



UWI IGDS



CARIBBEAN REVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES

A Journal of Caribbean Perspectives on Gender and Feminism

INTRODUCING THE CARIBBEAN REVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES



ISSUE 1

APRIL 2007

Cover Image Courtesy
Patricia Mohammed
*Reconstructed Amerindian
Vase, National Museum
Tobago*



<http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/index.asp>



Introducing the Caribbean Review of Gender Studies

Issue 1, April 2007

GUEST EDITORIAL

Introducing the Caribbean Review of Gender Studies **Patricia Mohammed, Guest Editor**

ESSAYS

Going Global? Transnationality, Women/Gender Studies and Lessons from the Caribbean
Alissa Trotz

Diversity, Difference and Caribbean Feminism: The Challenge of Anti-Racism **Rhoda Reddock**

A Space of Their Own: Indian Women and Land Ownership in Trinidad 1870-1945 **Shaheeda Hosein**

Racialised Identities, Caribbean Realities: Analysing Black Female Identity in Hispanic Caribbean Poetry **Nicole Roberts**

Man Talk, Masculinity and a Changing Social Environment **Linden Lewis**

Dancehalls, Masquerades, Body Protest and the Law: The Female Body as a Redemptive Tool Against Trinidad and Tobago's Gender-biased Laws **Michèle Alexandre**

Love and Anxiety: Gender Negotiations in Chutney-Soca Lyrics **Aisha Mohammed**

Gendering the Caribbean Picturesque **Patricia Mohammed**

Subverting the Gay-Lesbian Agenda: A Re-examination of Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* **Crista Mohammed**

GENDER DIALOGUES

30 Years Towards Equality: How Many More? The Mandate of the Bureau of Gender Affairs in Promoting Gender Justice in the Barbadian state **Eudine Barriteau**

Critical Moments: A Dialogue Toward Survival and Transformation **Amira Jarmakani** and **Donna Troka**

PHOTO ESSAYS

Masculinities in Motion **Gabrielle Hosein**

La Salsa Nuestra de Cada Día **Ivonne María Marcial**

RESEARCH IN ACTION

“A Gift from God”: Gender and the Feminist Ethnography of Water in Three Trinidadian Communities **Diana Fox, Heidi Savery** and **Ron Dalton**

The Making of Caribbean Feminisms – Interviews with two Caribbean Women: Diana Mahabir-Wyatt and Gaietry Pargass

Diana Mahabir-Wyatt: A meaningful life – Interviewed by **Kimberly Byng**

Gaietry Pargass: The making of a human rights feminist lawyer – Interviewed by **Shelene Gomes**

BOOK REVIEWS

Caribbean Mothers: Identity and Experience in the U.K. **Adele Jones**

Midlife and Older Women: Family Life, Work and Health in Jamaica **Donna Drayton**

EDITORIAL

Introducing the Caribbean Review of Gender Studies

Knowledge is one of the major commodities being bartered today. This is not a contemporary development. Knowledge has always been associated with the currencies of power and control. What is new at this time are the methods by which technologies of knowledge dissemination have transformed how we acquire and are given access to information. The Caribbean, like many other societies, are major downloaders of information from multiple sites, such as cable channel television and the internet. While these methods provide us with uncritical and incredulous amounts of data from other societies, unless we also become major uploaders of our knowledge and creative ideas, we are placed in a poor bargaining position in this new system of power where information has become a major resource. We need to tap into inventive technologies of publishing that might allow us to reach more people in a relatively short time and at reduced costs of dissemination of hard copy material. Admittedly, this is still limited to users who have access to technology and equipment. What is exciting about the new sites for publishing, however, is that it also expands the formats for publishing, so that not only can we access the written word, but through spiralling innovations in digital technologies, we have the possibility of including sound and image along with the written text.

The Centre for Gender and Development Studies joins a large number of educational institutions and departments already in this brave new world of online publishing. While current uses of technology for website publishing and surfing has wide appeal to a younger generation who are savvy with the keyboard and software, the space is equally available to a globally linked scholarly publishing world presenting numerous opportunities to the well known along with emerging scholars and practitioners in various fields. An added bonus of online publication is that it opens the window for a relatively more fast-paced dissemination of the work of university departments whose business it is to interrogate existing knowledge and generate critical scholarship. A cautionary line, nonetheless, needs to be drawn. Online publications must observe the conventional methods of rigorous peer review and the editorial standards required of academic journals and scholarly publishing.

Although gender studies in the Caribbean has been prolific in its output over the last decades, the ideas generated by Caribbean gender scholars remain limited to few on the map of feminist scholarship. Yet, this is precisely the way in which the global gender discourse has been shaped, through the theorists whose work have captured the imagination of many, rather than eyes of the few. The differently placed theoretical and empirical concerns that trouble Caribbean scholars rarely emerge as compelling ones on the international scene, not because they are without merit, but because the ideas do not circulate or penetrate sufficiently to compel serious response and exchange. Without comparative dialogues, the issues and concerns that have been raised, and the kinds of work being carried out in gender studies in this part of the world, remain on the margins of gender scholarship rather than central to some of the new questions now being articulated. For example, in her paper in this issue *Going global? Transnationality,*

Women/Gender Studies, and Lessons from the Caribbean, Alissa Trotz, a Guyanese-born scholar located in Canada, writes that she sees the Caribbean as a space that produces knowledge with important lessons for a remapping of women/gender studies in a Canadian context. She begins to respond to another question that also concerns Caribbean gender scholars “[U]nder what circumstances are we able to claim that we belong to other significant locations that enable new theoretical and political connections?”

How might we in the Caribbean benefit from greater cross-cultural exchanges with scholars based in different locations who are similarly concerned with the gap that has emerged in feminism and gender studies between those who make theory and those who do not, between those who create knowledge, and those who are ostensibly outside this reconstructed elitist space. Ideas take a while to infuse themselves into different empirical realities. Yet, the knowledge economy is built through the generation of ideas and empirical data that speak to a multiplicity of scenarios that reach beyond a provincial audience. These are only a few of the concerns that have influenced the publishing of an open access online journal *The Caribbean Review of Gender Studies (CRGS)* from The Centre for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies. To ensure and maintain the strict standards of publishing, the journal has drawn on the expertise of colleagues both regionally and internationally who serve in editorial, advisory or review capacities. In this first issue, I thank those who in agreeing to work alongside us have indicated their commitment to our goals, among these to make the best of our scholarship available to the widest range of users and to advance our engagement in a global forum of exchange.

In this issue, the journal sets out to establish a formative identity, recognising that the process of identity creation is itself ongoing and open-ended. Implicit in its title is the multiple meanings suggested by the word *review*, meaning variously to present analyses, to facilitate appraisal of ongoing work, to create a space for the *re*-viewing of gender through dialogues that concern gender in the academy and communities we serve, and to ensure that these are reviewed critically by users both within and external to the Caribbean. The *CRGS* brings together a wide-ranging set of papers: thus, its first characteristic if you like is that it is deliberately broad based uniting scholarship, creativity and activism in gender studies and feminism in a seamless interplay that is the hallmark of our institution. The Centre for Gender and Development Studies was formally institutionalised on the multi-campus University of the West Indies in 1993 after over a decade of preliminary work that led to its official departmental recognition. Its mandate is that of Teaching, Research and Outreach in almost equal measure, with the understanding that each of these areas was not mutually exclusive of the other. While the demands of academic production in gender and feminist research and theorizing are as crucial to our production of knowledge, so is the interface which must be established with government and non-government organizations, individual readers and a wide collective of users who belong to distance education programmes, secondary schools and the public whom we serve. The journal attempts to reach those within and outside the region, does not limit itself primarily to an academic audience, although its academic component is both rigorous and rich, and retains the lion’s share of the publication. It strives to connect

with an audience of users in a forum that is deliberately filtered through the distinctiveness of a Caribbean voice and lens.

Filtered through a Caribbean lens: Engaging new technologies of gender

This first volume of the Caribbean Review of Gender Studies, sub-themed in the immediate heading above, establishes a cross section of academic, scholarly, and creative essays that provide exploratory sites to continue our gender and feminist discussions. It is necessary to explain, as Editor my own separation of these two terms gender and feminism. In the first, I refer to the conceptual category of *gender* as it is applied, theorized, acted upon and continually undergoing redefinition and meanings. By *feminism*, I refer to the politics and activism involved in this area of work, a consciousness and agreement that gender equality is a prominent goal in the path of development, even while there are different routes one might take to work towards this goal.

The varied spheres of engagement in scholarship, which derive from gender studies and feminism activism within the region, are approached from many different angles and positionalities in this journal. In this sense, the journal is a free-thinking space in the old-fashioned sense of the word, imposing on each scholar or contributor no theoretical or ideological limits other than a profound interest in their subject matter and a commitment to the goals of good writing and thinking.

In *Diversity Difference and Caribbean Feminism: The Challenge of Anti-Racism*, Rhoda Reddock proposes that “feminist scholars have contributed a great deal towards deconstructing the categories of ‘race’, ethnicity’ and ‘nation’ where women, in particular, have been ‘othered’ in their relations and positioned as markers of ‘racial, ethnic and national difference” both within and between societies. She examines, through the work of the early 20th Century feminists in the Anglophone Caribbean, how the women’s movement have interacted, negotiated, and created alliances and coalitions or sought to challenge racialized hierarchies and divisions in their everyday praxis. The contributions of the women’s movement to the politics of nation, state and society remain primary areas for younger scholars to review and analyse. This paper opens a path to examination of this theme in coming issues.

Shaheeda Hosein, a historian, disputes a popular construction of East Indian femininity in the Caribbean as passive in *A Space of Their Own: Indian Women and Land Ownership in Trinidad 1870-1945*. She demonstrates through historical evidence that the commodity of land ownership offered Indian indentured and post indentured women the opportunities for independence, family survival, social status and religious freedoms. In uncovering this data, if anything, Hosein presents the story of all migrant women of any race as more alike than different and thus defies a notion of uniqueness of any one racialized group in the process of adjustment after displacement, other than the cultural traditions they draw on to do so and the opportunities made possible in new settings.

Nicole Roberts in *Racialised Identities, Caribbean Realities: Analysing Black Female Identity in Hispanic Caribbean Poetry* segues into to Spanish-speaking language groups

of women engaged with issues of race and identity formation. Roberts analyzes representations of femininity in contemporary Hispanic Caribbean verse, privileging the black female voice. She looks at representations of women in the poetry of three twentieth century female poets, Cuban born Excilia Saldaña (1946-1999), Puerto Rican Mayra Santos Febres (1966) and Dominicana Aída Cartagena Portalatín (1918-1994), exploring how the poets see themselves in the role of definers or shapers of Hispanic Caribbean identity. The three female poets in some measure succeed in deconstructing myths surrounding black female identity, while providing a broad platform for discussion of the racially problematic reality of colour differentiation that still prevails in the contemporary Hispanic Caribbean.

The gender discourse in the Caribbean has never been isolated from an ongoing dialogue with masculinity, a feature well recorded in the gender scholarship of the region from its inception¹. Linden Lewis, in *Man Talk, Masculinity and a Changing Social Environment*, grapples with the full range of pressures and influences on Caribbean men's conception of what masculinity means in the region today. This paper reflects on how Caribbean men have traditionally communicated with each other, directly and indirectly. Lewis argues against a separatist politics between the sexes, suggesting that even while men accept the responsibility of shaping manhood and masculinity, that the internal debate amongst themselves must take cognisance of women's right to be treated equally before the law, in the workplace, and in the home.

While Gabrielle Hosein continues to flesh out the contributions of her PhD dissertation entitled "Everybody Have to Eat: Politics in Trinidadian Public Life" for University College, London, she shares the visual data and insights she has harvested from ethnographic field work in a photographic essay *Masculinities in Motion*. The visibility of masculinity in a discourse in gender which has been for too long been dismissed in the Caribbean and elsewhere as "dem woman ting" is a commitment in feminism, not to privilege the masculine over the feminine, but to see masculinity as also composed of many parts and not set in an unyielding patriarchal plaster mould. Her essay here reveals male narratives that expose how pride, love, livelihood, family, ambition or violence are all interwoven with masculinity.

This song and dance in the performance of gender is carried out in multiple sites, each with different interactions and effects on how gender practices and attitudes are shaped in any culture. In *Dancehalls, Masquerades, Body Protest and the Law: The Female Body as Redemptive Tool Against Trinidad and Tobago's Gender-Biased Laws*, US based scholar, Michèle Alexandre compares and contrasts United States concerns with those of Trinidad and Tobago. Alexandre argues that feminist jurisprudence must identify women's bodies as tools for redemption against sexual profiling, sexism and patriarchy.

¹ For instance the Women in the Caribbean Research Project carried out between 1979 and 1982 initiated by Joycelin Massiah, then Director of the Institute for Social and Economic Research at UWI, Barbados, and the inaugural seminar on teaching and research in gender at the UWI in 1986 published by 1988 in *Gender and Caribbean Development* Patricia Mohammed and Catherine Shepherd (Eds) both involved a collaboration with male colleagues.

She challenges the existence of a range of acceptable morality practices that are generally used to evaluate women's behaviours and justify sexual profiling.

Aisha Mohammed, a young scholar from California, USA, who spent a Fulbright year at the Centre for Gender and Development Studies carrying out research in Trinidad, takes the examination of gender to song and stage. Chutney-soca is commonly perceived to be a fusion of 'chutney', an Indo-Trinidadian folk music originally performed during Hindu weddings, and 'soca', which is Afro-Trinidadian fête music that developed through a mixture of calypso with soul. In *Love and Anxiety: Gender Negotiations in Chutney-Soca Lyrics*, she suggests that the lyrics and performance of this relatively new musical form provide a public forum for both Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian sex/gender belief systems to come into intense interaction, resulting in real and symbolic disruptions in the Indian system of gender relations. Aisha Mohammed concludes that these disruptions can result in the reconfiguration of gender relations for Indian women and men at a metaphoric level, thus continuing the destabilization of gender norms as these are constantly being renegotiated in a society through different media.

Composing architectural stills of the fast-paced salsa dance in black and white photographs, Puerto Rican photographer and professor of architect design, Ivonne Maria Marcial, unsettles our gaze on bodies in the movement of a dance. In the photographic essay *La Salsa Nuestra de Cada Dia*, the dance might be viewed either as a communication of bodies in harmony or as a violent interlude between a man and a woman. The privileging of sight over sound, movement or text, offers new technologies for the unwrapping of gender, approaches which have as yet not been sufficiently confronted in the region's scholarship.

The decoding of the visual text has become central to my own scholarship in gender in the Caribbean over the last decade. Patricia Mohammed's *Gendering the Caribbean Picturesque* presents an iconographic reading of images of the colonial past to the present, focusing on how the gendered has been made picturesque in paintings and photographs of subjects captured in the European artistic or travellers' gaze. Adding to this stare, I am conscious of the act of repetition, reproducing the same images while attempting to reinvent the gaze. I am challenged with an ideological and theoretical conundrum, faced not only by the scholar in visuality but parallels with the theoretical and ideological stance of some postcolonial writing. In what tone or stance does one view the subject, whether female or racialized, drawn from a subjugated past? The dominant tendency is to depict postcolonial subject or the subordinate gender either as victims or caught persistently in heroic resistance in the face of the odds. Both binary positions are incapable of dealing with different kinds of agency enacted by real people living their daily lives. Preserving the gaze under lowered western eyelids does not deal with the systematic "othering" that is constantly being reproduced, including that within the region. Perhaps adding to our textual discourses, the reading representation practices of gender in the Caribbean offers new technologies of decoding the past and the present.

Among the technologies not directly confronted have been those of gender and sexuality. The journal therefore invites the boldly titled contribution by Crista Mohammed,

Subverting the Gay-Lesbian Agenda: A Re-examination of Shani Mootoo's 'Cereus Blooms at Night'. Crista Mohammed examines Mootoo's fictional novel set in Trinidad as it explores dichotomies, inner compulsions and outer markers of sexuality and gender and so establishes a continuum of sexual identities and sexual behaviours in antithesis to the male-female, masculine-feminine polarities. Crista argues, however, that there are instances where the novel contradicts its own agenda and that although Mootoo achieves the goal of undermining heterosexual privilege and subverting entrenched binary constructions of gender and sexual identity, rather than challenging hegemonic modes of belonging, the novel at times "ossifies them".

