise men and/or portray them in unfavourable stereotypical profiles.[9] But, the fictions examined here do not support the assumption that gender is an alien and alienating barrier which cannot be breached. Rather, even when the portrayal of the male character is negative, Senior risks sympathetic and compassionate authorial identification with a most hateful man - a criminal who threatens to brutally murders his grandmother, in cold blood. Hodge, in her effort to recuperate the vilified, working-class Afro-Caribbean male, de-centres the potentially problematic dimensions of male-female expectations and aspirations, in the interest of displaying, within the family network. what Rahim terms "a manhood stripped of chauvinism." By deconstructing negative stereotypes of the sexually-irresponsible, economically-impotent Afro-Caribbean man, Hodge alerts the reading public to alternative, submerged, cultural paradigms of manhood, which have hitherto remained obscure. On the other hand, Paule Marshall engages precisely this stereotype, but she does so with such sensitivity, that one comes to understand this manner of man, with all his charm and frailty.

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ENDNOTES

[1]Although white feminists have not been as quick to explore how dominance based on ethnicity **and** gender has shaped cultural practice. The title **The Madwoman in the Attic** drawn from Bronte's **Jane Eyre**, is based on the character of Bertha Mason, the Jamaican Creole heiress assumed to be racially tainted. Naming **Jane Eyre** as a cult text of western feminists, Spivak cites the Gilbert and Gubar's failure to read of the text Bertha's positioning in the "axiomatics of imperialism" as an example of their tacit complicity with the system of imperial dominance. She argues that the function of Bronte's native subject is "to render indeterminate the boundary between the human and animal and thereby weaken her entitlement under the spirit, if not the letter, of the law." (247)

[2] My reading of the situation was also qualified by the proviso:

> To the extent that the novels locate the formative experience within the dynamics of the plantation economy and the vicissitudes of neo-colonialism, they invite one to survey the wreckage of human relations created by this socio-political scenario and to celebrate the power of self-determination which is able to interrupt the downward spiral. (274)

[3] In this collection, Marshall experimented with the possibility of a woman writer of truly exploring male sensibilities. She sought to pierce that facade of emotional imperviousness and inviolability, which, to these men was the essence of their masculinity. These aging protagonists are awakened from their lives of spiritual and emotional paucity, to grasp in vain for life and sustenance from vibrant black women and in the case of *British Guiana* from a young black man. Senior's *View from the Terrace* has a near identical story-line and denouement.

[4]The portrayal of the young male criminal is fairly common in female-authored fictions, perhaps as a measure of the sense of vulnerability and the widespread fear which each gory and explicit account of crime strikes in the hearts of women, concerned for themselves and their families.

As in literature so in life. I recall my own sense of horror and violation, when, in the wake of the brutal murder of a housewife in Santa Margarita, Trinidad, who was preparing a meal for the gardener, even as he was preparing murder for her (1993), I read

again Michelle Cliff's **No Telephone to Heaven**. In this text, the handyman brutally decimates an entire family in post-independent Jamaica. The gross, gratuitous violence is an outgrowth of the decadent, insensitive extravagance of the upper class and the seething explosive violence of the lower class. At the same time, I encountered Jean Rhys' *Our Gardener* (the last creative work published in her lifetime), a grim poem in which a child witnesses the brutal murder of her parents by the gardener. It begins :

I thought Ken was a nice man
Ken was a pal

And the poem culminates:

People came running
Ken didn't look round
He laughed as he was striking
Mum on the ground

Went on laughing
And this is what he said
'White flesh, white flesh'
Talking to my Mother, dead.

These fictional portrayals, juxtaposed in my mind with the Santa Margarita murder, brought into focus the warped complexity of race and class relations in the Caribbean; the reasons why even in the mid-nineties, the focal point of white/upper class animosity and distrust is likely to be the male rather the female servant; and most chilling of all, the way in which the latent violence seems more prone to erupt, where there is some measure of social interaction - cordiality and even acts of kindness, exchanged between criminal and the victim.

