

**C A F R A**

**NEWS.**

NEWSLETTER OF THE CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATION FOR FEMINIST RESEARCH AND ACTION.



Vol.3 No.2 June 1989

## **Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA)**

We are an organisation of feminist researchers and activists who are committed to understanding the relationship between the oppression of women and other forms of exploitation in the society, and who are working actively to change this situation.

Members of CAFRA define feminist politics as a matter of both consciousness and action.

Membership spans the Dutch, English, French and Spanish-speaking countries of the region as well as the diaspora. Membership is open to women living in the Caribbean and Caribbean women living abroad who support CAFRA's general aims and objectives.

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### **MEMBERSHIP**

Open to women living in the Caribbean and Caribbean women living abroad who support CAFRA's general aims and objectives.

#### **Annual Membership Fee**

**Individuals:** 25 units in currency of residence



**Organisations:** 35 units in currency of residence

(Payable by cheque, money order or cash in currency of residence or US\$)

A brochure outlining the aims and objectives of the association, as well as its priority research areas, is available on request.

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# F

## eedback

### Editor's Note

As promised, this issue of CAFRA News looks at women's creativity. CAFRA's first Creative Writing Seminar having just been completed, writing is the main focus. An exciting mix of writers (from published to still-in-the-closet) of different nationalities and ages came together for two weeks in Trinidad and Tobago, and some of their views on writing appear on pp. 8-11. We also feature a review of Simone Schwartz-Bart's latest play (p.16).

Still on drama - those of us who were involved in organising local legs of the 10-week Sistren tour of the Eastern Caribbean are slowly recovering. The tour was marked by lively workshops, sold-out shows and favourable reviews in the 9 territories visited. Sistren spent 2 weeks in T & T, and on p. 12, Beverly Elliot ('Auntie Bev' in Buss Out) talks to Marilyn Jones about drama as a tool for empowerment.

There are also the regular features, e.g. information on CAFRA projects; and 'CARIFEM Update'. Once again, 'On the Bookshelf' fills several pages, and it includes an update of EPZ publications. We would like to know how useful you find this section, since the number of publications we receive increases all the time.

To allow you to voice your opinions, we've re-introduced the letters page, and hope to receive much more 'feedback' from you to help us chart the course of the newsletter.

The next issue (September) will focus on 'Women in Caribbean Agriculture'.

#### CAFRA News- Unity in Diversity

Once again, CAFRA News was a winner. I could not put it down until I had read it from cover to cover. I particularly enjoyed the review of Elma Francois and the reports on International Women's Day around the Caribbean.

I also liked the obvious influence of the ADA Publishing Course: the way articles were split up into sections with attractively presented sub-headings; the use of different types of visuals - cartoons, photographs, T-shirt designs, illustrations, etc.; and the improved layout generally.

However, I do have a concern. I do NOT, STRONGLY do not agree with having each issue of CAFRA News focus on a particular theme. The great strength of the newsletter has been the variety of its content, and the way in which it keeps us in touch with the many areas of activity, work and information in the movement around the region at any particular time. It is a NETWORKING organ and a NEWSLETTER, and should keep that focus.

Besides, it is boring to read about one issue throughout a whole magazine, and the tendency is to read one part, then put it on a shelf as reference material in case you should need the information later on. Maybe instead we could have a feature on a particular

issue around the region from time to time (as was done with the Free Trade Zones, for example).

The Sistren magazine, which is widely distributed in the region, is already using an issues approach. I would not like to see us develop a 'format' for feminist magazines in the Caribbean, the way left-wing newspapers in the 70s and even now tended to look and read the same. The value of our approach, to use a caption from this issue of CAFRA News, has always been "Unity in Diversity". That is what makes CAFRA News so enjoyable, and I think we should keep it that way.

Frankly, I also disagree that the name CAFRA News should be changed. This magazine is directed at our membership; it is not a general 'popular' feminist magazine. There may well be a need for that, but that is a separate issue.

Wishing you continued success with your great work.

*Joan French, Jamaica*

#### Mailing List Wanted

I was sorry not to make the General Meeting, but greatly enjoyed reading about it in CAFRA News. I especially enjoyed the interview with Audre Lorde and Andaiye.

I was wondering whether CAFRA has any plans to compile a mailing

list of members that all members could get a copy of - maybe it could include a brief biography of each individual so that we can see who has common interests, and also when traveling CAFRA members could get in touch with each other.

Another thing I wanted to mention is that I am a video producer who does documentaries including historical and current events and issues. I would not be able to work on any documentary for at least a year (I am committed to my own work at the moment) but if there are CAFRA members or groups who are interested in video projects (and I think we should be) I would be happy to give any advice to anyone wanting to get a project going.

I am also a linguist, so if there are any women working on language issues, that is another area that we can work on together.

*Esther Figueroa, 2514 Ontario Rd. NW, Washington DC 20009, USA*

**Costa Rican Project**

I have in my hands a copy of CAFRA News, which I find very interesting. We would like to continue receiving it in order to be well informed about the work that you are doing.

I enclose an informative pamphlet on the project we are devel-

oping with Central American universities. We are also doing research on women and will soon be offering a university scholarship programme for women who have not completed their studies.

*Ligia Delgadillo, Ciudad Universitaria "Rodrigo Facio", Costa Rica*

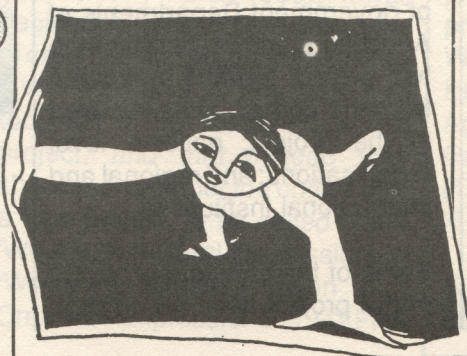
**Tackling Machismo**

Greetings and congratulations on the research work that you have been doing with women.

We are a new group with a strong desire to work with women in order to get them out of their oppression in this region, where 'machismo' rules.

Please send us information, publications and other material you have to spare. We would also appreciate knowing about any training courses or scholarships which could qualify and train us to facilitate our work with women.

*Ubina Rojas Alvarez, CEMUM, Aptdo. 112, Moquegua, Peru*



Isis International

**Pretty good, but ...**

Just received your newsletter. It looks pretty good but ...

- (i) Captions are much too small. Also I think they should be centred or perhaps set left;
- (ii) The type style really hurts my eyes. I think it's probably because it's a bold typeface (not necessarily typed in "bold") and a sans serif. You could try a "Times" or "Bookman". Just a suggestion.
- (iii) This isn't your fault, but the screens used for the photographs have a dot pattern that is just too far apart. Can your printers use a smaller dot pattern screen (120 dots per inch) so that the readers don't have to hold the magazine 2 feet away to avoid eye strain?
- (iv) I love the use of graphics in the magazine but I would be a little conservative in distributing them throughout the magazine.
- (v) Having a little trouble with the block letters around the first character in the heading. Or maybe it's the rest of the heading. I don't know what it is but something doesn't look right.
- (vi) Title could be just CAFRA. And I preferred the old logo.
- (vii) Covers are great.
- (viii) Stories are pretty good too.

I hope I haven't been too rough. Enclosed is our latest Koudmen. Rip it to shreds!