Perhaps a primary difference regarding 'gender work' in the Caribbean is the extent to which gender scholars are consistently involved in the generation of policy at national and regional levels. As the principal institution engaged actively in research on gender in the region, the CGDS promotes the value of research driven policy and intervention. This ongoing experience with practitioners on the field affords a space for grounded theory through praxis. In *30 Years Towards Equality: How Many More? The Mandate of the Bureau of Gender Affairs in Promoting Gender Justice in the Barbadian state*, Eudine Barriteau examines the role of the Barbadian Bureau of Gender Affairs in gender intervention. Barriteau challenges the value of the concept of *gender equality* in the popular gender mainstreaming discourse, arguing instead that we need to be considering more carefully the promotion of the goal of equality through an understanding of what *gender justice* demands.

Critical Moments: A Dialogue Toward Survival and Transformation is the report of a seminar at Emory University, Atlanta on March 29, 2003 convened by Amira Jarmakani, Donna Troka and three other postgraduate colleagues, in the wake of the post 9/11 trauma of the USA. The five young women brought together four scholar/activists in a public exchange of paradigms for survival to tell stories about the work that they do, in order to find out how people and societies move on from critical moments in their lives. They locate in these story-telling analyses an empathetic contact point with others, pulling on the time honoured tradition of the sharing of experience, and on the principles of second wave feminism, the personal is political. The journal is pleased to offer a voice to brave initiatives like this from young scholars by publishing their rendering of this dialogue.

Research leads to valuable insights on priorities and concerns of societies. Largely published in monographs that are often not widely accessible to users, the findings of such research frequently remain outside the knowledge base of the populations who may benefit from these encounters. In this issue, two research initiatives are given exposure. In the first, "*A Gift from God*": *Gender and the Feminist Ethnography of Water in Three Trinidadian Communities*, Diana Fox, Heidi Savery, and Ron Dalton report on a preliminary ethnographic study of water acquisition and management processes in three Trinidadian communities. In this component of the Gender and Water research and activist project of the CGDS, Fox et al examined the impact of gender ideologies as a key component in the decisions, work patterns, values and meanings associated with water for people of the three communities. In the second, an ongoing and long-term research and

activist project of the CGDS entitled *The Making of Caribbean Feminisms* is given attention. One component of this project involves the collection of biographies of women and men who have played important roles in the making of feminism in this Region. In each issue, the journal will allocate space to publishing some of these biographies. In this one, we focus on two women Diana Mahabir-Wyatt and Brenda Gopeesingh culled from interviews carried out by Kimberly Byng and Michelle Seeraj.

A regular feature of every issue will be book reviews of titles that relate to the Caribbean either directly or through comparison. Adele Jones reviews the book *Caribbean Mothers: Identity and Experience in the U.K.* by Tracey Reynolds while Donna Drayton reviews *Midlife and Older Women Family Life, Work and Health in Jamaica* by Joan Rawlins.

With ensuing issues, we know that this journal will develop a wider catchment of contributors through its readership. This first issue has necessarily focussed on work from scholars working in Trinidad in particular. At least three of the papers contained began as seminar presentations at the CGDS, St Augustine. Originally, these would have been published as hard copy working papers and reached a more limited audience. While this issue has concentrated on beginning an online global conversation and providing a clearinghouse for some of our in-house material, it is equally geared to encourage cross-cultural dialogues through different mechanisms. Users of this first issue are invited to write responses and enter a conversation with any works published here. With the individual scholar's and editor's permission, these will be published in further issues. We also welcome independent papers, particularly those with comparative and cross-cultural perspective of relevance to the Caribbean. The journal invites readers and users to engage in gender scholarship and activism through new technologies of seeing, hearing, listening and speaking gender.

As creator and first guest editor of the journal, I must extend thanks to those who have worked assiduously with me to make this first issue possible. We thank Frank Soodeen and Charlene Woo Ling at the UWI Main library for ideas associated with online publishing, Diana Fox for unselfish sharing of the process that she initiated at Bridgewater State College, Massachusetts, Marsha Pearce, graphic artist for her design concept, Linda Speth and Donna Muirhead of UWI Press, Kingston Jamaica for also sharing trade secrets in publishing, Nazma Muller for her editorial support, Michelle Seeraj for her photo editing skills and Daren Dhoray and Kerry Bullock of UWI Campus IT services for their readiness in providing the IT advice and support that this initiative required. The backbone of all publication is the consistency of follow up, communication and networking required. In this respect, colleagues on the Editorial and Advisory Boards have been highly supportive, with many of them also serving as Reviewers for the Journal. To all Reviewers thank you for your time generously given. We are afraid that such dedication will only be rewarded with further calls on your time and look forward to a long and rewarding relationship. To paper contributors, thank you for agreeing to publish with us in this maiden issue, apologies for delays and pushing back of deadlines, put this down to the teething pains of bringing out any new publication series. The most profound thanks, however, must be given to Donna Drayton, Editorial Assistant who has

assiduously kept this journal on track despite time and impetus derailments, keeping a steady hand on the email reply function, to all of us, but primarily to me.

Patricia Mohammed
Guest Editor



ISSUE 1 • April 2007

Going Global? Transnationality, Women/Gender Studies and Lessons from the Caribbean

D. Alissa Trotz

Abstract

The word 'global' has entered our everyday lexicon, presented as new, inescapable and often, as inherently positive. This poses considerable challenges in re-narrativizing globalization's trajectories to render visible historical encounters that are productive of difference and hierarchy. This essay offers tentative reflections on notions of the global that underlie the imperial divide between area studies and women/gender studies in a North American context.¹ The essay highlights practices of exclusion via Eurocentric

¹ This essay – and the attempt to specify a relational approach in which feminism is simultaneously a site of critical practice and an object of critique – is the product of a four-year engagement with curricular transformation in women and gender studies at the University of Toronto. In particular I would like to acknowledge Michelle Murphy and Linzi Manicom, with whom these conversations about transnationality and feminism first started and with whom a related essay, "Transnationalising Women's Studies", is in progress; June Larkin, undergraduate co-ordinator; and M. Jacqui Alexander, from whom I learn so much every day. The analysis that is presented here draws on and has benefited greatly from a multi-university study group that included Sedef Arat-Koc (Trent), Ena Dua (York), Kamala Kempadoo (York), Kiran Mirchandani (OISE/Toronto), Shahrzad Mojab (OISE/Toronto), Michelle Murphy (Toronto), Linzi Manicom (organizer, Toronto), Cynthia Wright (Toronto); discussions with colleagues at other women's studies programs; as well as a review of a wide cross-section of undergraduate syllabi.

renderings of global sisterhood based on a putatively universal notion of ‘woman’, and efforts to ‘go global’ that reduce areas, and people from those areas, to gendered types.

In response to Mino Moallem’s question – “[U]nder what circumstances are we able to claim that we belong to other significant locations that enable new theoretical and political connections?” (2001: 1267) – I see the Caribbean as a space that produces knowledge with important lessons for a remapping of women/gender studies in a Canadian context. In addition to exemplifying a long scholarly tradition of engaging with its insertion into global processes, the Caribbean also has historical and contemporary links to Canada, which belies the artificiality of the separation between the ‘women’ of women/gender studies and the ‘women’ of Caribbean (or more broadly, area) studies.

Introduction

By drawing on the Caribbean at certain points, I want to highlight its epistemological significance. I am not making the argument that scholarship on, about (as in area studies programs) or from this region offers ready answers to the dilemmas identified in this essay.² For example, the existence of the Centre for Gender and Development at the University of the West Indies (UWI) speaks to the institutionalization of feminism/women’s activism as a partial response to the relative marginalization of gender and sexuality questions from the general curricula in the region. At the same time, we should perhaps think carefully about whether and how ‘development’ disciplines the kinds of feminist inquiries that can be made under its name. We should also consider what kind of Caribbean gets served up and reproduced by the various area studies programs offered in Europe and North America. These examples point to the need to think more explicitly about the different questions or priorities generated in specific locations, while recognizing that they are, in important ways, related.

I open, therefore, by readily admitting that the impulse to share these provisional thoughts comes from my own ambivalence—as someone whose point of departure is the Caribbean—towards women’s studies in a Canadian/North American context, a project in which I am also invested. The term *ambivalence* is used here not in its usually negative sense (denoting the co-existence of opposing feelings or sentiments) but to describe a state of hesitancy, to signify the unsettled nature of conversations and to suggest a productive tension that can be animated by exploring where the two intellectual endeavours intersect.

More precisely, the hesitancy emerges from an observation that one can complete a women/gender studies degree in Canada without ever really encountering the Caribbean. This is not, however, a plea for inclusion; rather the broader question that its relative invisibility puts on the table is the extent to which women/gender studies curricula consistently and systematically engage the complex relations of inequality across place

² That is to say, it is also the case that the so-called ‘Third World woman’ can easily disappear between the cracks of the ethnocentrism of women/gender studies and the androcentrism of area studies.

that both constitute and are constituted by the international system we inhabit (Malkki 1994).³

This is not to say that these encounters do not occur. Here the pressure to open up the curriculum is not only in relation to a more general tendency to internationalise that can be found in other departments and programs,⁴ but also comes out of specifically located struggles in feminist organizing and women's studies programs. In relation to these latter political struggles for voice, visibility and inclusion, however, going global has done little to destabilize dominant subject positions in women and gender studies, since it is all too often accomplished via a politics of inclusion. At the introductory undergraduate level, for instance, one might be introduced to the global (usually in the form of women in a particular Third World site, such as workers in a 'global' factory) for a week or two, or there is an occasional interruption in the 'local' or national space, as in discussions of paid domestic work and immigrant women caregivers in Canada (this is actually one of the few, if not only, places where one is likely to find the Caribbean in a women/gender studies introductory course). Consistent with the multicultural language of Canadian national narratives (Bannerji, 1995), one might find a week on specific groups of women (such as Japanese-Canadians, African-Canadians), an identity-based approach that renders these communities fleetingly visible to students and frequently results in a pedagogy of compartmentalization, problematically communicating the message that different groups have different experiences. But there is little sense of how to theorise experience or to make connections.⁵ Indeed, one might ask, in a year-long course with a few weeks on hyphenated Canadians, who is the normative female subject of all the remaining 'unmarked' weeks? At more senior levels, intellectual encounters with the global tend most frequently to take place via special topics courses, courses on international development or area studies electives with a gender component or emphasis (for a similar discussion in relation to teaching 'Canadian' history in the women's studies classroom, see Wright, 2000. Also see Grewal & Kaplan, 2002; Mohanty, 2003).

³ The observations that follow are based on discussions with colleagues in women studies programs or those who do anti-racist and feminist work in other departments; conversations with students; as well as an overview of women/gender studies websites and a number of undergraduate syllabi. The discussion is meant to illustrate some general tendencies, and it should also be noted that the size and structure of programs across Canada vary widely, from those with departmental status and undergraduate as well as graduate programs, to those that continue to rely heavily on cross-listed courses and don't have faculty lines. This discussion also recognizes the exciting direction some institutional sites are taking, which also inspired these reflections – see for example the women's studies program at the University of Victoria. Note that I am using the Caribbean here to highlight gaps in how these encounters with otherness are pedagogically managed, not to make some sort of 'special interest' argument for its inclusion (although, given the vast number of people from the Caribbean and their descendants in Ontario and Montréal, one could justifiably ask where and how does the region appear in women/gender studies curricula in these sites).

⁴ Although beyond the scope of this paper, there is need for research into precisely what is meant when universities announce their intention to 'internationalise'. For critical discussions that address this call under conditions of global capitalism, and that focus on the kinds of global consumer/citizen/learner that are imagined in such apparently cosmopolitan gestures, see Mitchell (2003), Mohanty (2003).

⁵ This is another place where one might 'meet' the Caribbean in the curriculum. In fact, the Caribbean has largely been synonymous with blacks in Canada; for example until recently the Canadian Census had no box to tick as Chinese or Indian *and* Caribbean.

There are a number of consequences to this additive pedagogical approach, as feminist scholars such as Ella Shohat (2002), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), Inderpal Grewal & Caren Kaplan (1994, 2002) have pointed out in relation to their observations of women's studies in the U.S.:

- (1) It generates a plurality of knowledges, within a curricular structure that is profoundly hierarchical;
- (2) It reintroduces and reinforces ideas of 'here' and 'there' as place-bound, non-intersecting and discrete – where the 'there' that appears most infrequently and is integrated most problematically into the program appears under the general title of 'Third World', 'south' or 'international'. This makes the global an 'elsewhere, not here'⁶ that belongs in area studies, reinstating not only the compartmentalization of knowledge and spaces but also the certainty of 'Canada', despite the fact that as Audre Lorde reminds us, "By the year 2000, the 20 largest cities in the world will have one thing in common/ none of them will be in Europe, none in the United States"...and, one might add, none in Canada;
- (3) It situates geographies of gender along a tradition-modernity continuum in which women 'there' are less developed, less civilized, less able to contest patriarchal constraint than women 'here';
- (4) It raises questions of what counts as knowledge and what counts as case study, where certain 'areas' become fodder for theorizing, contributing data or information, then understood via the optics of a seemingly decentred, displaced and universal theorizing.

Critically, the national is left un-interrogated in these efforts, a point I return to later in this essay. Ella Shohat (2002) has an excellent discussion of nationalism in women's studies programs in the U.S. academy, and there is need for research on the specific form it takes in the Canadian context, how it shapes the narration of feminism in Canada (see Srivastava, 2005; Valverde, 1992), especially since there can be a temptation to claim an innocent space in the shadow of US empire. An anecdotal example of what I am trying to elaborate here comes from a panel on the future of women's studies in Canada a few years ago, where one speaker decried the use of so many American textbooks in introductory courses, a problem which she suggested could only be resolved with 'more Canadian content'. It is worth considering whether and how a call to fulfil such a mandate and our anxieties vis-à-vis the United States end up sustaining the fiction of a benevolent Canadian national identity, in which, as historian Michelle Murphy states, [Canadian] nationalism becomes the remedy/antidote to [American] imperialism.⁷

Sherene Razack (2004) reminds us, it is an innocence, bolstered by ideas of Canada as international peace-keeper, multicultural haven, that takes a lot of effort to construct and maintain, even as it is continually belied by domestic and foreign policies (in the context of the region, witness the central role played by the Canadian state in the Haitian crisis). It raises the troubling question of how women and gender studies, by unreflexively relying on a nation frame within which to accomplish its curricular objectives, might

⁶This is a play on Dionne Brand's novel, entitled *In Another Place, Not Here*.

⁷Personal conversation with Michelle Murphy.

operate within and not against such ideological moves. Here instead we might want to think about how we reorient a seemingly innocent imperative to teach ‘more about Canada’ that ends up reinscribing alterity on certain bodies, and assigning certain ‘kinds’ of women to particular marginalized geographies (within the academy, this means that students interested in these questions have to find – or hope to find – these women in area studies). How might we shift this desire to learn more about ourselves to an interrogation of who ‘ourselves’ comprises and the exclusions such investments have necessarily entailed, to a more careful and critical analysis of Canada in the world and in terms of its ongoing internal colonialisms vis-à-vis First Nations communities, its own productions of locals and outsiders, of ‘elsewheres within here’?

Transnationality and the women and gender studies curriculum: Caribbean lessons

The remainder of this essay considers some feminist interventions that offer alternatives to a celebratory or pluralizing approach to going global. It draws on recent discussions among a research group that included colleagues from the universities of Trent, York and Toronto, as well as initiatives in women and gender studies at the University of Toronto, to recast the undergraduate and graduate curricula in a transnational frame. The term transnational has proliferated in recent years, having

...been invested with a variety of meanings and political attributes, from accounts of global capital to the politics of alliance and coalition-building, from the creation of subjectivities (to be transnational, transmigrant, diasporic) through to the reconfiguration of imperialist ideologies and practices (Series Description, *Gender, Transnationality and Citizenship*, University of Toronto, 2002).