[5]This raises the issue of the coping strategies employed by the transnational family to remain a unit given the role which migration has played in the social and economic life of the Caribbean people. One area for further research is the role played by the absentee male in the transnational family.

[6]Leroy displays a mature version of nurturing functions incipient in Mikey in Hodge's earlier novel **Crick Crack Monkey**.

[7]The issue of male marginality has also faced substantial revision at the hand of sociologists and other researchers. Rodman in his study on "friending" relationships in Trinidad identifies "marital shifting" as an answer to the man's economic inability to maintain a household and "childshifting" as the answer to the woman's subsequent childrearing problems (Rodman 1977).

Another perspective is that male's absence from the familial home and the dissolution of the relationship with his child's mother, does not automatically add up to marginalisation. Based on a participant study of an urban Port of Spain community, Riley makes reference to numerous examples of fathers who displayed "long-term concern "for their offspring despite "the severing of conjugal bonds with the other parent." He also described the functioning of community male role-models as manifested in encouraging involvement in cultural activities such as "beating pan" and in sporting activities (Riley:1960).

Senior also makes reference to the fact that fathers who have been separated from their families through migration retain financial responsibility and consequently are perceived and respected as the heads of their households, despite long term physical absence. Pulsipher seeking to account for the propensity of males in traditional West Indian yards to display greater involvement in the childcare of the offspring of their female relatives, than in their own children, suggests a tenuous link between this practice and matrilineal descent rules.(Pulsipher 1993)

[8]The visiting relationship is quite complex. It is not expected to be permanent, yet despite its casual, make-shift appearance, it is governed by firm social expectations. Rodman's study of 500 friending relationships in Trinidad attributes the impermanence of the union, in part, to the attitude of mistrust generated by low levels of male supervision and control, combined with the expectation of financial support for any child of the union.

Gender inequity is reflected in the fact that despite the expectation of female fidelity for the duration of the visiting union, the male may be engaged in several visiting unions and/or other categories of marital union simultaneously. Although these women view legal marriage as an ideal, the temporary visiting relationship is perceived as affording greater physical freedom, opportunity for sexual experimentation and the financial advantage of not having to use the man's financial contribution to care for his needs. And very important for this study is Pulsipher's contention that the children produced from the

early encounters tend to be considered as the offspring of the kin group/household rather than of the individual. Therefore, elaborate arrangements are in place to ensure that the young often teenaged girls are not swamped with the exclusive burden of childcare. (Pulisipher:62).

Nevertheless, given the assumption that the only way to keep a man is, to borrow Hodge's terminology, "make baby", visiting unions often lead in time, to female-headed households, with a succession of children by different fathers, in which women, whose educational opportunities were more likely than not eroded by early childbirth, are constrained to labour at the lowest paying, most menial jobs in domestic servitude, factories and export-processing zones to support their numerous dependents. The parties within the visiting union are afforded no protection by law and these women household heads account for the "highest proportion of stress-related illness, behavioural disorders in children, cases before juvenile court, female crime and resort to court for assistance" as well as child abandonment and child shifting. (Senior 1989:84)

[9] In this regard I take issue with **Harriet's Daughter** by Marlene Nourbese Philip. It is a didactic *Bildungsroman* intended to help young persons in the second level of the diaspora face the intense identity crisis which awaits first and second generation West Indian immigrants to the metropolis. There is a disturbing element about the novel which so obviously sets out to impart a positive self-image and cultural values to young Caribbean women. It transmits a message of hope that the women can, with effort transcend the generation gap, achieve balance in cultural assimilation and arrive at a measure of self- knowledge. The men are hopelessly incapable of making any such adjustments. They function largely if not exclusively as aggressors who execute mental and/or physical violence towards their wives and daughters. Although Margaret longs for her father to see her, like her, and be nice to her, the girls reviewing their role model at the end, reason that Harriet Tubman "did not let any white man, slave owners...push her around unless it was part of her plan." They conclude they "don't ever want to depend on a man ever, ever. They just take advantage of you" (145). The message, inadvertent though it may be, is clear. Slavery has ended, but the black man is the new oppressor of Harriet's daughter.