*Robert Andre, Small Projects' Assistance Team, Dominica.*

# S haring the findings

## projects update

The WICA meeting to present the | the importance of examining the



*The St. Vincent & The Grenadines Booklet*

findings of the 'Women in Caribbean Agriculture' project to the region and to invite participation in the follow-up phase was held on 24-25 April at the Dover Convention Centre, Barbados.

This meeting forms part of the dissemination phase of the project, and follows on the heels of the national level workshops and consultations held last year in the 2 project countries, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the Commonwealth of Dominica.

It focussed on the following specific issues, which were felt to be central to the methodology, findings and recommendations of the project:

- (i) The importance of treating women as a specific constituency, i.e. as the target group for the WICA research/action project;
- (ii)

situation of women both at the home base (i.e. their reproductive work) as well as in the field (i.e. their 'productive' work); (iii) the impact of women's reproductive work on their participation in organisations, access

to credit, and so on; (iv) the impact of patriarchy on women's access to land; and (v) the importance of women's agricultural production to the nation.

The participants included CAFRA project personnel; research team members; representatives of the facilitating agencies (Committee for the Development of Women and Small Projects' Assistance Team); representatives of the back-up teams; representatives of government Departments of Agriculture and Statistics of the two project territories; women from the communities involved in the project; national level organisations; and regional and international institutions.

Some of the concrete products of the project were on display.

These included the country reports of the findings and the overall report (available from the CAFRA office), a videotape produced by each research team; and popular education booklets in comic format.

The report of the meeting will be available shortly. A fuller presentation of the process, main findings and recommendations will be made in the September issue of *CAFRA News*, the focus of which is 'Women in Caribbean Agriculture'.



*Two community women participate in the meeting.*

# D

## eveloping a feminist literature

CAFRA hosted its first Creative Writing Seminar at the Pax Guest House, Mount St. Benedict, Trinidad and Tobago from May 15-25, 1989. Workshops were conducted in poetry, the short story and oral history.

Participants came from St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominica, Curacao, Guyana, Belize, Jamaica, Suriname, Puerto Rico and Trinidad and Tobago, and we were fortunate to have as resource persons, published and internationally recognised authors - Audre Lorde, Makeda Silvera and Ramabai Espinet.

The secluded guest house, set in the Northern Range and overlooking the Caroni plain, provided an ideal setting for the women writers. The days were divided into several sessions, with the writers' craft as well as practical problems of publishing being discussed. Periods for solitary writing were followed by groups sessions for criticism.

During the two-week long seminar, we were also able to arrange three public events, where participants and resource persons read from their work, published and unpublished. Two of these readings were for secondary schools. Those students who embraced the invitation to read from their own work were all girls, perhaps underscoring one of the aims of

the seminar, which was to promote the development of a feminist literature in the Caribbean.



On left Jacqui Alexander (USA) and Helen Kerk (Suriname)

### WOW Meetings

Two meetings were also held (on Saturday 20 and Tuesday 23 May) to discuss the 'Words of Women' project (see *CAFRA News* Vol. 3 no. 1, March 1989). It was decided that the number and range of on-going and proposed activities involving women's creativity was too vast to be contained in this project, and that instead they should come under the umbrella of a new project, to be called either 'Women's Cultural Expression' or 'Women's Documentation and Creative Expression'. CAFRA

would retain control over and seek funding for this project, which would include the follow-up to the publication of *Creation Fire*.

This follow-up would include national launchings, to be organised by participants with a local team made up of women's organisations, women who submitted poems to the anthology, and so on.

The meetings also recommended that CAFRA be mandated to investigate a regional distribution system, in collaboration with participants; and that CAFRA undertake to compile a writers' handbook and seek information from publishers about translation.

It was agreed that CAFRA should lobby at the regional and national level to have women's writing introduced on book lists at secondary and tertiary level, and that *CAFRA News* be distributed to schools and Ministries of Education throughout the region.

Some of the on-going or proposed projects discussed by those present were 'Women Sugar Workers' (Guyana), 'Women as Healers' (Suriname), 'Women in Agriculture' (St. Vincent and the Grenadines), 'Women's Rituals' (Trinidad and Tobago), and 'Belizean Heroines' (Belize).

Sybil Seaforth, Seminar Co-coordinator

### RECLAIMING A POEM

A personal view of the seminar  
by *Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen*

I participated in Audre Lorde's poetry workshops during the first week of the Creative Writing Seminar. The early mornings were given to 'Shoptalk', when participants of all genres being offered gathered to talk (and sometimes argue) about issues of concern to women writers. These included 'Making time to write'; 'What is art? The relationship between the artist and society, and How do we interact with our communities?'; 'Writing as a form of resistance'; 'The process of publishing - How do you know when your work is ready? Who to publish with, Copyright, Royalties'.

Later we broke into workgroups, and those of us writing poetry explored, through our muse

Audre, a number of concepts, some of them inspiringly new and even revolutionary, such as 'The nature of the poem'; 'Poetry as a subversive use of language'; 'Poetry as a way of life'; 'Identity as a step to women's empowerment'; 'What poetry is

A poem functions by creating or changing feeling. It is a weapon, a subversive agent for change forged out of language. It is its rare ability to create or change feeling that makes it subversive. It is not a thought, not an idea.



*Participants in the Creative Writing Seminar*  
not'; 'The relationship between the poem and the experience'; and 'Who can't write poetry?'.

**Audre Lorde's Vision**

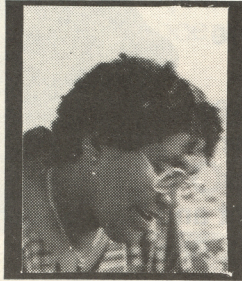
Lay these insights against one another, and what emerges? Audre Lorde's vision of the woman poet and her poetry ...

The question to ask yourself deeply is, "What do I want my reader to feel when she/he reads the poem? Poetry uses experience to create something. But the poem is not life; it is a thing, a work of art. It has a function. You are the poet, a person. You create

the poem and decide what its function is to be. The poem uses experience to tell a piece of truth as you, the poet, perceive it. That is how change begins. Truth becomes irresistible once made into feelings. Once defined as a poem, we have cut its umbilical cord ...

## projects update

And so it went. 'Shoptalk'. Intense sessions to come to grips with why we were writing and how we could sharpen our craft. The