In the studies, transnational tends to be most frequently deployed in three ways. Firstly, it refers to border-crossing flows of capital, technology/information and people (Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) mediascapes, financescapes, ideoscapes and ethnoscapescapes), the latter perhaps most clearly staked out as an area of study in relation to the back-and-forth movement of people across national borders that prompted the transformation of migration studies, coming primarily out of sociology, anthropology and to a lesser extent, geography.

Secondly, the transnational also encompasses border-spanning/crossing activism; what Michael Peter Smith and Luis Guarnizo (1998) referred to as ‘transnationalism from below’ in reference and in vigorous response to the seemingly borderless predations of capital, and what feminists identify variously as global, international, transnational feminism/feminist activism (although some of what is called global feminism, especially the United Nations (UN) Conferences, might be more aptly termed ‘globalization from above’ (see Spivak, 1996). A frequent assumption is that this political strategy of organizing across borders is the principal or only way of responding effectively to a world in which capital flows know no boundaries and where international civil society via supranational organizations like the UN and a proliferation of NGO networks produce new possibilities for realizing justice on a global scale.

The third use of the term, within which this essay's attempt to trouble the boundaries of women/gender studies is located, is to think of transnationality as a mode of critically apprehending the world, and which is related to, but distinguishable from the other two processes described above. Feminists bring overlapping intellectual trajectories to bear on this project. For instance, in a recently published set of reflections on women and gender studies in the present conjuncture (Wiegman, 2002), Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan identify Marxism, post-modernism and post-colonialism, while for Laura Donaldson, Anne Donadey and Jael Silliman, it is anti-racism and post-colonialism that are initially most productive. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty point out that any genealogy of transnational feminism must not only remember, but centre the struggles of aboriginal women and women of colour in and across both North and South to name colonialism and racism (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Alexander, 2006; Mohanty, 2005). This emphasis finds its counterpart in Canada (see Brand 1991; Bristow et al 1994; Carty 1993; Dua & Robertson, 1999). Their approach underlines the need to consider and historicise the context in which ideas emerge, circulate and reverberate, and offers a way of destabilizing the academy/community or theory/practice divide. In this third account, transnationality names the effort to find a conceptual apparatus that can ask critical feminist questions of globalization, understood in this reading as the historical and contemporary materialization of unequal and partial linkages in the worlds we inhabit. In the remainder of this essay, and drawing in part on the Caribbean to elaborate my argument, I sketch what I suggest are two important dimensions: history/relationality; and reflexivity.⁸

Historicizing and relationality (or, thinking backwards and outwards)

One frustration about the proliferation of globalization discourses, what Fred Cooper (2001) refers to as global babble, is the tendency to forget. Or, as Sidney Mintz (1998, 20) notes, there is "some risk in waxing too enthusiastic over a new lexicon of transnationalism without a serious historical perspective". As they point out, by some of the very definitions or assumptions undergirding the use of the term today, earlier moments of international trade were greater or 'more global' than the present. Historicizing globalization makes it less possible for celebratory narratives to elide the central question of the enduring legacies of colonialism in the neo-imperial present; as Mintz notes, "[t]he new theories of transnationalism and globalization are not respectful enough...especially of the history of exploration, conquest and the global division of labour" (Mintz, 1998, 131). At a time when border porosity in relation to capital is taken for granted (even by some anti-globalization activists who argue for border-crossing solidarities as a fundamental oppositional strategy), historicizing also challenges the inevitability embedded in such assumptions by allowing us to see capital flows not as a given, but rather as the outcome of travelling, *situated* and contingent practices and negotiations which link parts of the world, some more completely than others (Cooper, 2001; Gibson-Graham, 1996).

⁸ The first of these draws from Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (1992) seminal discussion of anthropological engagements with the Caribbean, where he identifies three themes that mark this encounter: historicity; articulation; and heterogeneity.

Foregrounding the acknowledgement that “the fluid millions who whisk here and there and back again...originated *somewhere*” (Mintz, 1998, 131), and that movement was regulated at various points to respond to the differently gendered needs and demands of an emerging global capitalist economy, resonates with the effort to bring area studies and women and gender studies into a meaningful conversation with each other. About Middle Eastern Studies, Mino Moallem comments that she supports work that “throws global feminism into crisis by emphasizing the historical specificity of the region, in general and each locality in particular” (2001, 1267). This should not be mistaken for a call to pit the local against the global as fixed binaries where the local becomes romanticized as the site of critical practice or as an arena of authenticity: “Retrieving or recuperating the local cannot immediately transform the contradictory politics of feminist theory, nor is recourse to the local an instant panacea” (Kaplan, 1994, 149). Again, a sense of historical process is key to avoiding the trap of reifying the local and culturalising differences. Uma Narayan points out that this has been a dominant response coming out of the challenges to the universalist claims of Western feminism that named gender as the most important form of subordination that *all* women faced, and where the particular was made into a general, normative and unmarked rule. In the search for ‘better’ representations or understandings, what one finds is “...culturally essentialist generalizations being generated as a result of self-conscious feminist attempts to avoid gender essentialism, something that happens not infrequently in classrooms and conferences, as well as in academic texts” (2000, 83). She goes on to note that such efforts “fracture the universalist category ‘woman’ only slightly” (2000, 81), a move that slides easily into a relativist and pluralist stance writ large on a global stage and calls up easy stereotypes, like the indefatigable African-Caribbean matriarch or the Latina overwhelmed by machismo. As Shohat notes, “we must worry about a globalist feminism that disseminates its programs internationally as the universal gospel, just as we have to be concerned about a localist feminism that surrenders all dialogue in the name of an overpowering relativism” (Shohat 2006, 7). Multiculturalising representational regimes do little to destabilize the centrality of Western feminist claims, projected as independent of gendered practices and ideas in other spatial configurations. Rather than reifying the local and leaving difference untheorised, we need to historicize categories of self-other and explore the global-local processes through which differences are produced, stabilized and taken for granted *in relation to each other*.

Accounting, therefore, for the production and circulation of gendered representations, practices and relations requires an emphasis not on comparison between separate entities, but on relationality (Shohat, 2002), or what Mohanty (2003) calls a deep comparative method. This does not suggest connecting up the previously disconnected, as if such embodied spaces existed outside or *a priori* those connections. Instead, it is a mode of analysis that questions both the discreteness and the equivalence of place, focusing our attention instead on tracking how power is spatialized, on the gendered flows and relations that constitute the uniqueness of each place and that also differentiate and hierarchize across and within them, the ‘power-geometries’ that feminist geographer Doreen Massey (1994) refers to.

The Caribbean is an excellent site to illustrate these connections, because it throws into relief the amnesia that is required or the particular kinds of histories that must be narrated in order to sustain globalization as innocent or recent. As Sidney Mintz (1998, 123) asks, “Does it not seem, to those who believe globalization is a new phenomenon, that moving a million people a year trans-oceanically for an entire century is pretty big and pretty global? If so, why have they not noticed?” It is only possible to maintain globalization’s myth of contemporaneity if we erase the colonial and imperial histories that created such ‘areas’ as Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, South Asia, or if we forget that, as Mintz, C.L.R. James and so many others have asserted, “Caribbean peoples are the first *modernized* peoples in world history” (Mintz, 1993, 10). As a region forged in the crucible of a colonial encounter that would initially lead to the expulsion and extermination of the area’s original inhabitants, where the “sugar making machine” (Benítez-Rojo, 1997) helped in no small way to industrialise Europe, and whose contemporary population are predominantly the descendants of those massively and brutally transplanted from Africa, India and China, it is impossible to think of the Caribbean *without* considering the colonial linkages that give it its historically specific imprint.⁹ Canada is very much a part of this transnational circuit, which historically encompasses 19th century missionary and banking links, trading routes for ships from Halifax bringing cod and timber and returning with sugar and rum, Maroons in Nova Scotia, bauxite ventures, and a Caribbean population in Canada since the 17th century (Bristow et al, 1994; Chodos, 1977). Today, those connections include banking interests, mining companies, the involvement of the Canadian state via ‘development’ work in the region and the central role played most recently in the removal of Jean-Bertrand Aristide from office in Haiti (and the deployment of Canadian police officers during the interim administration of Gerard Latortue).

Nor is it just the Caribbean that is shaped by these historical connections. Radhika Mongia (2003) provides an excellent interrogation of the apparent coherence of Canadian boundaries and national identity in her account of the history of the passport, that technology of differentiation which holds nationality between its covers and is a key index of inequalities in the international family of nations (Malkki, 1994). The Caribbean comes into play here in intriguing ways that beg further exploration. Canada’s robust support for passports was intended to effectively restrict Indian immigration in the early 20th century, an effort that can only be fully understood when placed in the context of Indian indentureship (in this continent, to the Caribbean), since the regulatory measures that did exist were for the movement of indentured labourers and did not at the time imagine ‘free’ migrations of Indians, especially to white settler colonies. It was consistent with earlier practices of racialization that denied citizenship rights to Aboriginal peoples as well as Chinese and Japanese resident in Canada. The furore over Indian immigration came to a head in 1914, when hundreds of Indian passengers on the steamship *Komagata Maru*, denied entry into Canada, launched a court challenge citing their right as British subjects to claim residency throughout the empire. Here differentiation (between ‘indentured’ and ‘free’ labour, between Canada as a white settler society and other British

⁹ One could think also in the opposite direction, from Eric William’s historical masterpiece *Capitalism and Slavery*, to more recent feminist studies such as Catherine Hall’s (2002) work on the Caribbean connections to the fashioning of the British imperial masculine subject.

colonies, between the citizenship rights of 'white' and 'non-white' peoples) would become key to the insistence of the Canadian federal government on its sovereign right to determine the boundaries of belonging (Dua 2003).

In her detailed examination of the migration of Indians to Canada in the early 20th century, Dua (2000, 2003) discusses the ways in which the state restricted access to citizenship for people of colour, with debates on the 'Hindu woman's question' in the Canadian parliament explicitly linking the barring of Indian women to the prevention of family reunification and settlement. Significantly, these debates occurred around the same time that indentureship was coming to an end in the Caribbean. There, gendered representations were shifting against the backdrop of an immense shortage of women, and via an elaborate colonial project to remake and domesticate Indian women within the family as part of a strategy of ensuring a resident male labour force and halting the possible return to India of ex-indentured labourers (Mohapatra, 1995). We need to think across these apparently distinct locations and sites of scholarly endeavour (Canada, the Caribbean, India), in order to understand precisely the gendered circuits, what Inderpal Grewal (2005) refers to as transnational connectivities, through which discourses of the family and of women's sexuality were emerging in roughly the same historical moment of the British empire. These discourses sought to position Indian women alternately as a threat to the Canadian national project and as integral to the future of sugar in parts of the Caribbean (albeit through a shift from public to private patriarchy via their relocation to the household and marginalization from the estate workforce). Holding and addressing this simultaneity in the same analytical frame enables us to see that compartmentalization is perhaps less an account of lives lived than the product of the imposition of our own intellectual maps.

A more multifaceted approach, then, would restore to the picture the ongoing gendered transnational processes that underpin contemporary Canadian state practices, the Canadian economy and the Canadian national imaginary. Discourses and practices of gender, class, race and sexuality are crucial to the ways in which national belonging – a family of citizens – is invoked, such that Caribbean peoples continue to be represented as recent migrants, as contingent members of the Canadian multicultural mosaic, notwithstanding their presence in Canada since the 17th century. An example of this contradictory positioning can be seen in the programs that have historically brought Caribbean women to Canada as domestic workers since the early 20th century (Calliste, 1989). These women represent a largely invisible labour force that sustains contemporary urban industrialized centres like Toronto: they are not simply or even victims of globalization, but an integral part of the process through which the global is constituted. They are not beneficiaries of Canadian benevolence and largesse as per the hegemonic representations of Canada as safe haven, generous to immigrants and refugees (Razack, 2000). Rather, they are women historically displaced and for whom migration is a transnational survival strategy (and today it is the economic and social dislocations effected by structural adjustment programs which have led to Caribbean peoples being among the region's greatest 'export'). It is the invisible labour of women recruited from the Caribbean as domestic workers and nannies that has made it possible for their Canadian employers and female counterparts to enter the paid workforce. Yet their

contributions are largely unrecognized, their labour rights unprotected, their access to permanent residence and citizenship contingent, as was made clear in the case of the seven Jamaican mothers ordered deported in 1979 because they didn't declare in their applications that they had children in the Caribbean (Chancy, 1997).¹⁰

The racialisation and gendering of citizenship also has implications for Caribbean men. The counterpart to the Domestic Worker Scheme (now a Live-in Caregiver Programme) is the recruitment of women and predominantly men from Latin America and the Caribbean as temporary farm workers across Southern Ontario, where there is a similar presumption that while their labour is required, their families, and the costs of social reproduction, must remain outside the borders of Canada. Here we see the ways in which gender calls for different bodies to perform feminised (domestic, private) and masculinised (public) work, in a context in which both kinds of jobs have little status and are associated with immigrants, non-Canadians, people of colour. Caribbean men are also positioned in urban Canada as potentially dangerous, as a threat to the stability of the nation. Racial profiling is fueled by stereotypical depictions of Caribbean men as gangsters (mostly Jamaicans by default), part of a wider global circulation of representations of violent black masculinity. It is perhaps unsurprising that the effect of federal legislation allowing the Canadian government to deport permanent residents was disproportionately felt in the Caribbean community. According to one report, in the first year of the law's application, Jamaicans, Trinidadians and Guyanese ranked among the top three groups deported from Ontario (*Toronto Star* 1998). What these examples point to – if our conceptual maps are not to end up doing the work of the state – is the need to address the ways in which these histories and geographies are unevenly and inextricably entangled, as well as to track how this intertwining is denied by gendered, racialised and sexualized practices and representations that are called up to sustain and narrate Canada's self-image and outward projection as a white settler society (Atlantis, 2000; Razack, 2000).

There is another point of entry into this category of 'Canadian', in exploring the "racial geography of the Canadian nation-state" (Walcott, 1997), one that reorients our focus away from dominant stereotypes and exclusionary state practices and towards the cumulative effects of a range of everyday activities on this seemingly bounded sense of national identity. If we start with the lives and survival strategies of Caribbean women and men, their uneven circulation and mobility map a transnational social field that stitches Canada and the Caribbean together and makes it impossible to insist on the separability of the two if an adequate accounting of this complexity is to be rendered. This manifests itself in a number of ways, from the households in the Caribbean that are kept afloat by remittances sent by relatives in Toronto (Burman, 2002), to efforts by Haitian women in Montréal to contribute to the democratic struggle in Haiti (Charles,

¹⁰ That the women eventually challenged the ruling and won, after a vigorous campaign fittingly titled 'good enough to work, good enough to stay', did not prevent the future policing of immigrant domestics: witness the deportation order against Mavis Baker more than a decade later, where the fact that she had children in Canada (and also in Jamaica) was used to suggest that she had sought 'immigration by progeny'. For an excellent discussion of what this case revealed about the production of the Canadian border, see Browne, 2002.

1995), active involvement of Caribbean women in community, feminist and anti-racist activism in Toronto (Bobb-Smith, 2003), and the emergence of Toronto itself as a significant performative site of Caribbean identity through the annual Caribana parade and associated festivities (Trotz, 2006). The field of cultural production offers another rich and varied tapestry of diasporic affiliations in which the Caribbean is a central interlocutor (Walcott, 1999, 2001). The contributions of Lillian Allen, Dionne Brand, Ramabai Espinet, Lorna Goodison, Nalo Hopkinson, Tessa McWatt, Shani Mootoo, M. NourBese Philip, Djanet Sears, Olive Senior, Makeda Silvera and D'Bi Young, among others, foreground the multiple ways in which women's bodies are not only witness to histories of suffering that are transatlantic and diasporic, but also emerge as key sites of resistant practices and memories that cannot be contained or incarcerated by territorial borders (also see McKittrick, 2006; Sudbury, 2004). In these renditions the Caribbean is not an elsewhere. It also exists in Canada, in the lives of people who constitute part of the steady migratory stream, in the continuing connections that are forged through remittances, the internet and the telephone, travel back and forth, as a material and imaginative/symbolic diasporic resource that is reiterated daily. There is much work to be done here to explore the ways in which these movements are gendered, and their contribution to challenging and redrawing maps of belonging within and across both the Caribbean and Canada.

Reflexivity and social change

In the final section of this essay, I want to briefly draw out an argument that has been implicit in the previous pages, namely that women/gender studies needs to consider the space it occupies, the ground it is standing on. In other words, and in some ways most importantly, feminist practice, rather than simply or primarily being that which illuminates, or complicates, or makes visible, becomes an object of analytic scrutiny itself.¹¹

This lesson can be a difficult one to impart to a first-year class where the understanding of feminism writ large is theory not just in and of itself, but for social change, and which slides easily into expectations of happy endings, a narrative of women's (which women?) struggles worldwide against the odds (which odds?).¹² It is certainly difficult to resist the temptation to offer celebratory invocations of women's organizing globally across borders, and indeed many would define transnational feminism in just these terms. Instead, what is suggested here is that we historicise these spatial practices, open up the question of how gender is constituted across uneven circuits of power, in order to "pressure the question of gender relations without bypassing the contradictions arising from the unequal power configurations inherent in colonialism and neocolonialism, as well as in globalization and transnational capitalism" (Shohat, 2006: xvi).

¹¹ To be sure, this is partly difficult to do because such programs, unevenly institutionalized, still appear to operate at the margin of the academy, and engaging this – apparently larger – issue often remains the priority. The point I am making is that it need not come at the expense of truly opening the program up to a genuinely inclusive practice.

¹² To be sure, this is not always the case. In fact, for students who may have tended to feel that certain issues were marginal or unspeakable, practising self-critique in the classroom can open up new spaces for engagement and belonging.

In this regard, Anne McClintock's (1995) notion of anachronistic space is extremely useful for enabling us to see how the tradition-modernity binary is spatialized and gets played out on the bodies of women. We can, for instance, consider how the first wave of Western feminism imagines its project of political belonging via positing women of other, 'non-Western' spaces as less modern (Burton, 1994; Valverde, 1992). We witnessed the recycling of these orientalist tropes in the US-led war against Afghanistan, now actively supported by Canadian troops, which was partly justified on the grounds of helping to liberate Muslim women from Muslim men and Islamic fundamentalism (for a discussion of Canadian media representations of these stereotypes see Jiwani 2005). In Canada, this rationale found active support among many self-described feminists (Arat-Koc, 2002; Razack, 2005). Moreover, orientalism took the form of sanctioning the kinds of feminist responses that were forthcoming, as in the case of Sunera Thobani, women's studies professor and former president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, whose loyalty (as an immigrant) to Canada was questioned after she called for feminists to critique the gendered and racialised effects of US foreign policy (Arat-Koc, 2005). In tracking itineraries of feminism here, we should foreground the 'Canadian' in order to undo it; that is to say, we can fruitfully explore in what ways, and with what effects, nationalism is sedimented in feminist projects inside and outside of the academy, creating not only notions of who rightfully belongs but also what place the normative Canadian citizen is imagined to occupy in the world, and in relation to whom¹³

Reflexivity is also warranted in view of what many would describe as the success of well-networked feminist struggles to mainstream gender. The evidence of these efforts surrounds us, from national governments collecting data and creating women's bureaus and gender focal points in ministries, to the declaration of a United Nations Decade for Women in 1975, to the various international legislative instruments and protocols issued by institutions such as the UN and the Canadian International Development Agency (which is present across the Commonwealth Caribbean). If these have all helped to give gender its current institutional recognition on the world stage, has this legitimacy perhaps come to regulate the terms of participation?

One good example of this tension can be seen in what has come to be known as the NGO-ization of feminism. Much has been written about the benefits and dangers of NGO-izing: the perils of bureaucratization; questions of co-optation and autonomy; compromise and neglect of grassroots movements. Yet it could be argued that a good deal of the literature contains a residual core of innocence: the idea that notwithstanding the huge gains that were made to get gender accepted and institutionalized, something was sacrificed or corrupted in the process. This doesn't really answer the question of how we make sense of the almost ritualistic invocation of gender by the same institutions – local, national, regional and international – that are the architects of structural adjustment

¹³ Sarita Srivastava (2005), in her study of feminist organizations in Canada, provides an excellent discussion of just how difficult such conversations around anti-racism can be, and suggests that some of the resistance has "roots in feminist community, imperial history, and national imaginings" (p. 30). For a discussion of these issues in relation to feminist scholarship, see Ruth Roach Pierson (2006); and in relation to the university classroom, see Dua & Lawrence (2000).

policies with hugely detrimental effects on the majority of the world (Manicom, 2001). If in the previous example we see how gender becomes a rationale for imperialist wars, here we must ask what is it about the way in which gender has been deployed by a constellation of actors that *includes* feminists, that enables it to co-exist so easily, to fall in line so effortlessly, with neo-liberal projects?

We can turn to the Caribbean where some of the debates among feminists and women activists have squarely put these thorny questions on the agenda. Thus, in a seminal essay on a Jamaican women's organization, Sistren, Honor Ford-Smith (1997) addresses external structural constraints, including the disinvestment of the state from the provision of education, health and other social services, the disproportionate burden that structural adjustment policies placed on poor women in particular, the 'discovery' of women by international funding agencies and the limit placed by sponsors on the kinds of transformative work needed to be done. At the same time, Ford-Smith confronts the difficult legacy of colonialism as it plays itself out in Sistren, through a discussion of the internal dynamics of race and class among the women involved. It is an analysis that foregrounds the uneven international terrain which the feminist movement in the Caribbean must navigate (thus naming the impossibility of global sisterhood), without sacrificing attention to the nuances within the region that reproduce hierarchized differences among women.

More recently, and in a discussion of the consequences of what one might term the supranational gender agenda on women's organizing in the region, activist Guyanese Andaiye pointedly reflects on the changing ways in which she is interpellated as a respectable women's activist/expert on women in a socio-economic climate patently hostile to comprehensively addressing gender and poverty:

As the market has shown itself more hostile to the interests of poor nations and poor people, beginning with the poorest women...I have become less and less a political activist and more gatekeeper for the development industry, helping to demobilize poor women. Agencies which would never pay me to organize with women pay me as a "gender expert" to mainstream gender into institutions which are not designed to serve the interests of poor women or men and cannot be made to serve their interests...I end up helping to provide services to a few women instead of challenging the economic model that justifies governments not providing and maintaining services to all women (Andaiye, 2002: 16-17).

Andaiye's comments raise the question of the reconfiguration of the women's movement in the contemporary Caribbean, prompting us to examine the uncomfortable ways in which feminist activism meets or converges with neo-liberal strategies to produce the category of poor women in need of rescue.¹⁴ The broader lesson that can be drawn from these sites, and that can usefully inform our pedagogical practices, is the call to beware

¹⁴ In an interesting discussion of feminist ethnography in Latin America and the Caribbean, Carla Freeman and Donna Murdock (2001) note the enduring influence of Marxist intellectual traditions on the direction of scholarship, in particular the prominence of political economy and development. One avenue for future research is to explore in greater detail how 'women and development' approaches changed in the region, as well as how knowledge production travels across the borders of academia, nongovernmental organizations and the state, and with what effects.

the tendency to think that a feminist analysis necessarily provides the way out – where everything ‘global’ but feminism itself is subjected to the feminist critique (and here of course we need to think about our own investment in certain sorts of narratives as always already oppositional). As Grewal and Kaplan (2001) note, “Feminism’s own self-rendition as an agent of liberating women must itself come into critical view”. At stake, as always, is the question, what are the terms of inclusion? Who is hidden from this picture and what does inclusion – different from transformation – entail?

Conclusion

This essay has offered some reflections on what transnationality might mean in the context of reframing women and gender studies in Canada, noting its uneasy relationship with area studies and drawing on the Caribbean as a site that is both in Canada (historically as well as currently) and where there is a tradition of engaging some of the issues these comments sought to address here. At a time when globalization is spoken of as something new that connects us all, but the reality is that such connections have magnified inequality and displacement to staggering proportions, critical literacy is required to apprehend what exactly is this ‘global’ that we speak of. Feminist knowledge production is an important interdisciplinary space that can offer much in the way of understanding the gendered dynamics of this new dispensation of power, but it does not stand outside of these processes and it is crucial to recognize these messy entanglements and their histories *from the start*. Pedagogically, we want to keep our eyes on both dimensions simultaneously. The goal of opening up women and gender studies to these close and strange encounters is not to be ‘at home in the world’ or to achieve a simplistic sisterly solidarity in the face of globalization. It is more modest (and hopefully more accountable), to unsettle these impulses and to explore the kinds of conceptual tools that will enable us to specify and make obvious the connections across which our lives have been, are and will be made. As has hopefully been made clear, identifying linkages should not result in a commensurability of place, a move that in relation to women studies/feminist projects can all too easily slide into a multicultural feminism or proclamations of ‘sisterhood is global’. A critical, accountable and in the final analysis, inclusive feminist practice must struggle to render visible the historical and contemporary materialization of unequal and partial connections in the worlds *it also* inhabits.

Bibliography

- Alexander, M. Jacqui. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual, Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Alexander, M. Jacqui & C. Mohanty, C. (eds). *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Andaiye. “The angle you look from determines what you see: Towards a critique of feminist politics in the Caribbean”, Lucille Mathurin Mair Lecture. UWI, Mona, March 6, 2002.

- Appadurai, A. "Disjuncture and difference in a global cultural economy" and "Global ethnoscares: Notes and queries for a transnational anthropology" in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalizations*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Arat-Koc, S. "The disciplinary boundaries of Canadian identity after September 11: civilizational identity, multiculturalism, and the challenge of anti-imperialist Feminism" in *Social Justice* 32 (4)(2005): 32-49.
- _____. "Imperial wars or benevolent interventions? Reflections on 'global feminism' post September 11th" in *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal*, 26.2: (2002) 53-65.
- Atlantis*. "Special Issue: Whose Canada is it?" (2000): 24(2).
- Bakan, A. & D. Stasiulis. "Making the match: Domestic placement agencies and the racialization of women's household work" in *Signs*, 20 (2) (1995): 303-335.
- Bannerji, H. *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1995.
- Benítez-Rojo, A. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Bobb-Smith, Y. *I Know Who I Am: A Caribbean Woman's Identity in Canada*. Toronto: Women's Press, 2003.
- Brand, D. (ed). *No Burden to Carry*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1991.
- Bristow, P., D. Brand., L. Carty., A. Cooper., S. Hamilton., A. Shadd, (eds). *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.
- Browne, S. "Of 'Passport Babies' and 'Border Control': The Case of Mavis Baker v. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration" in *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal*, (2002): 26 (2).
- Burman, J. "Remittance; Or, Diasporic Economies of Yearning" in *Small Axe* 12: (2002) 49-71
- Burton, A. *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.
- Calliste, A. "Canada's immigration policy and domestics from the Caribbean: The second domestic scheme" in *Race, Class and Gender: Bonds and Barriers*. Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1989.
- Carty, L. *And Still We Rise: Feminist Political Mobilizing in Contemporary Canada*. London: Women's Press, 1993.
- Chancy, M. "Good enough to work, good enough to stay: M. Nourbese Philip, Dionne Brand, and Makeda Silvera and women's dignity in Canadian exile" in *Searching for Safe Places: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile*. PA: Temple University Press, 1997.
- Charles, C. "Gender and politics in contemporary Haiti: The Duvalierist state,

- transnationalism and the emergence of a new feminism (1980-1990)" in *Feminist Studies*, 21 (1) (1995): 135-
- Cooper, F. "What is the concept of globalization good for? An African historian's perspective" in *African Affairs* 100 (2001):189-213.
- Dua, E. "Towards theorizing the connections between governmentality, imperialism, race, and citizenship: Indian migrants and racialisation of Canadian citizenship" D. Brock (ed) *Making Normal: Social Regulation in Canada*. Scarborough: Nelson Thomson, 2003.
- _____. "The Hindu Woman's question" in *Canadian Woman Studies* (2000): 108-117.
- Dua, E. & B. Lawrence. "Challenging white hegemony in university classrooms: Dua, E. & A. Robertson (eds). *Scratching the Surface: Canadian Anti-Racist Feminist Thought*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1999.
- Ford-Smith, H. "Ring ding in a tight corner: Sistren, collective democracy, and the organization of cultural production" in M. J. Alexander & C. Talpade Mohanty (eds) *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Freeman, C. "Is local : global as feminine : masculine? Rethinking the gender of globalization" in *Signs*, 26 (4) (2001): 1007-1037.
- Freeman, C. & D. Murdock, D. "Enduring traditions and new directions in feminist ethnography in the Caribbean and Latin America" in *Feminist Studies*, 27 (2) (2001): 423-458.
- Gibson-Graham, J.K. "Querying Globalization" in *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
- Grewal, I. *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Grewal, I. & C. Kaplan. "Global identities: Theorizing transnational studies of sexuality" in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7(4) (2001): 663-679.
- _____. *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Hall, Catherine. *Civilising Subjects : Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Jiwani, Y. "The Great White North encounters September 11: race, gender, and nation in Canada's national daily, the Globe and Mail" in *Social Justice* 32 (4) (2005.): 50-68.
- Kaplan, C. "The politics of location as transnational feminist practice" in *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Malkki, L. "Citizens of humanity: Internationalism and the imagined community of nations" in *Diaspora*, 3(1) (1994): 41-68.
- Manicom, L. "Globalising 'gender' in – or as – governance? Questioning the

- terms of local translations” in *Agenda*, 48 (2001): 6-21.
- Massey, D. “A Place Called Home?” in *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.
- McClintock, A. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- McKittrick, K. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Mintz, S. “Goodbye, Columbus: Second thoughts in the Caribbean region at mid Millennium”. Walter Rodney Memorial Lecture, Warwick University, 2003.
- _____. “The localization of anthropological practice: From area studies to Transnationalism” in *Critique of Anthropology*, 18 (2) (1998): 117-133.
- Mitchell, K. “Educating the national citizen in neoliberal times: From the multicultural self to the strategic cosmopolitan” in *Trans Inst Br Geogr NS* (28) (2003) 387-403.
- Moallem, M. “Middle Eastern Studies, Feminism, and Globalization” in *Signs*, 26(4) (2001): 1265-67.
- Mohanty, C. “US empire and the project of Women’s Studies: Stories of citizenship, complicity and dissent” in *Gender, Place and Culture*, 13 (1) (2006): 7-20.
- _____. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Mohapatra, P. “Restoring the family: Wife murders and the making of a sexual contract for Indian immigrant labour in the British Caribbean colonies” in *Studies in History*, 11 (2) (1995): 227-260.
- Mongia, R. “Race, nationality, mobility: A history of the passport” in A. Burton (ed) *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Narayan, U. “Essence of culture and sense of history: A feminist critique of cultural essentialism” in Uma Narayan & Sandra Harding (eds) *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Razack, S. “Geopolitics, culture clash, and gender after September 11” in *Social Justice* 32 (4): (2005)11-31.
- _____. *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.
- _____. “‘Simple logic’: Race, the identity documents rule and the story of a nation besieged and betrayed” in *Journal of Law and Social Policy*, (2000)15: 183-211.
- Roach Pierson, R. “White Academic Women and Imperialist and Racist Knowledge Production” in *Atlantis*, Special Issue Two, 2004.
- Rolph-Trouillot, M. “The Caribbean region: An open frontier in anthropological

- Theory” in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 21 (1992):19-42.
- Sassen, S. *Globalization and its Discontents*. New Press, 1998.
- Shohat, E. *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
- _____. ‘Area Studies, Gender Studies, and the cartographies of knowledge’, *Social Text* 72, 20(3) (2002): 67-78.
- Silvera, M. *Silenced: Talks with Working Class Caribbean Women about their Lives and Struggles as Domestic Workers in Canada*, Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1989.
- Smith, M.P. & L. Guarnizo, L. *Transnationalism from Below (Comparative Urban and Community Research)*, Transaction Publishers, 1998.
- Spivak, G. “‘Woman’ as Theatre: United Nations Conference on Women, Beijing 1995”, *Radical Philosophy*, 75 (1996): 2-4
- Srivastava, S. ‘You’re calling me a racist? The moral and emotional regulation of antiracism and feminism,’ *Signs*, 31 (1) (2005): 29-62.
- Sudbury, J. ‘From the point of no return: Writing contemporary spaces of confinement into diaspora studies,’ *Canadian Woman Studies* 23 (2) (2004): 154-163.
- Toronto Star*. “Deportation law ‘targets’ Jamaicans.” August 19, 1998.
- Trotz, D. A. ‘Rethinking Caribbean transnational connections: Conceptual itineraries’, *Global Networks*, 6(1) (2006): 41-59.
- Valverde, M. ‘When the mother of the race is free: race, reproduction, and sexuality in first-wave feminism,’ in Valverde, M. & Iacovetta, F. (eds) *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Canadian Women’s History*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992.
- Walcott, R. ‘Caribbean pop culture in Canada: Or, the impossibility of belonging to the nation,’ *Small Axe*, 9, (2001): 123-39.
- _____. ‘Rhetorics of Blackness, rhetorics of belonging: The politics of representation in Black Canadian expressive culture,’ *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 29(2), (1999): 1-24.
- _____. ‘A Tough Geography’: Towards a Poetics of Black Space[s] in Canada,’ *West Coast Line* 31 (1) (1997): 38-51.
- Wiegman, R. (ed.) *Women’s Studies on Its Own: A Next Wave Reader in Institutional Change*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Cynthia Wright. ‘Troubling the Nation: On Teaching Canadian History in the Women’s Studies Classroom’, *Atlantis* 25 (1): 2000.