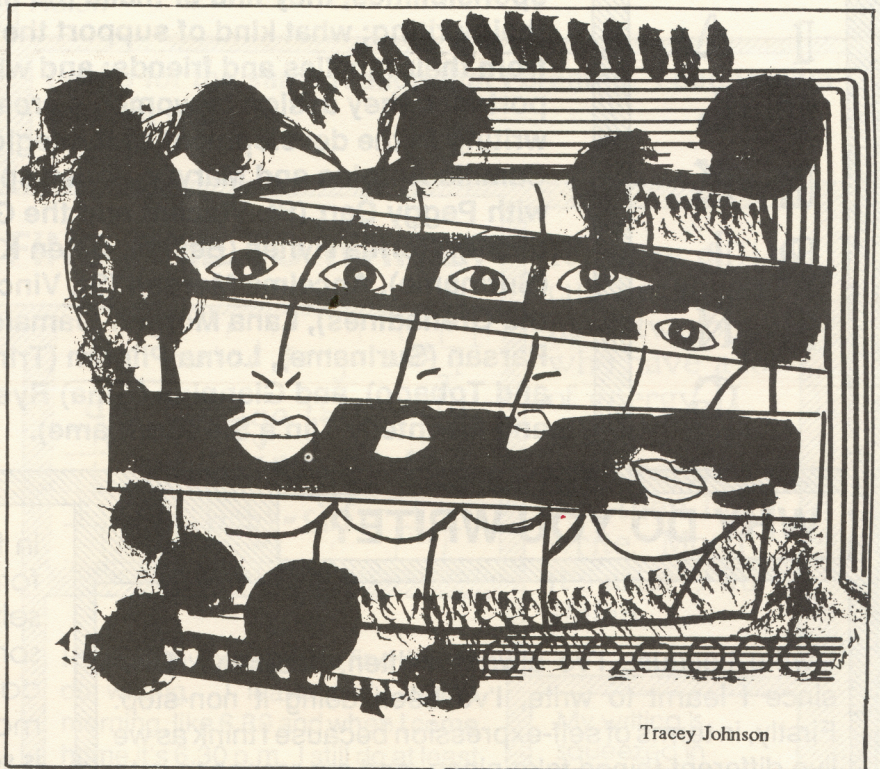


periods of actual writing (Audre: "Write a poem about the feelings you had last Sunday at 4.00 p.m."). Communal sessions to read our work out loud and hear each other's responses - one's first reaction is terror and paralysis, later sisterhood and increased confidence - unleash critical and creative energies. Then individual consultations with Audre who, with a combination of profound honesty and sensitivity, discusses your poems.

At the end of four days, I could reclaim as mine a poem which a month ago I did not have the courage to place my name against.

### URGENT

During the Creative Writing Seminar, a folder containing Ancelma Morgan's short stories was lost. If anyone has found it among her things, please return it right away to the CAFRA office.



Tracey Johnson

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During the Creative Writing Seminar, **CAFRA News** asked several of the writers present some questions about their work - why they write; how, as women with all our myriad responsibilities, they find or make the time for their writing; what kind of support they get from their families and friends; and what importance they assign to women's creative writing in the development of the region. Camille Antoine and Marilyn Jones spoke with Peggy Carr (St. Vincent and the Grenadines), Norma Hynes (Belize), Helen Kerk (Suriname), Ancelma Morgan (St. Vincent and the Grenadines), Lana Morgan (Jamaica), Sita Parsan (Suriname), Lorna Pilgrim (Trinidad and Tobago), and Giannina (Gina) Rysdyk and Mechtelly Tjin a Sie (Suriname).



### WHY DO YOU WRITE?

I write because I've always written, basically. Ever since I learnt to write, I've been doing it non-stop. Firstly, in terms of self-expression because I think as we live different things take place, and my response is to grab a piece of paper and write. Secondly, not just for me but for other people; I write for women mostly  
*Leone*

In the first place, it's a form of expressing myself and when I write something, it means I can't keep it in any more. Another reason is sometimes I observe things that I think will make a nice story. I have no real discipline, so whenever something occurs, or something really bothers me, then I write.  
*Gina*

I feel that I am saturated with a lot of information that many people don't know. The majority of people out there don't know what I have in my head and therefore, in order for me to express it and for other people to understand how I feel about something and what can be done about a situation, I decide to put those ideas I have in my head on

paper. During the Women in Caribbean Agriculture project, we gathered a lot of information on social issues that affect the lives of women. CAFRA suggested that, seeing I had collected most of this information, I should take up documenting it and put it together so that it could go back to the people themselves.  
*Ancelma*



There are certain messages I would like to convey to people, burning things inside of me that I can really express best by poems  
*Lana*

I get the feeling that I have so, so much to say. I think the things I have to say are so important that I don't want them to get lost. I put them on paper in such a way that people feel the urge to read them.

*Helen*

**I write for the same reason that I breathe. I cannot live and not write.**

*Peggy*

## HOW DO YOU FIND TIME TO WRITE?

Sometimes I don't have the time to write even one day within a week. What I do is wait until everyone has gone to bed, when it's very quiet; or send my children to their various grandmothers so that I have time to myself.

*Anselma*

I have plenty of time, because at the moment I'm a housewife. But the stupid thing is that when you have plenty of time, you cannot schedule it. Plenty of time is wasted. I notice that I have to be more disciplined.

*Sita*

I live by myself, so I have time. Then, anytime the thought, the burning comes, I would go and put it down on paper wherever I am.

*Lana*

I wanted to go out  
and change the world  
but I couldn't find  
a baby-sitter

I make it my business to find time to do writing. I leave early in the morning, like 6.30 and when I come home it's 6.30 p.m. I still do at least 15 minutes of writing before I go to sleep. Every day. Sunday is better because I have more time to work.

*Norma*

I write mostly at night time or early in the morning, in the quiet hours when everybody else in the house is asleep.

*Peggy*

Sometimes I am too busy. A lot of people knock on my door for help, and I cannot say no, so my time becomes too short to do things for myself. But I found a way. After my office work, I come home and do my housework and then I free myself every afternoon. The children say, "Oh, Grandma is asleep" - they know it so well - they say, "You have to come back after 5 o'clock."

*Mechtelly*

It's very difficult because I have two boys who have a lot of energy. I wait till they are sleeping, and then I can write. Mostly it's after 9.00.

*Helen*

My writing is squeezed in somewhere along the line. I have activities in the community; every week I have several things going. I have no definite time to write; I can't operate that way.

*Lorna*

## WHAT SORT OF SUPPORT DO YOU GET FOR YOUR WRITING FROM YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS?



Helen Kerk

Well, my family doesn't have much interest in writing. So, as far as support goes, I don't get much from them. Then I don't really have much time to see my friends, except maybe on Saturdays.

*Norma*

My husband specially is the critic, and mostly he has some good comments and I have good support from him. I have some friends who are writers and they encourage me a lot. When I write something, they also criticize it in a very honest way.

*Helen*

Sometimes I find my fellow can be a bit unreasonable. When he wants to create space, he makes sure that he makes that space and that nobody gets in it. But when he needs me, I must be there whether I'm writing or not. Sometimes it does create a problem, because

you may be thinking about something and you have to try and get that down on paper before you lose that trend of thought, and somebody trying to distract you sometimes puts you off. You have to go and start all over again.

*Anon.*

There was a period in my life when there was very little support for anything at all, and that included my writing. It was something that I kept to myself and shared with only one person. It was very difficult to work under those circumstances. Now my relatives and friends are very supportive. They all encourage me and look forward to reading what I write.

*Peggy*

I must say my parents have been very supportive of me - my father died recently - and even my fella to some extent. My friends, who are very few, have encouraged me a lot also, particularly Joan French. She is the one who insisted that I have these abilities and that I must put them to work, and I really have to say a special thanks to her.

*Anelma*

I get a lot of support. My mother gives me a lot of support. My whole family, actually, are constantly asking for things to read and giving me advice. I send my father a lot of my stuff and he sends back literary criticism. He gives it to other people who are writers as well and they send back their comments.

*Leone*

## HOW DO YOU SEE CREATIVE WRITING PLAYING A PART IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR COUNTRY AND/OR THE REGION?