ISSUE 1 • April 2007

Diversity, Difference and Caribbean Feminism: The Challenge of Anti-Racism:

Rhoda Reddock

Abstract

The Caribbean, as with other parts of the New World, has been shaped by racialized constructs since the beginning of its modern history in the late 15th Century. Caribbean history is closely related the emergence of modern racism, usually dated at the point of the encounter between Europe, Africa and the New World. Feminist scholars have contributed a great deal towards deconstructing the categories of ‘race’, ethnicity’ and ‘nation’ and exposing their gendered character. Women, in particular, have been ‘othered’ in relation to each other and positioned as markers of “racial’ ‘ethnic and national difference. This paper analyses the changing ways in which feminist activists of the Anglophone Caribbean women’s movement have addressed issues of ‘race’ and ethnicity. It examines how they have interacted, negotiated, and created alliances and coalitions or sought to challenge racialized hierarchies and divisions in their everyday praxis. The work of the early 20th Century feminists of the Anglophone Caribbean is addressed: women who were conscious of their African/Indian heritage at a time of great European colonial power. It also explores the anti-racist work of feminist activists at the end of that century, in the very different context of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana at the high point of the Caribbean Women’s movement in the 1980s and 1990s.

Introduction

In her 2002 Lucille Mathurin-Mair lecture,¹ the Guyanese activist, Andaiye, stated:

¹Biennial Lecture hosted by the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, UWI, Mona Campus, Jamaica.

While feminism has defined itself as placing great store on inclusiveness, organized feminist politics in the region has not been inclusive. CAFRA for example has always been made up mainly of predominantly Afro-Caribbean women, with Indo-Caribbean women in a small minority and little or no connection with Indigenous women, the poorest in the region. Working-class women of all races/ethnic groups form another minority. The age range was and still is narrow. How is this better than what we opposed in the Left movement? In the form and practice of organising in the 1980s and later, we studiously ignored the power relations among women, thereby allowing us, women with more power (however defined) to dominate or exclude – consciously or not, deliberately or not, it does not matter.

I do not believe that we thought any further (I certainly did not) than the need for the autonomy of women from men. But in organizing, if we cut gender off from the other power hierarchies, that is if we work to end relations among women, while ignoring the power relations among women, we will not succeed in transforming the power relations between women and men because we are not aiming at the whole power structure, of which the power relations between women and men are only a part (Andaiye, 2002:11)

In this lecture, well-respected Guyanese activist accuses the contemporary Anglophone Caribbean women's movement of ignoring questions of 'race' and 'class' in its feminist work. In this she was echoing concerns already raised by Indo-Caribbean feminists such as Rawidda Baksh-Soodeen (1998) Nesha Haniff and others. It is also important bearing in mind the centrality of issues of 'race,' ethnicity and colour to Caribbean history and current Caribbean life and praxis, and given the centrality of class to the radical politics of the 1970s and 1980s from which many of the feminist activists of that period emerged. This statement by Andaiye provides the opportunity for Caribbean feminist scholars and activists to reflect on her claims and possibly learn from these reflections. In this article, I focus particularly on the issue of feminist organising around 'race' which was central to the arguments in her presentation.

First, the term 'race' is in need of clarification. It is a complex term which, despite the recognition of its conceptual limitations, continues to be used in social analysis and everyday discourse. It is used here to refer to socially constructed groupings differentiated by phenotype, physical features and area of origin. Rather than focus on a static phenomenon called 'race,' however, scholars refer to the dynamic process of racialization – the process “where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities (R. Miles 1989: 74, cited in Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992:11). Yet notions of 'race' continue to be among the most pervasive and powerful bases of ethnic division, conflict and inequality. 'Race' by itself or combined with religion is also recognised as a powerful basis of social identity. In this article I do not deconstruct the term 'race,' but use it as it appears in historical and contemporary discourse to construct and demarcate different groups in Caribbean society.² I take 'ethnicity' to refer to relationships among collectivities based on religion, phenotype, culture or nationality. These characteristics are seen as distinctive and used to signify

² 'Race' has also been recognised internationally as a contemporary global construct, as evidenced by the recently held World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa in 2001.

difference in relation to other collectivities. In the Caribbean, ethnicity is often used interchangeably with race and ethnic difference may cohere around differences of phenotype and historical origin; religion and “culture”.

The Caribbean, along with other parts of the New World, has been shaped by racialized constructs since the beginning of its modern history in the late 15th Century. Indeed Caribbean history is closely related to the history of racism itself, and the emergence of modern racism is usually dated at the point of the encounter between Europe, Africa and the New World.³ European conquest of the region, the introduction of forced labour systems leading to the eventual decimation of the indigenous peoples, the establishment of the modern slave trade and enslavement of Africans, the importation of bonded labour of Asian and other nationalities were all justified by a Eurocentric discourse of natural racial and cultural superiority. Notions of racial superiority and inferiority were supported by European-derived rigid colonial state structures, armies and military mechanisms of various sorts. This reinforced and rationalised the inequitable social, economic and political systems of the colonizers, thereby de-legitimising alternative worldviews and social, economic and cultural practices of Caribbean peoples indigenous to the region as well as the predominantly African and Asian forced labour migrants.

Colonial processes and discourse therefore served to construct ‘race’ and ‘racism’ as central organising principles of Caribbean life, traditions and ideology, manifest in the economy, society, culture and social, sexual and gender relations. Thus constructs of race and colour became the bases of social and economic disparities, as well as of cultural diversity and creativity. So entrenched were these racialised structures of inequality in the region, first between Europeans and indigenous people and later Europeans and Africans, that they were able to incorporate new groups as they entered Caribbean societies. As such, all new groups found themselves located somewhere on the ranking order of status and acceptability and moved up or down it depending on their colour, appearance, changing financial status and the circumstances of their entrance. It is not accidental or surprising then that ideas of race and colour eventually came to be solidified within class structures and status systems which have, over time, reproduced themselves in varying permutations throughout the region.

It must be noted however, that although issues of ‘race’ and colour have been central to Caribbean history and social and economic stratification, these issues have not emerged in the same way in all places and at all times across the region. Differences in regimes of race and colour emerged based on the racial ideologies and practices of the main coloniser, e.g. Britain, Spain, France, the United States or The Netherlands, the patterns of economic production, the extent of importation of other migrant labouring populations and other patterns of migration. Common to all of these racialized systems, however, was the privileged position of ‘whiteness’ and the negative racialization of dark skin colours and, thus, persons of African descent.

Feminist scholars have contributed significantly towards deconstructing the categories of ‘race’,

³ Edward Long’s three volume *History of Jamaica 1774* is often taken as one of the early treatises of modern racism.

ethnicity’ and ‘nation’ and exposing their gendered character. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) note that:

The boundary of the ethnic is often dependent on gender and there is a reliance on gender attributes for specifying ethnic identity; much of ethnic culture is organized around rules relating to sexuality, marriage and the family, and a true member will perform these roles properly. Communal boundaries often use differences in the way women are socially constructed as markers (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992:113).

In the Caribbean, a scholarship on the gendered nature of ‘race’ and ethnic difference emerged in the 1990s (see Mohammed 1994, Tang Nain 1991, Baksh-Soodeen 1998, Reddock 2001).⁴ By then, the primacy of class in social analysis had been increasingly undermined by the defeat of Marxism, the decline of the radical trade union movement and the emergence of social and economic neo-liberalism. The language of class struggle was replaced by one of poverty alleviation in development thinking, a process to be accomplished by projects, programmes and micro-enterprise development, no longer through collective struggle and political action.

The increased visibility of ethnically based collectivities in the region, in particular the emergence of Indo-Caribbean and indigenous identity movements, and the personal and political experiences of women scholars and activists, may also have contributed to the feminist discourses on ‘race/ethnicity’ and gender which emerged at this time. These have contributed, in a largely uncoordinated way, to what I have called an emerging discourse on Difference and Feminism relevant to this sub-region (Reddock 2001a).

In conceptualizing difference in the Caribbean, it is important to note that in colonial contexts ethnic collectivities were historically defined in opposition to each other. First the indigenous peoples were defined as subordinate to persons of European descent. Later, persons of African descent were defined in opposition to persons of European descent. In the Southern Caribbean countries of Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago, this was also increasingly the case with the majority Indian and African descended populations being defined in opposition to each other. Tejaswini Naranjana observes:

It may be worth emphasizing that the maintenance of distinctions between the “Christianized African Creole” and the “Asiatic coolie” was a matter of some concern for the colonial authorities as well. After the establishment of the Republic of Haiti in 1803, the specter of successful non-white revolt haunted every European in the Caribbean. Any stint of solidarity between laborers, especially of different races, was speedily crushed. As the planters faced the prospect of the end of indenture, and the imminent formation of a purely domestic labor force, images of the shiftless, lazy African and the industrious coolie circulated with increasing frequency. The colonial constructions of “Indian” and “African” continues to inform the contemporary formations of the two groups’ identities (Naranjana, 1999:235-236).

In particular, women have been ‘othered’ in relation to each other and stereotypical distinctions have become markers of group difference. Afro-Caribbean women, for example were constructed as

⁴ By then, the primacy of class in social analysis had been increasingly undermined by the defeat of Marxism, the decline of the radical trade union movement and the emergence of social and economic neo-liberalism.

loose, immoral, loud, independent and sexually available; In contrast Indo-Caribbean women were constructed as chaste, pure, controlled and sexually unavailable (Reddock, 2001). This is so although historical records seriously challenge these stereotypes (Reddock 1994). In this regard, Naranjana argues that “The East Indian woman in post slavery society, then, brought in to compensate colonial planters for the loss of captive labor, had to be imaged as completely different from the African, woman (Naranjana,1999:236).”

Afro-Indo conflict has in recent years become paramount in the parts of the region with a significant Indo-Caribbean population, superseding the earlier and more dominant white/black dichotomy. Feminist scholarship on race and ethnicity internationally on the other hand, has been dominated by the rhetoric of the white/black binary. This has been so because of the hegemony of Euro-American cultural and economic influences worldwide, but also because of the weight given to scholarship from the North where the white/black binary has been the dominant construct of ethnic discourse. Although as noted by Susan Freidman, even in the United States:

...the dualistic “black and white checkerboard” of race that has long dominated the American consciousness of racism has been reconfigured in multiracial, multicultural terms ... These narratives of multiethnic, multiracial and multicultural conflict do not of course, render irrelevant the systematic forms of white racism against people of color in the United States (Friedman,1995:2).

Not surprisingly therefore, in the face of Euro-American (White) cultural and ‘racial’ hegemony and political and economic dominance, there has been little space for the analysis of relationships among subordinate groups of women (and men) in the United States. So while the white/black binary continues to be an important backdrop and context for relations among ethnic collectivities in virtually all contexts (Reddock, 2001a) other relationships structured by class, colonialism, racism, colourism religion and other structural markers create inequality, mutual mistrust, fear and inter-ethnic conflict and violence in various parts of the world. As a inter-ethnic conflict has been the basis for a majority of military conflicts and civil war in the world over the last two decades (See Freidman, 2001:23-25). It is precisely for this reason that feminist activists and scholars of the Caribbean need to address these issues. Race and other forms of identity politics have the potential to fragment and neutralise social movements at a time when a rapidly globalising Euro-American capitalism is negatively affecting the social and economic welfare of millions in the Economic North and South. Attention to difference is one way of confronting this issue and its divisive and conflictual potential.

While the focus of this paper is on relationships between women of subordinate racial or ethnic groups, how then should we understand ‘the white other’ in the Caribbean? The focus here is not to suggest that whiteness and white privilege are no longer important in the Caribbean region. White privilege is maintained (although significantly reduced) through the practice of colour privilege and the continued presence of Euro-American national, regional and transnational corporate interests and global communications. White privilege acts as a backdrop against which struggles of subordinate groups take place. At the same time the contribution of Euro-Caribbean(White) and other privileged minority women active in the women’s movement throughout the 20th Century must be acknowledged. Women such as May Farquharson, Beatrice Greig, Honor Ford-Smith and others

have contributed to the discourses on ‘race’ and ‘class’ which emerged over that period.⁵

In reflecting on Andaiye’s statement, this article examines the ways in which ‘class’ and ‘race’ have emerged in the consciousness and actions of women’s movement activists and feminists in the 20th Century.⁶ This has been different at different points in history; and shaped by the existing context, the political orientation of the activists and the changing dynamics of racialization and ethnicization.

We need however to examine the efficacy of these approaches, the extent to which they were successful and the lessons to be learnt for the future. We need to analyse the mechanisms through which the women’s movement and women’s organisations – feminist and otherwise – have interacted, negotiated, created alliances, coalitions or sought to challenge hierarchies and divisions in their theory and everyday praxis.⁷ To do so, I examine the work of the early feminists of the Anglophone Caribbean: women like Catherine McKenzie, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Amy Bailey and Una Marson of Jamaica, and Audrey Jeffers and Gema Ramkeesoon of Trinidad and Tobago. These were middle class women who were actively conscious of their African/Indian heritage at a time of great European colonial power and control. Their relationship to women of the working classes ranged from solidarity to charity. I also refer to the work of working-class women’s activists such as Christina Lewis in Trinidad and Tobago, whose class activism always reflected her feminist consciousness as well as her consciousness of ‘race’. The paper then explores the later period of the Caribbean Women’s movement in the 1980s which resulted in the formation of a regional feminist organisation, CAFRA - The Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action.

‘Race’ and ‘Ethnic’ Consciousness in the Early Anglophone Caribbean Women’s Movement

In the early 20th Century, less than one hundred years after the abolition of slavery, Afro- Caribbean women’s identification with feminist politics in the Anglophone Caribbean was integrally combined with concern for their race locally, in Africa and elsewhere. At this time, the European colonial administrative and oligarchic classes were still powerful and oppressive, colonial race and colour structures were still very much in place. Therefore struggles by early middle-class and working class women of this region could not be separated from their overall concern for the social upliftment of their race, sex and, in the case of working women, class. As the term was introduced in the late 19th century, many of the women activists of this period defined themselves as feminist. When they did not use the term to describe themselves, it was used by their detractors and supporters to identify them. Their lives and work reflected an awareness or consciousness of the subordination of women which they actively sought to change.

The emergence of Pan-Africanist movements in the Caribbean and the Caribbean Diaspora at the start of the 20th Century provided one context for such women to be involved in social and political organisation. One of the earliest public feminists identified in the region is Catherine McKenzie,

⁵ See Honor Ford Smith and SISTREN – *Lionheart Gal*, Women’s Press, Toronto. 1986, republished The UWI Press, Kingston 2005; Reddock, 1994 and Miss Amy and Miss May, Video by Sistren Women’s Theatre Collective.

⁶ A similar paper could also be done on how these movements tried to address ‘class’ issues in their work.

⁷ There has been more discussion of women’s actions in high-profile conflict situations such as in Palestine and Israel.

secretary of the Kingston Branch of the Pan African Association(PAA) of Jamaica.⁸ McKenzie, a member of the People's Convention, founded by Dr. Robert Love, which later incorporated the Jamaica PAA, was clearly concerned about her race but she also expressed strong concerns about her sex. In numerous speeches and presentations, she made her demands for women's equality and human rights, as shown in the excerpt below:

Everywhere in the world, and all along the course of the world's history, a state of things has existed in which the rights accorded to women have left much to be desired. Just why woman has been denied all the rights which are accorded to man is one of the unexplained relations of life, except it be that it is man alone who has made the laws denying her such rights... (The Advocate, 10.8.1901 cited in Vassell, 1993:17).

Unfortunately, Catherine McKenzie had a short life, dying in a fire in 1903. She was but one of a group of Afro-Caribbean women who during the first half of the 20th Century championed the rights of women within and through of Pan Africanism. Another example is Amy Ashwood Garvey, the first wife of Marcus Garvey, who worked with him to establish the early United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Jamaica.⁹ She was its first secretary and member of the Board of Management and was responsible for starting the Ladies Division which later developed into the Black Cross Nurses Arm¹⁰ of the organisation. Much of the later activism of Amy Ashwood outside of the UNIA took place in England, where she was heavily involved in Pan-Africanist and feminist activities as through her friendship with Sylvia Pankhurst, the Ethiopianist and feminist.

Joan French and Honor Ford-Smith credit Garveyism as being a major influence on the early 20th Century women's movement in Jamaica. They note that:

...The UNIA was the training ground for almost all the women active in on feminist issues in the 1930s. From its ranks came both the feminist liberals and the women of the working classes who were active in the 1938 period. It offered a chance for both to organise in women's arms and to be in the leadership of the organisation internationally and locally. It did not however challenge the image of woman as essentially a housewife and social worker. For this reason it did not offer a completely clear path of resistance to the colonial definition of woman (French and Ford-Smith, 1985:226).

At the same time they recognised that women in this movement did not simply follow Garvey but created their own image of themselves.¹¹ In a later work Ford-Smith suggests that it was the contradiction between the stress on Black masculinity at the formal level of the movement and the dependence on women's work to build the organisation that may have contributed to the emergence of Black feminist activism in Jamaica in the 1930s (Ford-Smith, 2004:30).

⁸ The Association had as its aim to: 'secure [for] Africans and their descendants throughout the world their civil and political rights; ameliorate the condition of our oppressed brethren in the continents of Africa, America and other parts of the world by promoting efforts to secure effective legislation; encourage our people in education, industrial and commercial enterprise; foster friendly relations between Caucasian and African races;' ... (Lewis, 1977:63)

⁹ Also known as the Garvey Movement, with branches all over the Caribbean including Cuba.

¹⁰ Based on the example of the Red Cross

¹¹ Honor Ford-Smith, "Women and the Garvey Movement in Jamaica", Rupert Lewis and Patrick Bryan(eds) *Garvey: His Work and Impact*, ISER-Mona, and UWI Extra Mural Studies Department, Kingston, 1988, p. 77).

Garvey's deportation from the United States to Jamaica in 1927 occurred at a pivotal time in the development of the early movement there. According to Ford-Smith, his ideas influenced the anti-racist, feminist practice of working and middle-class women activists such as Adina Spencer, Aggie Bernard, Madame de Mena, Una Marson and Amy Bailey of the Jamaica Women's Liberal Club (Ford-Smith, 2004: 30).¹² For instance, Amy Bailey in an interview with Ford-Smith acknowledged Garvey's influence in the inclusion of the study of Negro history in the objectives of the Women's Liberal Club, and in her focus on Black women as a group (Ford-Smith, 2004:30).

Henrice Altink identifies "colour discrimination" as one of the issues addressed by Jamaica's "black feminists" in the inter-war period, especially in the writings of Una Marson and Amy Bailey (Altink, 2006: 7-9). She notes that many of these women had experienced the limitations of their own life prospects due to their dark skin colour. But colour discrimination was not only an issue in relation to Black and White women or Black and White men, but also among women of various 'shades'. Colour and shade distinctions may have had a similar impact on feminist solidarity then as 'race' and ethnic differences may be having today. At the same time therefore as these feminists sought the

Valorisation of their colour and 'race' they collaborated with. "White" feminists such as May Farquharson in Jamaica and Beatrice Greig and Gema Ramkeesoon in Trinidad and Tobago, and worked to combat shadism and colour prejudice among African-descended women within their societies (SISTREN Research and Wilmot, 1990; Reddock 1994, Altink, 2006).¹³

In her writing in Jamaican periodicals and newspapers, Amy Bailey drew attention to discrimination against black women in urban employment for example in the case cited by French and Ford-Smith below:

"The case is mentioned of an extract from one of Amy Bailey's articles in The Newspaper entitled "Not Wanted" where she confronted employers about not hiring black women:

At one place, TIMES STORE, the owner told me 'we have them, Miss Bailey, but they are upstairs.' 'Well put them downstairs, Mr, Durie, we want to see them.' (Cited in French and Ford-Smith, 1985:249)

This issue also was raised by Trinidadian, Audrey Jeffers, in different contexts including her address to the First Conference of British West Indies and British Guianese Women Social Workers in Port of Spain in 1936 (Reddock, 1994:173) - the failure to employ women of dark skin colour or to relegate them to the back of commercial establishments (Reddock, 1994:172).

This combination of feminist action with race and class consciousness reflects how difficult it was for Afro-Caribbean women to separate these three aspects of their experience. Race, class and

¹² Henrice Altink identifies in addition women like – Eulalie Domingo, Mary Morris-Knibb and Aimee Webster among this group of what she terms 'black feminists.' Henrice Altink, "The Misfortune of being black and female": Black Feminist Thought in Interwar Jamaica", *Thirdspace*, Volume 5, Issue 2, January 2006, p. 1

¹³ This may still be relevant in parts of the region today.

gender all intersected to influence their lives, having what King (1988) calls a ‘multiplicative effect (King,1988).’ For example, Henrice Altink refers to Bailey and others’ writings on gender discrimination in the workplace, which was sometimes addressed on its own but often conflated with colour discrimination.

Another example of an early Caribbean feminist who addressed issues of race was Una Marson, a playwright, poet and journalist who in 1929, edited Jamaica’s first women’s publication, *The Cosmopolitan*, the official organ of the Jamaica Stenographers Association. Living in London between 1932 and 1935, she acted as secretary of the League of Coloured Peoples, which provided her with opportunities for involvement in Pan-Africanist activities and to meet West Indian and African students and activists. Along with her increased exposure to Pan-Africanist organisations and ideas, Marson was also in touch with women’s organisations such as the Women’s Freedom League, the Women’s Peace Crusade, the British Commonwealth League and the Women’s International Alliance.

In 1936, Marson returned to Jamaica where, with Amy Bailey and others, she contributed to the burgeoning feminist and black consciousness among sections of the middle classes: she was one of a number of Afro-Jamaican feminists, including Eulalie Domingo, Adina Spencer and Mary Morris-Knibb, whose writings in *The Daily Gleaner*, *Public Opinion* and other periodicals raised a range of issues related to colour, gender and class discrimination in 1930s Jamaica. For instance her play, *Pocomania*, written in 1937, was seen as a breakthrough at the time because of its use of Jamaican language and its focus on Afro-Christian popular religion. As Ford-Smith notes:

Angry, unladylike middle-class black women searching out the secret knowledges of Afro-Christian religions were officially denigrated in the 1930s, seen as slightly ridiculous or out of control. Black female anger and cross-class solidarity were as taboo in women’s organisations as they were in the wider world (Ford-Smith, 2004:31).

Marson’s early poem, *Kinky Hair Blues*, addressed a continuing theme in the lives and identities of African-descended women, namely the politics of hair. In the poem she took a then unpopular stance against “ironed” or straightened Afro-hair consistent with her stance in her political and creative work, to make political points about African culture and peoples. As noted by her biographer, Delia Jarrett-Macauley:

In *Songs of Africa* (1930) she applauds the music of Afro-Creole people of the Americas that fosters race pride and the determination to be free. Fragments of colour, people, places and warmth form an intricate pattern. Again, in *There will come a time* (1931) she cries out for racial equality as the foundation of her dream of the oneness of the world’s diverse peoples. Her poem *To Mothers* (1931) is a praise-song to women of all races seeking to build a world of equality. Years later, this theme is celebrated in *The Moth and the Star* (1937), her third collection of poems. Her use of local tones and voices never really satisfied Black bourgeois tastes and attitudes. Liberal whites were uncomfortable with her affirmation that black is beautiful. You are struck by the writer’s searingly courageous stance. The mass of Marson’s literary output shows that her political views were no sudden eruption. They were always at hand strengthening her Black poetics. (Jarret-Macauley, 22.11.03).

Audrey Jeffers of Trinidad and Tobago is another example of these early Pan-Africanist feminists,

who combined efforts for her race with those for her sex. Jeffers, a member of Trinidad's then small Black land-owning class, was an early member of the Society of Peoples of African Origin, formed by fellow Trinidadian F.E.M. Hercules, and was later founder of the Coterie of Social Workers, the leading organisation of 'black and coloured' middle-class women of the 1920s-1940s.

The Coterie campaigned for women's right to secondary education, for the introduction of women police and for the Divorce Act. They also established social work programmes focussed on women and children. Like its Jamaican counterpart, The Women's Liberal Club, the Coterie raised issues of racial discrimination, for instance calling for increased employment of black women in white collar occupations. Jeffers was the honoured guest at the Negro Progress Congress in British Guiana to mark the 100th Anniversary of freedom from slavery, and chose then to address the women's session of the convention on the topic, 'Women and their Responsibility to the Race' (Comma-Maynard, 1971:93). Referring to Jane, mother of Booker T. Washington, Jeffers called on women to take a serious view of life and come forward to "help in the new epoch of the reconstruction of the race (Comma-Maynard, 1971:92-93)."

In May 1936, the Coterie and Audrey Jeffers hosted the First Conference of British West Indian and British Guianese Women Social Workers in Port of Spain.¹⁴ In her presentation, "The Urgent Needs of Women in Trinidad and Tobago," Jeffers, like Amy Bailey in Jamaica, highlighted employment discrimination against educated black women, referring, to her own private census which had found that there were only three such women in the government service, six to eight on the whole of Frederick Street,¹⁵ none in the groceries and only two in the leading business firms. For the majority of these women, the only alternatives were teaching and nursing, and women in small stores worked 13-14 hours daily and earned only \$1.50 per week (Trinidad Guardian, 20, May, 1936: 8).

One of the few Indo-Trinidadian women to be associated with the Coterie and the Caribbean women's movement at this time was Gema Ramkeesoon. Ramkeesoon had been influenced by Beatrice Greig, a white feminist labour and literary activist whose wide-ranging interests included the people and literature of India. In the early 20th Century, Greig, in the absence of visible activists for Indo-Trinidadian women, became a voice on their behalf. As a regular contributor to *The East Indian Weekly*, she consistently raised issues related to Indian women such as girls' education, child marriage and others which were at the time difficult for Indian women to raise themselves (Reddock, 1995:105-106). Suggesting that for Indo-Caribbean women as well the link between race and gender was also important, Ramkeesoon together with Patrick Solomon in 1949 established the short-lived Indo-Caribbean Cultural Council to work towards improving relations among the two major ethnic groups in Trinidad and Tobago. Ramkeesoon was also a member of the Welcoming Committee established for the visit of Amy Ashwood Garvey in 1953 and had been present during her visit to Barbados just prior to this. At the launch of the Barbados Women's Alliance, which she chaired, Gema Ramkeesoon paid tribute to Marcus Garvey and spoke of the future advancement Africans and Indians could achieve by marching side by side (Reddock, 1994:248).

¹⁴ Representatives from British Guiana, Barbados, St. Lucia and Grenada attended.

¹⁵ Frederick Street is the main shopping street in the capital, Port of Spain.

What is clear from the above is that issues of gender and race were central to the work and consciousness of the early feminists of the Anglophone Caribbean, but in a very different way from that which was to develop later in the 20th Century. Their work was directed primarily at the hegemonic white plantocratic and colonial elite, and opposed to the hierarchical system based on race, colour and class which supported it. Little attention was paid to relations between the majority African-descended population and other ethnic groups such as the Indian populations in Guyana and Trinidad or other minority populations. Although small numbers of women of these minority groups were involved in the women's movement, albeit in very limited ways.

This was possibly because the race and colour discrimination which Afro-Caribbean women faced overshadowed their relations with women of other ethnic groups which were not considered problematic at that time. Additionally the Indigenous and Indo-Caribbean populations at this time were primarily rural. But in Guyana, already by the mid-20th Century, Indo-Guyanese women were beginning to become more visible although still to a limited degree in Women's Political and Economic Organization (WPEO) formed by Winifred Gaskin and Janet Jagan (Peake, 1993:115). The alignment of the successor organisation the Women's Progressive Organisation (WPO) with the socialist Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) meant that with the eventual 'racial split' in that party the middle-class women's movement was divided along 'racial' lines (Peake, 1993:115-116)

Unfortunately, in terms of class relations, some of the middle-class feminists saw their relationship to working-class women more as one of charity than solidarity, although issues related to the working conditions of working-class women were raised. They saw this relationship as an important means to improve the standing of their 'race' and, accordingly, many of their social work programmes sought to 'uplift 'poor' women' to where they felt they should be. In Jamaica for example, as early as 1929, calls were made by Una Marson for unemployment bureaus and private and public work schemes to increase work opportunities for working-class women (Altink, 2006:3). Similarly, in her articles, "Sweated Labour," Bailey drew attention to the working conditions of female factory workers, and even called on better off women to support the establishment of a minimum wage and improved working conditions (Altink, 2006:3-4). Their actions in this regard, however aimed more at maintaining the status quo than transforming it (Altink, 2006:13). Theirs could be described as a kind of liberal feminism which sought integration of black women (and men) into the established system rather than a more radical politics. It is therefore not surprising that while advocating the right for enfranchised Black women such as themselves to be elected to public office, they did not advocate universal adult suffrage, promoted by Bahamian/Jamaican Pan-Africanist, Robert Love, as early as 1901 (See Reddock, 2001). Instead, in Trinidad and Tobago in the 1940s, Jeffers and Marceline Archibald, as members of the Franchise Committee, voted against immediate Universal Adult Suffrage, using Jeffers now famous phrase: "we must hasten slowly." This was denounced by working-class feminist activist Christina Lewis in these words:

As a woman and West Indian I feel happy at times to see two members of my sex on our local Legislatures, but I often feel ashamed when the vote is taken to find them voting against the elected representatives of the people. Given the opportunity I will return poor and hardworking persons who know the pains of labour into the Legislature... most of the Intellectuals we voted to represent our

views have joined hands against the interest of the working-class. (*The People* 26.3.49).

Lewis, working-class feminist activist was a member of the Butler Movement¹⁶; had attempted to form a Domestic Servants Union and had established the Caribbean Women's National Assembly in the 1950s. This organisation introduced the celebration of March 8, International Women's Day in the 1950s and campaigned for paid maternity leave as well as the banning of imported comic strips – Mandrake and Phantom which they considered racist in their depiction of people of African descent. Lewis, was also associated with the socialist West Indian Independence Party(WIIP) and was investigated for seditious activities in the 1950s. Her activism and foresight, is an example of working-class feminism which also characterised the first half of the 20th Century and whose influence should also be acknowledged.