Since I started to write, I focus my writings on women. And I think that they can identify with stories of mine, which can make women conscious of things that are going on, not only at the level of their family but also at the level of the whole society. My things also have the objective of encouraging them to take part in what's going on in society. I think it's a very good way to open people's eyes.

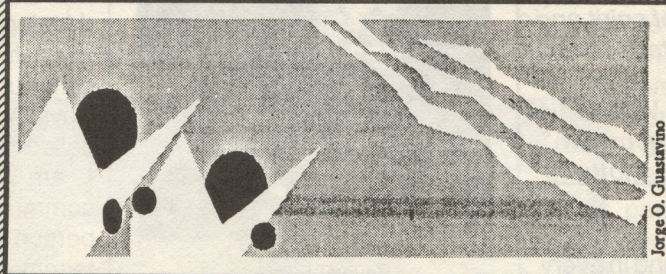
*Helen*

If you want people to do things, you have to make them interested. If you want people to change, or to improve themselves, or even just to respond to



any kind of social change, you have to get them in a way that will draw them. If you write a short story or a poem, you can touch people much more than perhaps talking at them.

*Leone*



*Jorge O. Guastavino*

Progressive writings from the 70s have really done a lot to lift the consciousness of people like myself. Long ago, I wouldn't have wanted to identify with any sort of feminist movement because of ignorance. My perception of feminism was basically the North American model where you burn the bra and that sort of thing. Now I know feminism is not what I perceived in the past. Because there have been a number of women coming forward and writing, you find that a lot of people are developing an interest. I see myself being part of that.

*Ancelma*

Long ago, we had a little group of writers, mainly men, but now we see women's growth. We need writing if we are to make a change. We need for our children to read and find themselves in the book. When you put things in a book, thousands read it. It is very effective.

*Mechtelly*

I personally feel that what affects one part of the region affects us all, because the sea between our islands is not a barrier but a link. Therefore, if we're making progress in one area, that progress should spread the length and breadth of the Caribbean. Creative writing, as Audre (Lorde) would say, is the most subversive weapon for change. It reaches out to people and it gets them in that place where true change happens, which is deep down inside. That is what I am working for and what I think other women in the region are working for.

*Peggy*

# B

## ringing back the warrior

sistren

Marylin Jones talks with  
Beverly Elliot of Sistren

*"The absence of models, in literature as in life, to say nothing of painting, is an occupational hazard for the artist, simply because models in art, in behaviour, in growth of spirit and intellect - even if rejected - enrich and enlarge one's view of existence ..."* (Alice Walker in *"Saving the life that is your own", In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*).

There is a Fletcher's Land in every Caribbean island - a squatters' settlement in the town, but not of the town, where young boys hang out at street corners doing nothing in particular, because there is nothing to do really; where older men assume an invisibility that leaves their children fatherless; where young girls too soon become women and mothers, destined to become - like their own mothers - neglected.

Ask someone in a suburban neighbourhood not far away about Fletcher's Land in Kingston, Jamaica, and they say they've never been there, or maybe never heard of it. Check the official records, and you'll find dust-covered plans for development and resettlement.

Places like Fletcher's Land bear relevance only to those who live there and to those with an eye for real estate - developers for whom

malls and town-houses would not only be less unsightly but more profitable.



Beverly Elliot

"I come from Fletcher's Lane," says Beverly Elliot, as we chat about her role in the Sistren production, *Buss Out*, which has been touring the Caribbean. "If you should leave here now and go there, all you have to ask for is Auntie Bev and the littlest of babies in the community can carry you where I am."

She is a leader in her community and in places like Fletcher's Land this means the continuation of the West Indian tradition where elder women assume responsibility for everybody's child going to school, keeping out of trouble and being sure of their daily bread.

It's a role she also assumes on stage in *Buss Out*, and now, after a dozen or so years with Sistren, she understands its value as a

sustaining force for people who would otherwise have no helping hand.

*Buss Out* is an improvisational Sistren production, which tells the story of a tenement settlement earmarked for the bulldozer by developers who wish to put up town-houses, and of the community's resistance to this. Says Auntie Bev, as she is also called in the production, "On stage I am living a reality of my community. On stage, I am the person whom everyone in that tenement settlement is looking to. They are looking to me to make sure the landlord does not get them off the premises ... they are looking to me to make sure that if they fight back to stay on the premises, I'll be there with them wherever they end up - in jail, wherever."

She is the warrior, she says.

On and off stage, Auntie Bev has a commanding presence. As she speaks, she focuses directly, looking you in the eye without the shiftiness of guilt. She has exploited no one. She has learnt from her work with Sistren that the victim must feel no guilt.

*Buss Out* addresses the issue of powerlessness by presenting the obvious option: fight back. We discuss this further. "I was just simply saying that, of course, people need to stand up to their own responsibility in terms of how

## sistren

you grow your children, why you get children, whatever; people need to decide how they are going to go through all those phases of life before they attempt certain things. At the same time, if the society at large makes plans for each individual in society, we wouldn't end up with these kinds of problems, problems like housing ... this society, nobody cares about you. You can't even get a proper job. You have to have a lot of things behind your name ... in other words, if you are a domestic helper, you are valuable to society; if you are a mother, you are vital to the society - you're growing children - so the society at large needs to recognise that. You don't have the paper and the degree behind your name, but you are serving society."

This voice from the tenement settlement, with its edge of defiance and commitment to struggle, is an often overlooked phenomenon of the West Indies, forgotten by many textbook scholars who attribute all change to those of the middle classes, denying the memory of struggles against enslavement, struggles for the

franchise and struggles for the birth of the labour movement, all characterised by the presence and activism of women from that part of the society that every now and then would 'buss out' of the imprisonment of silence imposed on them.

This is the central theme of



*Sistren in performance*

Sistren's production, as it confronts its audience with dialectics on class, race and gender.

"Until the society realises that," says Beverly, "we are going to have a problem, and women like me, we are going to speak out. We decide to make trouble for the society if they don't do something about it."

In real life and on stage, I say? "Yes," says Auntie Bev. "In real life and on stage."

And how does the society respond, I ask.

"I get a lot of fight, especially from the men. They say we are lesbians, we are trouble-makers, we want to take over ... They say dem is communist, dem is PNP, dem is JLP. As you open your mouth and talk about something that affects women, is problem. Then you get me real mad, and I am not a person who will just shut up. And if I get a chance to say it on stage, then it is much more powerful. It is a continuation of tradition. Look at Nanny! Nanny is an example." She is speaking, of course, of Nanny the Maroon, who led several slave revolts and has now become legend.

*Buss Out* was performed by Sistren on its Caribbean tour, with a cast of ten. It was directed by Earl Warner. The script was based on a composite of life stories of several women from working class communities and from the Sistren group. Auntie Bev's story is just one part of a whole picture that deals with power, subordination, exploitation and struggle.