Race, Ethnicity and the 2nd Wave

Issues of race and ethnicity were also in clear focus at the period when Caribbean feminism re-emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s. This was a period when the call for Black Power and black consciousness rippled through the region. It was also a time of social upheaval on other fronts including the Marxist, socialist and New Left movements; national liberation struggles in Africa, and other social movements in Asia and Latin America. Not surprisingly, as with the Anti-Slavery movements in Britain and the USA at the end of the 19th Century, many of the women who would emerge as leaders of the new women's movement would come out of the socialist-oriented and left movements of the 1970s and 1980s.

The Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA)

After the renewed Black consciousness movements of the 1960s and early 1970s, there was a discernible shift in emphasis in political discourse from 'race' to 'class' by the late 1970s and 1980s. This period was one of the high points of socialist and anti-imperialist organising among the young and not so young in the region. Even governments took pro-socialist and anti-imperialist positions, as did revolutionary Cuba, democratic socialist Jamaica and socialist Grenada. Much of the early 2nd Wave activism was carried out by women in organisations associated with left organisations. These included: the Committee of Women for Progress (CWP) in Jamaica; The Committee for the Development of Women in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (CDW), Concerned Women for Progress (CWP) and The Democratic Women's Association in Trinidad and Tobago; and later Red Thread in Guyana.

Yet with time those links between women activists and the Left would be broken as the former sought more autonomous spaces for organising and for challenging male hegemony in personal and political life. The conflict between the primacy of 'class' or 'sex' was one of the main factors which led to the formation of The Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA). Many of its founding members came to feel great discomfort with their experiences in leftist

¹⁶ Working-class movement led by Grenada born Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler in Trinidad in the 1930s and 1940s.

political parties and organisations. While there was official acceptance of women's equality in these organisations, they were in actuality patriarchal structures, with strict hierarchies and few women in leadership positions. Feminist-oriented ideas in these spaces were dismissed as 'bourgeois,' 'foreign' and, as a result, 'irrelevant' and potentially divisive; consider, for instance, that one of the original group of women who discussed forming the organisation which eventually became CAFRA,¹⁷ was uncomfortable with the implications of using the word 'feminist' in the Caribbean and failed to join at its inception.

Activists genuinely concerned with women's issues and gender relations found it difficult, to continue working in the existing leftist organisations. This experience was reflected in the third of CAFRA's original objectives: "to bring a feminist perspective to bear on the work of existing progressive organisations and shatter the myth that feminism divides the struggle." Thus the original aims and objectives of CAFRA in 1985 reflect the founders' concerns at that time. Looking back now, these objectives sound quaint and strange but they did reflect the issues which were motivating us at that time. The General aims were:

- (i) To develop an approach to women's problems from the perspective of race, class and sex, specifically to show how the exploitative relationship between men and women, facilitates the continuation, maintenance and reproduction of exploitative capitalist relations, and how the capitalist system benefits from this approach:
- (ii) To develop an approach to the analysis of relations between men and women in non-capitalist and socialist societies;
- (iii) To develop the feminist movement in the entire Caribbean region; and
- (iv) To promote the inter-relationship between research and action.

In choosing, despite opposition, to use the term 'feminist' in its title, the early CAFRA membership sought to create its own definition of Caribbean feminism which was inclusive in relation to class, race or ethnicity and colour. It also sought to be pan-Caribbean in its outlook and composition. It must be asked, however, to what extent was CAFRA able to accomplish its mission, and the reasons why it failed to live up to its original ideals. Rawwida Baksh, first coordinator of CAFRA, suggests that one reason may have been the organisation's failure to articulate its analysis of the situation of all race/ethnic/class/other groups of women in the Caribbean, drawing on our multiplicity of research/activist experience. Perhaps, this was the first piece of research/action she reflects, that should have been undertaken collectively. Based on this analysis an outreach to the wider collectivities of women in our societies and region could have been developed.¹⁸

¹⁷ Others were Sonia Cuales, Honor Ford-Smith and Rhoda Reddock.

¹⁸ Correspondence on reading an earlier draft of this paper, June 2006.

Yet even at this stage, theoretical discussions were already taking place on class, which was, in the 1970s and 1980s, a much-debated concept. These often took place within a wider debate on whether Marxism and Marxist-derived concepts were relevant to Caribbean society. In the mainstream left, the critique against Marxism as a white ideology in the context of the Black Power movement and nationalist sentiments reflected a continuing tension which was mirrored in the efforts of feminists to mobilize and collaborate with women of different classes and ethnicities - the perennial problem of feminist movements. In many ways this is a problem which has not yet been solved. In Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, by the late 1980s, there was also a shift in the discourse on race and ethnicity. There was a move away from efforts to valorise 'Blackness' in the face of white cultural and economic hegemony. Instead there was an increasing assertion of Indo-Caribbean rights of citizenship, cultural representation and inclusion and Afro-Caribbean responses to this.

Diana Wells suggests that in Trinidad and Tobago, the shift to autonomous feminist politics from the more Marxist-oriented approaches resulted in a reduction of ethnic and class diversity among the membership of the new women's organisations (Wells, 2000). Though in its early days CAFRA did have a significant representation of Indo-Caribbean and women of other minorities¹⁹ — for instance, the first Co-ordinator, Rawwida Baksh (Soodeen) was an Indo-Trinidadian of Muslim background — it ultimately failed in its outreach to the wider population of women of the region. Rawwida herself observes in 1998:

Further, feminist organizing has also been largely viewed as the domain of African women, rather than as a space in which women of different racial/cultural identities and experiences interact. Women who have been 'left out' in this process include the remaining indigenous inhabitants, Indian, Chinese, and other groups such as the Indonesians. The experience of the white woman has also been left out, deliberately I think, because the discourse has emerged from the standpoint of people who have been brutally enslaved by Europeans. The white woman is hence perceived as belonging to the oppressor race, class, and culture, despite the fact that a few white women have also been part of the feminist movement in Caribbean (Baksh-Soodeen, 1998:72).

CAFRA was criticised for not adequately representing Indo-Caribbean women, for instance. In 1993, Roseanne Kanhai, an Indo-Trinidadian member, wrote a letter to CAFRA NEWS after attending the Third General Meeting in Guyana, in which she faulted the organisation for "not responding to the issues of Indian women" and not attracting them to its membership. She noted that there was a marginal presence of Indo-Caribbean women at the meeting ... and no expressions of Indian culture at the Cultural evening (Mehta, 2004:96). She did however acknowledge the potential difficulties in attracting Indian women, as they were uncomfortable with certain kinds of activism and shied away from confrontation especially when they constituted a minority (Wells: 2000:158).

¹⁹ These included Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen, coordinator for many years, Ramabai Espinet, Patricia Mohammed, Gaietry Pargass, Indra Chandernal first national representative for Guyana and more recently Sharda Ganga of Suriname and Gabrielle Hosein of Trinidad and Tobago. Euro-Caribbean women included - Honor Ford-Smith, founding member, Nan Peacocke and Tina Johnson.

Diane Wells, based on her study of cross-ethnic women's networks in Trinidad in the late 1990s, suggests that there may have been other reasons for such difficulties. She argued that many of the groups and organisations claiming to be feminist in the 1970s and 1980s comprised predominantly Afro-Trinidadian women, many of whom were educated abroad or at the University of the West Indies. These Afro-Caribbean women activists came from a tradition of public social action by women, which included the formation of and participation in women's organisations. Feminism in this context was therefore seen as part of an Afro-Trinidadian version of womanhood which some Indian women were not willing to adopt (Wells, 2000:187). This argument resonates with the antipathy held by many African-American women to the idea of feminism in the USA, where it was constructed as a primarily white concern, hence resistance to the label by many African-American women activists²⁰ and the emergence of the term, 'womanism.'

Using a culturalist argument, Wells suggests that the family structures and social control exercised over Indo-Trinidadian women's lives at that time also worked against their involvement in activist organisations. According to her:

Meetings frequently required travelling to Port of Spain or the East West Corridor where few Indo-Trinidadians lived...Another source of conflict was that these hours were important times for Indian women to be with their families, whether or not they had their own careers. One Indian woman who was specially invited to an organisation's annual retreat ...responded to the invitation in the following way: "No Indian woman who is married and has children can spend an overnight away from her family" She did, however attend the day sessions and drove two hours in each direction to fulfil her obligations. "Feminists, the perception goes, do not have families" (Wells, 2000:188).²¹

The reality is however those feminists do have families but that family structures are differently organised. While it is true that marriage is the norm for most Indo-Trinidadian women it was less so for their Afro-Trinidadian counterparts. Even for women in a marriage or other unions, there was greater freedom of movement and family support for child care and so on for the latter group. Indo Trinidadian women by that time had already begun to challenge many of these stereotypical norms, increasing numbers were gaining employment outside of the home and were physically mobile with their own networks e.g. attending the transgressive 'chutney' events in large numbers.²²

Most of the Afro-Trinidadian women in the activist groups at the time, however, were not married although many did have children and, similarly, "many of the Indo-Trinidadian women who have been attracted to the more active organisations, which correspondingly involve time commitment, have generally been women who have rejected the traditional Indian family life – or were in the process of constructing new kinds of family and kinship systems (Wells:2000:189). She concluded:

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion of this see R. Reddock, "Conceptualising Difference in Caribbean Creole Societies" in Brian Meeks and Folke Lindhal(eds.) *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, The UWI Press, Kingston, 2001.

²¹ Actually this invitation was to a training programme for women's organisation organised by Workingwomen and carried out by the Women and Development Unit, UWI Barbados. The training programme was organised over four weekends at the then Farrell House Hotel in Point a Pierre.

²² I thank Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen for this insight.

In sum, the differently positioned ethnic groups have distinct relationships in the criticism they are subjected to in connection with European and American ideas of womanhood. The stakes for Indo-Trinidadian women involved in the women's movement are different from those of Afro-Trinidadian women. For the Indo-Trinidadian women, claiming the feminist identity is seen as rejecting an Indo-Trinidadian identity because a key aspect of that identity includes a gender hierarchy implicit within the family structure (Wells, 2000:190).²³

According to Wells therefore, feminism became constructed as part of an oppositional 'modern' Creole identity. Participation in this identity differs for men and women because of the complex interplay of patriarchy, ethnicity and nationhood. While Indo-Trinidadian men are free to compete with Afro-Trinidadian men in the Creole public space, Indo-Trinidadian women are held as symbolic markers of their culture, family and tradition, and therefore have a greater responsibility to maintain ethnic and cultural purity. Gabrielle Hosein identifies what she has called "differential creolisation" among young women and men in Trinidad and Tobago. Based on research among high school students in north-east Trinidad, she argues that Indo-Trinidadian young men find it easier to participate in the 'modern creole' mainstream than young women, for whom identifications with the creole had negative connotations. She found that:

Whereas males gain masculine status by becoming creolised, females lose 'Indianness', femininity and 'difference' – markers of Indo-Trinidadian female honour. Therefore, for Indo-Trinidadian (adolescent) females, the counterpart to honour is shame – associated with loss of 'community' values, disobedience to patriarchal and elder control and a move to identification with creolised masculinity (Hosein, 2001:7-8).

It is also possible that structural economic reasons may have contributed to the relatively lower participation of Indo-Trinidadian women in the feminist movement. Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana are distinct in the Anglophone Caribbean for their lower if increasing proportions of women in the labour force. Afro-Trinidadian women have a longer history of economic independence and labour force participation, albeit often at the lower economic levels, than Indo-Trinidadian women, many of whom were withdrawn from paid work after indentureship²⁴. This may be a contributing factor for their higher levels of participation, physical mobility and familiarity with the public space relative to the latter. The correlation between class and extent of participation is also supported by the fact that the majority of Indo and Afro-Trinidadian women active in the movement tended to be part of the emerging professional middle-class.

Yet for other analysts, the issue was that much of the feminist activism was located in urban areas, whereas the Indo-Caribbean population tended to be more rural based. Some organisations recognised this and focused specifically on rural and agriculturally based women. The Democratic Women's Association, a group linked to the socialist-oriented Communist Party of Trinidad and Tobago and which had Indo-Trinidadian women leaders, for example, worked primarily in rural and

²³ I would disagree with Wells there though that what was at stake were European and American ideas of womanhood. There was a serious attempt of develop Caribbean Feminist understandings.

²⁴ It is true that many Indo-Caribbean continued work on the plantations but in decreasing numbers. Many in rural areas became responsible for market gardening but were not perceived of as the main producers or farmers and were not paid an income (Reddock, 1994).

inner city communities, a strategy which allowed greater access to ‘grassroots’ Indo and Afro-Trinidadian women. In similar vein, Indrani Rampersad,²⁵ a founding member of the Hindu Women’s Association of Trinidad and Tobago would later criticise its middle-class membership and attempt to form a Rural Women’s Association in Central Trinidad in the 1990s (Wells, 2000).

In concluding, it must be stressed that all populations of women are heterogeneous with internal differences of class, age, and geographic location. The participation of middle-class educated Indo-Trinidadian women may be a reflection of their greater economic autonomy, social and spatial mobility and familiarity with the public space. Yet the focus on Indo-Trinidadian women’s absence from the regional women’s movement runs the risk of dismissing the important contributions which they have and continue to make to this movement in its activist, academic and other manifestations. In the early 21st Century, Indo-Trinidadian women’s visibility in the women’s movement has increased significantly although the movement is today facing many serious challenges.

Workingwomen and its Anti-Racism Campaign.²⁶

One community-based women’s organisation in Tunapuna, Trinidad and Tobago, Women Working for Social Progress²⁷ (Workingwomen), formed in 1985, embarked on an active but uneven programme of anti-racism work in 1996. With a predominantly Afro-Trinidadian membership, Workingwomen always had a minority of Indo-Trinidadian members and sought to reach out to this population through collaboration with other organisations, even as it sought unsuccessfully to significantly diversify its own membership.

In 1995, the first initiative taken was to issue a public statement criticising Afro-Creole Trinidadian calypsonians for racist lyrics. That year was a significant one for Trinidad and Tobago. It was the year when the first Indian-dominated government came to power and it also marked the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Indians in the Caribbean. This emergence of Indo-Trinidadian political leadership, in a ‘racially charged’ atmosphere was very traumatic for some members of the African-descended population and this was reflected in the stark lyrics of calypsonians that year. The statement by Workingwomen was followed by its decision to institute an anti-racism Campaign; the first major activity being a workshop for members to address their own internalised racism and prejudices. Women of the predominantly Indo-Trinidadian Presbyterian organisation, Church Women United, were invited to participate in these workshops, held on two Saturdays in San Fernando. One of the workshop’s aims was to train participants to do anti-racism work as well as:

To help participants understand the way racism has impacted on our lives and to begin healing from

²⁵ Later Pandita Indrani Rampersad

²⁶ Although the author was present at these events, this section draws heavily on the ethnographic work carried out by US researcher Diana Wells and published in her 2000 doctoral dissertation – *Between the Difference: Trinidadian women’s Collective Action*. The author was also a participant in these workshops and then a member of Workingwomen.

²⁷ The founding members of this group were Jacqueline Burgess, Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen and Merle Hodge,. Baksh-Soodeen however did not continue to be an active member after the first few years.

those hurts; to begin recovering from the isolation and separation that racism has forced upon us by learning to support each other and to be supported by our own groups (Wells 2000).

Based on her observation of these two workshops, Wells had this to say in relation to a request by the facilitators for participants to acknowledge their heritage:

The individuals present described their heritage in terms that included: Indian, East Indian, Carib, Venezuelan, Spanish, French Creole, European and African. Several individuals ended their descriptions with the phrase “as far as I know” underlining that in this setting some heritages are denied. It was notable that the only participants who indicated a single ethnic identity were those of Indian descent, however these individuals further made distinctions of caste or religion, nuancing this identity (Wells: 2000:202).

In other words, while the identity ‘African’ allowed for mixture, the identity ‘Indian’ did not. In relation to the methodology used she found that:

The method used for this workshop - Re-evaluation Counselling(RC) is one which calls for much public personal sharing of innermost thoughts and emotions and often leads to tears, anger and other deep emotional responses.