*Marilyn Jones is a freelance journalist.*

# L ong distance love affair

## Review of Simone Schwarz-Bart, Ton Beau Capitaine, by Roseanne Brunton

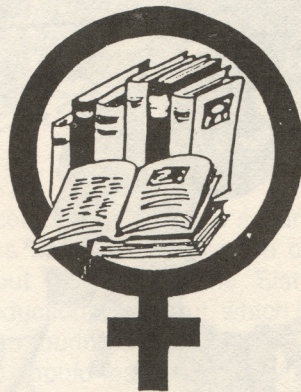
As West Indians, we are all familiar with the phenomenon of couples who must separate because of economic conditions; one partner emigrates to England, France or the United States in search of employment while the other stays at home. Letters, phone calls, gifts of personal items and of money sustain the relationship while the couple waits for the opportunity to be reunited. Either the emigrant must earn enough money to return home and make a new start, or s/he must pave the way for the partner left behind to emigrate as well. In either case, the couple shares one dream; a dream which is put under pressure by the traumas inherent in separation; a dream which sometimes runs aground, leaving both stranded on separate islands of loss and loneliness. Such is the theme of Simone Schwarz-Bart's Ton Beau Capitaine

Even though she is widely recognised as one of the leading black women writers in the world today, Schwarz-Bart, a francophone woman whose writing focuses on the Caribbean, in particular Guadeloupe, remains unfamiliar to many of us. Ton Beau Capitaine is her fourth published work, a play in one act and four scenes that was created

in Guadeloupe at the third Caribbean Theatre Festival, April 28, 1987.

### Previous Works

Simone was born in Charente-Maritime (France) in 1938 but has lived in Guadeloupe since the age of 3. She went to study in France in the 1950s where she met and married Andre Schwarz-Bart, a



Cayenne

Jewish writer who was finishing his first novel, The Last of the Just (1959). The couple jointly produced Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes (untranslated) in 1967. Literature on this novel describes it as a diary of nineteen days in the life of a Martinican woman, Marie, who is spending her last days in an institution for the aged in Paris. During hallucinatory states of consciousness, she converses with her grandmother, Man Louise, and becomes nostalgic for a traditional Caribbean dish of pork and green bananas. Man Louise is herself the grand-

daughter of Solitude, the mythical/historical heroine of La Mulatresse Solitude (1972), translated as A Woman Named Solitude. The official author of Solitude is Andre, although it is obvious that it could not have been written without Simone's help. Solitude recreates the life of a female maroon leader who led runaways in rebellions and was eventually imprisoned by the French and executed the day after her baby was born.

The first text published by Simone alone is Pluie et vent sur Telume Miracle (1972), translated as The Bridge of Beyond. Pluie et vent is a fictional biography, told from the perspective of an old Guadeloupean woman, Telumee, who looks back on her life of poverty and strife and recalls how she learnt to cultivate personal strength. The Simone's TiJean L'Horizon (translated as Between Two Worlds) was published in 1979. It sets itself up as a Caribbean epic, giving us a male maroon ancestor, Wademba, and his grandson/son, TiJean, the trickster-hero who takes a surreal trip to Africa, France and back to Guadeloupe, in the quest for self-identity.

### Contemporary Challenges

So far, the Schwarz-Barts' preoccupations seem to have been with the Franco-Caribbean heritage and its links with the African past, but Simone's Ton Beau Capitaine concerns itself

with the challenges of contemporary West Indians. It is a stunning piece of drama that requires a male actor who can command the stage alone, and an expressive female voice that can communicate her presence through a tape recorder. The setting is simple: the sparsely furnished interior of a West Indian hut. Caribbean songs, music and dances are very important for they act as supplementary language for the character, used to convey intense emotional states.

**Problems of separation**

As the play opens, we meet Wilnor Baptiste, a Haitian agricultural worker now in Guadeloupe. He is about to listen to a tape from his wife, Marie-Ange, sent from Miami. Most of the first scene is dedicated to listening to her voice on the tape as she expresses her love for Wilnor, and her difficulty in dealing with the separation from him. She likens herself to a boat; he could be her captain and together they could sail far away: "A l'autre bout du monde, peut-etre, ou les gens vous regardent pas comme des moins que rien, des cocos secs. Wilnor, y-a-t-il donc pas un pays sur la terre ou nous Haiti on peut travailler, envoyer quelque argent chez soi, de temps en temps, sans se transformer en courant d'air?" ("To the other end of the world, perhaps, where people don't look at you like you're nothing, a couple of coconut stumps. Wilner, there must be a place on earth where

we Haiti people can work, send some money back home from time to time, without turning ourselves into wisps of air"). She sings "Moin n' a i m e danser, moin n' a i m e chanter" ("I w a n n a dance, I wannasing") - a song which becomes associated with her moods: gay and lively in the first scene, becoming defiant at times, and then tortured and agonised as the play progresses.

Wilnor too has his own songs, and in his case it is possible to add dances. As he hears of Marie-Ange's betrayal, indeed she has become pregnant by his friend, Wilnor stumbles/dances to the high, quavering sound of a bamboo flute. Then the music changes to that of the Lerosé (a more violent mode) as drum beats join in, and then a whole orchestra with a bass voice interweaving "Mouje, mouje, e, o". But Wilnor too has betrayed Marie-Ange, not with women but by secretly saving more than the agreed sum. Now he angrily burns the banknotes, denouncing the

search for the almighty dollar that has kept them apart and seems to destroy them. Overcome by emotions - love, hurt, frustration, bewilderment - Wilnor drinks deeply into his bottle of rum and breaks into an old creole quadrille, assuming all the roles, changing the words to hurl obscenities into the tape recorder.



Cayenne

**"I sit in a tub of cold water"**

Having exorcised his feelings, he is ready to tell his own suffering; it becomes sadly funny as he explains his own strategies to control his sexual urges:

"Tous les soirs que Dieu fait, je me prends des bains de siege froids et parfois meme ca m'arrive en plein jour, je remplis ma bassine et je m'assieds dedans... Pour dormir, je me mets des enveloppements entre les cuisses, et je tiens une bassine d'eau prete ... Parfois, tu sais, etendu dans le noir, comme ca (il ecarte les bras), j'ai l'impression que ca gonfle, ca me fait des ballons entrer les cuisses, ca me fait comme si j'allais m'envoler."

# Railroad to freedom

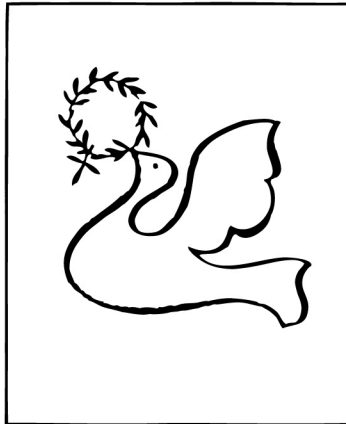
"Every evening that God sends, I sit in a tub of cold water, sometimes even in the middle of the day, I fill my tub and I sit in it... For sleeping, I wrap cloths between my thighs, and I always keep a tub of water ready ... Sometimes, you know, stretched out in the dark like that (he spreads his arms) I have the impression that I am swollen down there, that I have balloons between my thighs, it feels like I am going to fly away."

## Triumphant Love Relationship

By this time, Marie-Ange, as well as the audience, assumes that Wilnor will break off the relationship. However, in an amazing turn-about, claiming that he has received vision from the gods, he records a calm, loving message - that she must take care of herself and the baby, and that he wants to remain "ton beau capitaine" (your handsome captain). It is perhaps the most moving scene in the play, expressing a sensitivity that we long to see in West Indian males.

Not overtly feminist, this is one of the few West Indian literary texts that portray a triumphant love relationship between male and female. Not obviously political, it discusses the plight of West Indians as regards their relationship with the developed world. Ton Beau Capitaine has been translated into English by Roseanne Brunton and Christine

Makward, and will soon appear in Makward and Miller, Ten Women's Voices from French Drama: A Critical Anthology.



## Second Language Exchange

In keeping with our aim to break down language barriers in the region, CAFRA is offering Second Language Exchanges to women who are studying a second language, and who would like the opportunity to improve their skills by living and working among native speakers.

If you are interested, apply now to CAFRA's Second Language Exchange Programme, and spend up to 3 months working with a women's group, attending classes and living with a family.

Send full details of language required, level of ability, qualifications, etc. to the CAFRA office by **31 August, 1989** for this year's programme. We also want to hear from groups willing to host candidates.

## Review of Marlene Nourbese Philip's Harriet's Daughter (Heinemann Caribbean Writers Series, 1988) by Honor Ford-Smith

Harriet's Daughter is the kind of book that I wish had been around when I was about thirteen and sick and tired of Mills and Boon, the Famous Five and Nancy Drew. It's a book for and about young, black and Caribbean feminists! Harriet's Daughter, Marlene Nourbese Philip's first novel, makes a welcome addition to the range of themes covered by Caribbean novels dealing with childhood and adolescence. The book is a straightforward, humorous account of one young woman's determination to lead a creative and exciting life and her refusal to be a victim of racism, sexism, ageism and the fall-out from migration. It is the story of the adventures she has when she puts this principle into practice.

## Friend from Tobago

Margaret (a.k.a., and henceforth referred to as, Harriet) is determined to lead a brave and imaginative life in spite of the restrictions of G.W.I.D. (Good West Indian Discipline) imposed by a hypocritical, petty-bourgeois father obsessed with the importance of discipline and respectable behaviour to what he calls 'Coloured People'. Harriet's circumstances are not improved

by her nervous and timid mother's inability to stand up for her own or her daughter's rights. In the process, Harriet meets and makes friends with Tobagonian Zulma, who teaches her some of the skills she has - like how to speak Tobago talk, how to pluck chicken and "cuss like a real artist". The friendship between these two young women stimulates Harriet both to invent the underground railroad game, and to build her own metaphorical underground



railroad to freedom - a road that forces her to confront the oppressive circumstances of her adolescence and brings about several other unexpected changes in her family.

The novel works because it weaves together ideas about identity, authority, childhood, class and colour with a fast-paced plot and clear characterisation. Philip captures the commonsense and frank sense of justice which adolescents often have. She paints a picture of a young woman

who is not afraid to be a leader and to speak her mind. She sustains this and uses it to colour what the whole novel describes, since the story is told by Harriet, from her point of view. Yet Harriet

is no dogooding heroine as we see her somewhat petty and intolerant side too, a side that makes her all the more believable in the face of the difficulties she lives with.

Reflecting Issues

The novel is probably one of the first to reflect certain issues which have become visible because of the space opened by the political discourse among women of colour. One of these is Harriet's insecurities about her sexuality and her interest in her own body. While this is not developed by Philip, the book offers a glimpse at the kinds of pressures on adolescent girls and the lack of open discussion of alternatives to the 'Denise Cosby' model. The book also touches on the complexity of the Caribbean

family, and takes a look at the authoritarian petit-bourgeois father as a product of colonial education and the effect of this kind of man on the rearing of his children. It takes a swipe at the myth of the "strong-black-woman", both by recounting the inner life of the strong heroine and juxtaposing her with her mother's character. The book links together Afro-American experiences with the experiences of Black Canadians and Caribbean people. It does this cleverly through the metaphor of the underground railroad game, but it also does it by describing the intricacies of migration

There are a few difficulties with the plot, in particular its conveniences and coincidences. There is the way the turning point hinges on coincidence, for instance, and the convenient assistance of Mrs Billings, the kind-hearted neighbour. There's the sudden development of the mother. O that life could be as kind to all of us in our hour of need.

These are small difficulties, though, in a novel that is fun and makes good reading for youth and the people interested in them.

*Founding Artistic Director of Sistren Theatre Collective, Honor Ford-Smith is currently on a fellowship at the Mary Ingraham Bunting Institute of Radcliffe College in Boston and is working on a novel.*

# M

## Meetings, etc.

### October-December 1989

5th International Training Programme on Rural Industries Promotion in Developing Economies (RIPDE-V), October 30-December 16, 1989 at the National Institute of Rural Development, Rajendranaagar, Hyderabad 500 030, India. A 7-week training programme, the objectives of which include: sharing the Indian experience in the field of small and rural industry development and promotion; developing analytical skills for identifying industrial opportunities and making project analysis; and enabling participants to study and understand the nature and functioning of support systems in credit, market, raw materials, technology, management, etc. and the institutional infrastructure for training, etc. Interested persons may contact the High Commission/Embassy of India accredited to their country for details of fellowship awards available through the Government of India.

### June 1990

Second National Conference on Black Women's Health

Issues, June 25-30, 1990, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. The theme of this conference will be "Empowerment through Wellness". For information, contact the National Black Women's Health Project Conference, 1237 Gordon Street, S.W., Atlanta, Georgia, USA (Tel.: 404-753-0916).



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# N

## ews

### News

### News

### SECRETARIAT MOVEMENTS

Two members of CAFRA's Secretariat have recently left Trinidad and Tobago. Gaiety Pargass is spending some time in England, while Pat Mohammed has gone to do her PhD at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, The Netherlands. Her thesis will be on the social history of Indians in Trinidad.

### BANK CLOSED

Posting out of the March issue of CAFRA News was delayed due to the one month closure (by the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago) of Workers' Bank Ltd., where CAFRA has its account. The closure, officially said to be because the bank had too large a portfolio of unsecured loans, was widely interpreted as an attack on the unions, many of whom bank there. The bank has since reopened 'under new management'.

# WHEN HE WENT AWAY

I packed his cases full of  
cotton shirts  
and thick warm nights  
while he carefully  
arranged his promises  
in the windows of our future

Reverently I touched that morning  
when he left  
his farewell trailing  
from a plane  
and blending with  
the chaste white fingers of  
cooksmoke  
which stole upward  
through the dew to  
wipe the smudges from the sky

How cheerfully our love moved out  
to live inside  
a cold blue envelope  
and like an orphaned street-wise  
child  
slept easily  
between two thin indifferent  
lines

Like sheathed claws  
atop a taut silk sheet  
his first lies probed  
the boundaries  
of my innocence  
then  
artfully his words  
rehearsed to  
a finer edge  
until  
"winter"  
"riots"  
"strikes"  
and  
"Government"  
flicked smoothly from his pen  
to quiver  
in my hopes

Carelessly he tried to patch  
my still-hot pain  
with random ten pound notes  
and pictures

of some grey defiant  
stranger

My letters drifted into  
slow soliloquy  
and reassured themselves  
like Job

A velvet tongue of  
tired midnight breeze  
licked the moisture from  
my cheeks  
then shook an old newsheet  
awake  
snuggled underneath  
and belched the flavour of

too many lonely women  
on its breath

Today I forgot to  
tremble  
to the rhythm  
of the postman's  
bell.

*Peggy Carr is from St.  
Vincent and the Grenadines.  
This poem is taken from her  
book, Echoes from a Lonely  
Nightwatch, and was judged  
second in the BBC's Carib-  
bean poetry competition in  
1986.*

## AUGUST 25, 1986

*by giannina elena rysdyk*

God rest your soul, my dear  
Goodbye  
You could have been  
my brother, lover, friend.  
But you were a soldier  
And soldiers ...  
they are bound to die.

Woman  
Just shed your tears  
I too, would cry  
But then  
didn't you know  
Your husband was a soldier  
You became a widow long ago  
That day you saw him  
Clad in green.

*Giannina Rysdyk lives in Suriname, and  
writes poetry and short stories.*

# Death of a Caribbean woman

## Arah Hector, 1945-1989

CAFRA members were shocked and saddened to learn of the brutal murder of Arah Hector at the end of May.

The newspapers restricted themselves to describing Arah as the 'wife of Tim Hector' of the Antigua-Caribbean Liberation Movement. But although she certainly was that - supporting Tim in his struggles to expose corruption in Antigua and suffering with him through the ensuing official persecution - she was also much more.

She was a major force in the formation of the Antigua Women's Movement, and an executive member of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). She was the Co-ordinator since its formation of the Women for Caribbean Liberation (WCL), a network of women and women's organisations that came out of a regional meeting that she organised in Antigua in October 1984. Added to this, she ran a small business and brought up three sons. In a tribute to Arah in the Barbados Nation on Sunday 3 June, Merle Hodge noted that "In her death, as in her life, she

### IN ANTIGUA Dedicated to the memory of Arah Hector, May 1989

In Antigua  
Planes in battle fatigues  
Take off and land  
Or lie waiting  
On the tarmac

No passengers alight  
Still they hover  
Black and green  
Warbirds  
Ready to tear  
The dry land  
Brown and green

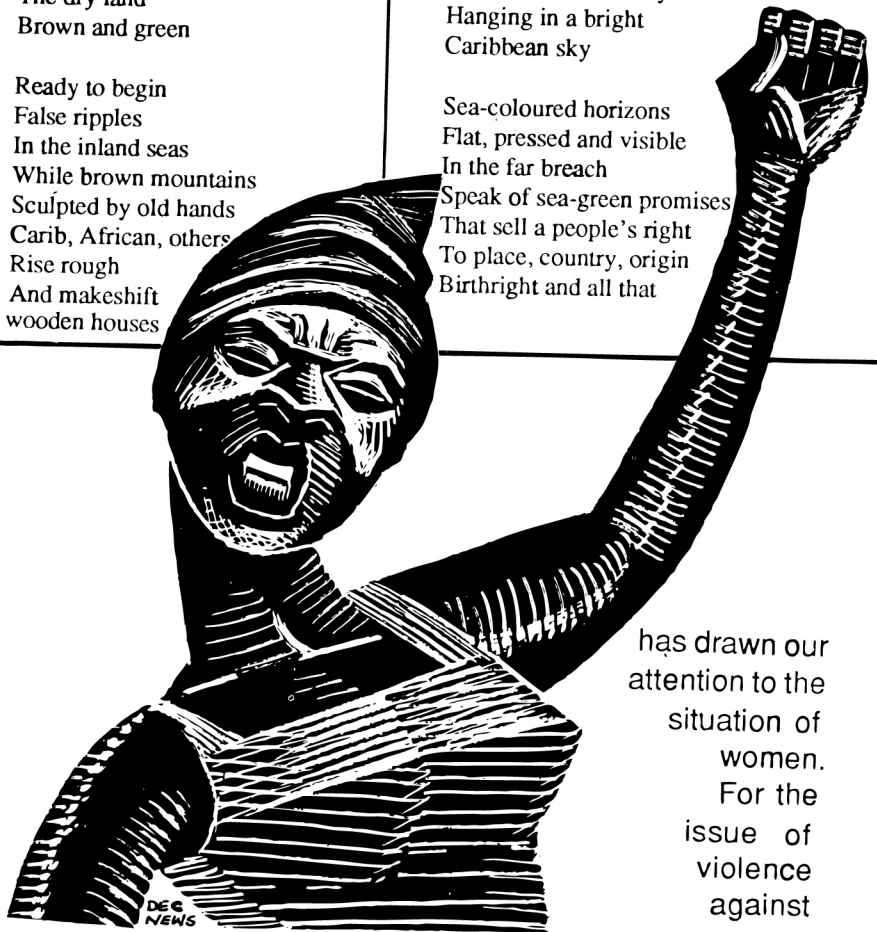
Ready to begin  
False ripples  
In the inland seas  
While brown mountains  
Sculpted by old hands  
Carib, African, others  
Rise rough  
And makeshift  
wooden houses

Sit on ledges  
In the middle of nowhere

So battle fatigues circle  
In the dry, dry air  
The white Caribbean light  
Sparing no mercy, no shade

As white tourists  
Women mostly  
Walk with dark lengths of male  
And ebony and sable  
They walk  
Watched and protected  
By grey, black and green  
Battledressed security  
Hanging in a bright  
Caribbean sky

Sea-coloured horizons  
Flat, pressed and visible  
In the far breach  
Speak of sea-green promises  
That sell a people's right  
To place, country, origin  
Birthright and all that



has drawn our attention to the situation of women. For the issue of violence against

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# O n the bookshelf

The sea a song  
From memory's bitter chain  
The sea where all tears drown  
Weeping loudly  
Through the eyes  
Of black mermaids  
The sea where battle-charged  
Submarines plough  
Wet minefields lie in wait

A satellite curves just  
Beyond that round brown hill  
And those army-green  
Birds on the wing  
Wring promises blue  
As blood, out of stone,  
Out of aging sun-dried eyes,  
There they wait  
Grey birds of prey  
Plucking the green  
The black, the aquamarine  
The weeping eyes  
Of the Antilles.

*by Ramabai Espinet*

women, the particular forms of violence which women face because they are women has been dramatically highlighted by this crime.

"It is for us now to wring good out of evil, progress out of destruction," she concludes. "Arah's struggles will not be abandoned by those of us who have had the privilege of going this part of the road with her."

## PERIODICALS

The CAFRA office is now receiving many periodicals on a regular basis. We will be listing these in the next issue of the newsletter, and have limited ourselves this time to periodicals we recently received for the first time, and those with articles of particular interest to Caribbean women.

Association of Women's Organisations in Jamaica 1.1 (March 1989). AWOJA, c/o The Women's Centre, 42 Trafalgar Rd., Kingston 10, Jamaica

Caribbean Affairs 2.1 (Jan-March 1989). Trinidad Express Newspapers Ltd., 35-37 Independence Sq., Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

Includes article by Rhoda Reddock, "Caribbean women and the struggle of the 1930s: a Phyrrie victory", pp. 86-102.

Connexions: An International Women's Quarterly 26 (1988): "Women in exile at home and abroad"; 27 (1988): "Girls speak out!"; 28 (1988-89): "Feminism and religion"; 29 (1989): "Lesbian activism". 4228 Telegraph Ave., Oakland, CA 94609, USA (Quarterly).

Development/Developpement (Spring 1987): "Women". CIDA, 200 Promenade du Portage, Hull, Quebec K1A 0G4, Canada (Quarterly).

Includes articles by Anita Finch, "Caribbean: a mixed record of progress for women", pp. 27-29.

Doing Social Work for Change 8 (198?): "Women, work, income".

Projects Promotion Ltd., P.O. Box 554, Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This issue deals with the joint CARIPEDA/Centre for Caribbean Dialogue research project, "LDC Women Workers in Industry".

INSTRAW Links: a bulletin for networking 1 (1989). United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), P.O. Box 21747, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic:

INSTRAW News: Women and Development 11 (Winter 1988). INSTRAW (see above address). Special issue on "Networking for Women and Development".

Informativo Mujer 1 (January 1989). Area Mujer, Centro de Documentacion y Estudios, Brasil 986C/Tte. Farina, c.c. 2558, Asuncion, Paraguay.

Experimental issue of a monthly index to newspaper articles on women featured in the Paraguayan press. Includes chronological and subject indexes, selected articles, publications received by CDE, a directory of women's organisations, and information on the activities of women's organisations.

Koudmen: Issues in Dominican Development 5.2 (May 1989). Small Projects' Assistance Team, 6 Fort Lane, Roseau, Commonwealth of Dominica. (Monthly). Includes feature on the status of

## publications received

of Dominica. (Monthly).  
Includes feature on the status of women in Dominica.

ORPeP Newsletter 5 (March 1989).  
The Oral and Pictorial Records Programme, the U.W.I., St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago (Quarterly). Feature article: "Oral history and women's history: reflections on one experience", by Rhoda Reddock.

Quehaceres 9.2 (February 1989); 9.3 (March 1989): "Mujer y politica (women and politics)". CIPAF, Luis F. Thomen no. 358, Ensanche Quisqueya, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. (Monthly).

Recherches Feministes 1.1 (1988): "femmes et developpement: mythes, realites, changements." Gremf, bureau 2463, Pavillon Charles-De Koninck, Universite Laval, Cite universitaire, Quebec, Canada G1K 7P4. (Biannually). Includes: femmes et developpement en Amerique latine et aux Caraibes/Andree Michel; Du travail domestique comme deuxieme journee de travail des Haitiennes/Mireille Neptune Anglade.

SAGE: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women 4.2 (Fall 1987): "Mothers and daughters II." Sage Women's Education Press, Inc., P.O. Box 42741, Atlanta, Georgia 30311-0741. (Biannually). Includes two poems by CAFRA member Audre Lorde.

Speak: A magazine for women 16 (Aug-Oct. 1987); 18 (March-May 1988). SPEAK Collective, P.O. Box 19375, Domerton 4015, Durban,

South Africa.

Spearhead 3.1 (March 1989). Society for Promotion of Education and Research, P.O. Box 571, Belize City, Belize. Includes an interview with representatives of four women's organisations: Belize Family Life Association, Breast is Best League, Belize Organisation for Women and Development and the Belize Rural Women's Association.

Sojourner: The Women's Forum 14.7 (March 1989); 14.8 (April 1989); 14.9 (May 1989). 380 Green Street, Cambridge, MA 02139, USA. (Monthly). Vol. 14, no. 8 includes a review of Jamaica Kincaid's A Small Place.

The Tribune 41 (March 1989): "Women using media to effect change". International Women's Tribune Centre, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA. (Quarterly).

Women Unite for Democracy. Equality and Social Progress. Mirror Supplement 1 (1989). New Guyana Co. Ltd., 8 Industrial Site, Ruimveldt, Georgetown, Guyana.

### BOOKS

CAFRA and Committee for the Development of Women. Disah hard wuk. Illus. by Raymond Payne. Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines: CAFRA, 1989.

The findings of CAFRA's 'Women in Caribbean Agriculture' research project inform this booklet in comic form which highlights issues effecting women in agriculture.

Chamberlain, Mary, ed. Writing Lives: Conversations between women writers. London: Virago, 1988. Anthology of interviews between women writers of different generations. Caribbean writers featured are Rosa Guy (Trinidad and Tobago), Phyllis Shand Allfrey (Dominica) and Paula Marshall (of Barbadian parentage).

La deuda externa: que hacer frente a ella? Panama: Instituto de Estudios Nacionales, Universidad de Panama, n.d. (Cuadernos Nacionales, 1).

Edwards, Michael. "The irrelevance of development studies". Third World Quarterly 11.1 (January 1989): 116-135.

Feuerstein, Marie-Therese. Partners in evaluation: evaluating development and community programmes with

participants. London: Macmillan, 1986.

Hurricanes and houses. Kingston, Jamaica: Construction Resource and Development Centre, 1988.

INSTRAW. Programme activities of INSTRAW 1988-1989. Santo Domingo: INSTRAW, 1988.



Inter-American Dialogue. **The Americas In 1989: concensus for action.** Queenstown, Maryland: The Aspen Institute, 1989.

Lagro, Monique. **Women traders in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.** Port of Spain: ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, 1988 (LC/CAR/6.261).

Morrison, Elizabeth and Randall B. Purcell, eds. **Players and Issues in US foreign aid: essential information for educators.** West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1988.

Randall, Margaret. **A poetry of resistance: Selected poems and prose from Central America.** Ed. by Lynda Yanz and Marie Lorenzo, Toronto. Canadian Action for Nicaragua; International Women's Day Committee; Participatory Research Group, 1984.

Safa, Helen I. **Las mujeres y la crisis de la deuda en America latina y el Caribe.** Buenos Aires: Fundacion TIDO, 1988. (Cuadernos de Divulgacion).

Taylor, Alicia. **Women traders In Jamaica: the informal commercial importers.** Port of Spain: ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, 1988.

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Advisory Group Meeting on Women Traders in the Caribbean. St. George's, Grenada, 9-11 May, 1988.

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First Disciplinary Seminar, Arts and General Studies: Gender Issues in the Humanities. St. Augustine, Trinidad, 4-9 September, 1988. Report. (St. Augustine, Trinidad: Women and Development Studies Project, The University of the West Indies, 1989).

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"That's an excellent suggestion. Miss Triggs. Perhaps one of the men here would like to make it."

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# Carifem update

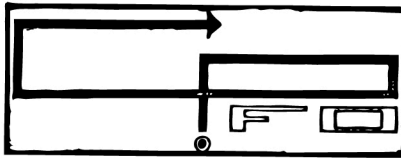
## Haiti

### Promoting the status of women factory workers

The Factory Women's Centre, known in French as the Centre de Promotion des Femmes Ouvrieres (CPFO) has been in operation in the industrial zone of Port-au-Prince since 1985. It aims to improve the living and working conditions of women workers in the light assembly industries through upgrading their qualifications and educational level.

CPFO has a permanent staff of 6, and carries out both research and training. A base-

line survey on the socio-economic and working conditions of 300 women workers was conducted at the outset. The provided the Centre with a wealth of information, and helped in preparing programmes.



Courses offered include Human Skills and Development, Literacy, Micro-Enterprises Development Techniques, Health, and Nutrition.

The main beneficiaries of

CPFO's programmes are 25-30 year old women who work as unskilled workers in the production and assembly of electronic devices and components, garments and sporting goods. With a monthly income averaging US\$80, these women are, in 46% of the cases, the sole breadwinners of a 6-member household that includes 1 or 2 children of their own as well as several members of their extended families.

For further information, contact Centre de Promotion des Femmes Ouvrieres, P.O. Box 1329, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

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