Although extremely effective in reaching the deep hurts and scars of internalised racism, participants found this method emotionally difficult and draining. In many ways this is because the women’s movement in Trinidad and Tobago, possibly due to its history of public politics, has little experience and indeed, in some instances, a strong mistrust of deep emotional and introspective work. In other words, there is resistance to the “touchy feely stuff.” According to Wells: “Several participants acknowledged that they were resistant to dealing with many of these issues, which had been so deeply buried and did not see the point of remembering them. ...Most found it more difficult than expected ...everyone agreed that they were not equipped to run an anti-racism workshop. The sense of participants was that this was not a function of a failure of the workshop, rather it was a function of the complexity of issues that they had confronted for the first time” (Wells,2000:202-204).

Also in 1995, Workingwomen hosted the month-long visit of Kalpana Kannabiran, an activist from ASMITA Women’s Collective of Hyderabad, India. The visit was organised to strengthen ties among women of different ethnicities in the women’s movement. Kannabiran visited and addressed women’s organisations throughout Trinidad. She was especially welcomed by Indo-Trinidadian organisations of different religious and political persuasions, and spoke forthrightly about the impact of partition and continued Hindu-Muslim conflict in India. At the end of her visit, the Hindu Women’s Organisation (HWO), an organisation founded in May 1997 with the mission to: uphold the traditions of Hinduism; project the image of the Hindu woman and to educate the general population on matters pertaining to the Hindu woman hosted a tea party in her honour (Wells, 2000:204). The HWO acknowledged the work of Workingwomen and its members in reaching out to women of the Indian community and expressed their appreciation to Dr. Kannabiran for her visit. They also called for more visits by Indian feminists and progressives, as this helped strengthen their

position locally.²⁸

The anti-racism campaign continued haphazardly, due partly to difficulties within the organisation. Nevertheless the campaign continued and in 2003, the theme of the 18th Anniversary Public Lecture was Challenging Everyday Racism in Trinidad and Tobago.²⁹ The lecture was introduced as follows:

The anti-racism campaign that we launch today comes 18 years into our organisation's experience. For all the years of our existence, Workingwomen has been concerned with issues of equity. We have 18 years' experience of activist campaigning, the underlying concern of which has been equitable treatment for all groups in the society. Notably we have carried out campaigns of public awareness on issues of IMF/World Bank Structural Adjustment, and how its economic policies affect women; the proposed introduction of Export Processing Zones; domestic violence; the use of corporal punishment in schools and the need for alternative, non-violent methods of discipline...We bring to this anti-racism campaign our concern for equity, the strength of these networks, and the diversity of our experiences and friendships" (Hodge and Rampersad, 2003:1).

The presentation included definitions of key terms like 'race' and 'racism,' and analysed the racist language of inclusion and exclusion in everyday use. It was not limited to the two majority ethnic groups in the country but also addressed attitudes towards minorities for example Tobagonians. It also examined the ways in which local language had been racialized, a practice reflected in the use of racist codes and in-group insults by co-ethnics (Hodge and Rampersad, 2003: 6-7). The lecture was carried live on two radio stations, with different ethnic audiences and Chutney/Soca star Rikki Jai spoke of his personal experiences of inter-ethnic relations. The speakers called on women of all races to join with Workingwomen in the campaign against racism. This, however, has not materialised due to the limited reach and inconsistency of the campaign itself.

While the impact of these interventions has been limited, there has been an acknowledgement of their efforts and the limitations which they face. Jacquie Burgess of Workingwomen and a former employee of CAFRA expressed frustration at the burden laid at the feet of these two organisations because of the limited efforts of other groups in the society. HWO leader, Brenda Gopeesingh, acknowledged this, lamenting the difficulties of organising women of her community even for an organisation such as the HWO. As noted by Brinda Mehta:

Burgess' frustration is echoed in the words of Brenda Gopeesingh, the public relations officer of the Hindu Women's Organisation (HWO), who criticises the movement for not growing fast enough despite the great advances made... While Gopeesingh is very critical of the Trinidadian media and its negative coverage of the HWO, she is equally frustrated by the "apathy" demonstrated by some members of her organization. However, she is also quick to recognize the fact that Indian women may not feel comfortable enough to speak out because of their feelings of inferiority and exclusion: "they don't have the gumption to come forward. It's partly cultural. The other groups have been trying to draw us out, but we don't feel comfortable coming out. We want to be part of the national mosaic, but we feel marginalised" (quoted in Sandra Chouti, *Feminism in Need of a Stronger Voice*, Trinidad

²⁸ Personal recollections.

²⁹ Delivered by members Merle Hodge and Sheila Rampersad.

Express, 27, April,2000, cited in Mehta, 2004:202).

Red Thread and “race” in Guyana

Formed in 1986 in Guyana, the Red Thread Women’s organisation with which Andaiye is associated, aims “to initiate dialogue and mutual cooperation between urban Afro-Guyanese and rural Indo-Guyanese women by demonstrating that race is not a barrier to inter-ethnic collaboration”(Andaiye,2000). Using income-generation, in this case embroidery, as their main method of empowerment and mobilization, Red Thread felt that this could serve as a legitimate reason for women’s absence from the home. Embroidery was also used as a mechanism for valorising women’s work (Andaiye, 2000) and as an “instrument of coalition weaving” (Mehta, 2004:103). “Building on the commonality of experience between Indo and Afro-Guyanese women, Red Thread was seriously committed to multiracial organising despite cultural differences” (Mehta, 2004:104). Member Danuta Radzik, recalled that for some Indo-Guyanese women it was the first time they had entered a Black community and they “would have been scared to go were it not for Red Thread (Mehta, 2004:104). Yet, in spite of these conscious efforts to work collectively with Afro and Indo-Guyanese women, they found that:

...African women were still able to take better advantage of whatever opportunities Red Thread provided them because of cultural differences and differences in household organisation. Fewer Indo-Guyanese members were involved in activities such as workshops, which required them to be out for long hours overnight outside their villages. Reasons given were security; the need to supervise their girl children and households; that these activities reduced time for earning; and they felt unable to do workshops because they had less education. (Andaiye, cited in Mehta, 2004:104).

The women did agree however that the opportunities for independent income earning had allowed them to question family restrictions, postpone marriage and children, contest male violence and acquire a new-found sense of self (Mehta,2004:104).

The efforts of women’s organisations in this regard however, receive little public acknowledgement or endorsement. Due to financial and human resource constraints, the anti-racist efforts of women’s organisations do not reach the national populations. Speaking on Women and Ethnic Conflict at a panel discussion in 2002, Andaiye noted that:

On March 8, 2002, 140 women were organized by Red Thread to march in Linden as part of a global strike of women held every year since 2000 in more than 60 countries. Most of the 140 Indo-Guyanese, Afro-Guyanese, Amerindian, and mixed race women in the march were not alive in the early 1960s. But as a new generation they were willing to subscribe to the following words in the handbill we distributed: [Ours] is a struggle of women of all races for women of all races. Because Wismar was a symbol of the terrible racial violence of the 1960s, we, the women, send out this call - Let us make Linden a symbol of how women can cross race divides and fight for a world which values all women's work and all women's lives!. Red Thread informed all the media about our action, but none of them found this attempt at reconciliation important enough to cover (Andaiye, 2004).

³⁰ This refers to a period of racial conflict and violence in Guyana in the 1960s. It has been suggested that these were externally agitated due to the socialist orientation of the ruling political party at that time. See Cheddi Jagan, *The West on Trial, The Fight for Guyana's Freedom*. New York: 1967

Women's movement activists in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana in particular are faced with a climate in which political parties continue to be ethnically defined and periods of general election become times of extreme ethnic polarization. This is despite overwhelming social and cultural collaboration and coexistence at other times. In addition, due to geographic and other reasons related to the differences in patterns of patriarchal authority, the forms and spaces of organisation available to Indo and Afro-Caribbean women vary; social expectations of these women differ in spite of numerous similarities and commonalities between them. In addition to significant differences between both groups of women, there are also significant contradictions and differences which exist within each group. In analysing women's movement activism in this context therefore, it is necessary to understand the historical origins of these divisions, the constructions of identity and citizenship and the ways in which these had been shaped in the colonial and post-colonial periods.

The efforts of both Workingwomen and Red Thread can be seen as attempts at what Nira Yuval-Davis, calls transversal politics. In examining attempts at dialogue among women of different nationalities and ethnicities, she calls for a transversal feminist politics as a corrective to universalist approaches. All feminist politics (and other forms of democratic politics) she argues, should be perceived as a form of coalition politics, "in which the differences among women are recognized and given a voice, without fixating the boundaries of the coalition in terms of 'who' we are but in terms of what we want to achieve." (Yuval-Davis, 1994:188-189). She explains further:

The idea is that each participant brings with her the rooting in her own membership and identity but at the same time tries to shift in order to put herself in a situation of exchange with women who have different membership and identity. This is called 'transversalism' - to differentiate from 'universalism' which by assuming a homogenous point of departure ends up being exclusive rather than being inclusive (Yuval-Davis, 1994:192-193).

Transversal politics allows one to develop empathy and respect for others although some positions may be reconcilable. Yuval-Davis warns however against the threat of uncritical solidarity or losing one's own perspective, which could result in the homogenising of the experiences of the 'community,' lending support to undemocratic or anti-feminist causes in the name of ethnic solidarity. Where possible, transversal politics could, she argues, prevent some of "the pitfalls of 'identity politics' of all kinds" (Yuval-Davis, 1994:193).

Conclusions

This article sought to critically review the history of women's organising around race in the Anglophone Caribbean. It acknowledges that this has been deliberate throughout the 20th Century but has shifted in emphasis, orientation and significance over time. It is predicated on the view, discussed in an earlier publication, that Caribbean feminist understandings of difference must acknowledge the ways in which our contrasted definitions construct the 'other' within ourselves. In order to know ourselves therefore, we need to know our 'other' (Reddock, 2001a). The issues of race, ethnicity, identity and difference have become more poignant now in a social and political atmosphere of heightened identity politics. The continuing weakness of the radical tradition in the

region means that class solidarities are severely challenged and get translated into a language of race.

The women's movement at the same time is facing its own challenges - the influences of a US-dominated globalised media with its own representations of feminist ideas; the problems of generational transition to younger women who are confronted with some of the same issues but in different dress; the backlash against the movement and the increased visibility of religious and ethnic fundamentalist movements which have all served to mediate the positive influences of the movement. As noted by Andaiye in a presentation on Women and Ethnic Conflict:

Even though the efforts that women have made so far to come together across race and party in defence of women who have been abused have yielded little, we have to keep working. Most women are incapable of being as cavalier as most men about "collateral damage" - perhaps because we give birth to and raise and care for the persons who constitute this "collateral damage"... It is clear that for most Guyanese women, the strongest identity they feel is their race/ethnic identity. But maybe, if we see ourselves as women, capable of thinking freely, without party blinders, we can return to the position that we reached so easily when we were organising for Beijing - that the sexual subjugation of women can never, ever, be acceptable to us, whoever the subjugator(s), whatever the cause (Andaiye, 2002).

The continuation of such efforts calls for an atmosphere where the main emotion is not one of guilt or accusation but openness, organisation and commitment to save our societies from the potential ravages of inter-ethnic conflict which we see taking place in other parts of the world. I therefore welcome this opportunity to reflect on where we are politically and theoretically and to learn the lessons of the past.

It is time for a renewed women's movement to take the process further by being leaders in a broad movement against racist and tribalist discourses and practices of inequity. Based on the analyses presented above, Caribbean women are well situated to use their theorising, their historical experience and their activism to develop new socio-political paradigms for our countries and our region which may be applicable to other parts of the world; paradigms which challenge existing stereotypes and allow us to construct broad alliances and coalitions.

Bibliography

- Alrink, Henrice. "The Misfortune of being black and female": Black Feminist Thought in Interwar Jamaica", *Thirdspace*, 5, Issue 2, (2006). Available at http://www.thirdspace.ca/vol5/5_2_Alrink.htm
- Andaiye. "The Red Thread Story: Resisting the Narrow Interests of a Broader Political Struggle," in Suzanne Francis-Brown (ed.) *Spitting in the Wind: Lessons in Empowerment from the Caribbean*, Kingston: Ian Randle, 2000.
- _____. "The Angle You Look at Determines what you See: Toward a Critique of Feminist Politics in the Caribbean," Lucille Mathurin-Mair Lecture 2002, UWI, Mona, 8, March,

- 2002.
- _____. "Notes on Women and Ethnic Conflict, Part 1," Presentation made at panel discussion on Thursday, August 15, 2002, at the National Library, Georgetown, 2004. Available at www.guyanacaribbeanpolitics.com/andaiye/andaiye.html
- Anthias, Floya and Nira Yuval-Davis. *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Baksh-Soodeen R. "Issues of Difference in Contemporary Caribbean Feminism", *Feminist Review* 59, No. 1, (1998): 74-85.
- CAFRA News. Volume 1, No. 2, (December, 1987).
- CAFRA News, Volume 2, No. 1, (March, 1988).
- Comma-Maynard, Olga. *The Brierend Pattern: The Story of Audrey Jeffers and the Coterie of Social Workers*, self published, 1971.
- Ford-Smith, Honor. "Women and the Garvey Movement in Jamaica," in Rupert Lewis and Patrick Bryan (eds). *Garvey: His Work and Impact*. Kingston, Mona: ISER, and UWI Extra Mural Studies Department, 1988.
- French, Joan and Honor Ford-Smith. *Women, Work and Organisation in Jamaica: 1900-1944*, Research Report, The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1985.
- Hodge, Merle and Sheila Rampersad. "Challenging Everyday Racism," 18th Anniversary Lecture, Women Working for Social Progress, Tunapuna, Trinidad and Tobago, 2003.
- _____. "Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular: Performing Engendered Nationalisms in the UNIA in Jamaica," *Interventions*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (2004): pp. 18-44.
- Hosein, Gabrielle. "Too Much Freedom and Mixing": Gender, Generation and Differential Creolisation." Paper presented to the 27th Annual Conference of the Caribbean Studies Association, Nassau, The Bahamas, 27, May – 1 June, 2001.
- Jarrett-Macauley, Delia. *The Life of Una Marson: 1905 – 1965*, Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998.
- _____. "The Life of Una Marson 1905-1965," Available at www.black-history-month.co.uk/articles/una_marson.html. viewed on 1, December 2005.
- Jayawardena, Kumari. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, London: Zed Books. 1986.
- Kanhai, Roseanne. "From Matikor to Caribbean Dougl'a Feminism," Lunchtime Seminar presented at Centre for Gender and Development Studies, UWI, St. Augustine, February, 1999.
- King, Deborah. Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology. Deborah K. King. *Signs*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1988: 42-72.
- Mehta, Brinda. *Diasporic Dislocations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the Kali Pani*. Kingston: The UWI Press, 2004.
- Mohammed, Patricia "A Social History of Post-Migrant Indians in Trinidad 1917-1947" Ph.D dissertation, The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1994.
- Peake, Linda. "The Development and Role of Women's Political Organizations in Guyana" in Janet H. Momsen (ed.) *Women and Change in the Caribbean*, Kingston, Bloomington and London: Ian Randle, Indiana University Press, James Currey, 1993.
- Reddock, Rhoda. "The Primacy of Gender in Race and Class" in J. Edward Greene, (ed) *Race, Class and Gender in the Future of the Caribbean*, Mona: ISER, 1993.

- Reddock, Rhoda. *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago: A History*, London: Zed Books, 1994.
- _____. "The Early Women's Movement in the Caribbean" in Saskia Wieringa (ed.) *Subversive Women: Women's Movements in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean*, London New Delhi; Zed Books: Kali for Women, 1995.
- _____. "Conceptualising Difference in Caribbean Feminist Theory" in Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl (eds) *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, Kingston: The UWI Press, 2001a.
- _____. "The First Mrs Garvey and Others: Pan-Africanism and Feminism in the Early British Colonial Caribbean." Paper presented to international conference on "Henry Sylvestre Williams and Pan-Africanism: A Retrospective & Projection", January 4-13, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus, 2001b.
- SISTREN Research and Cynthia Wilmot. *Miss Amy and Miss May*, Videotape, 40 minutes, Colour, VHS, Kingston, 1990.
- Tang Nain, Gemma. "Black Women, Sexism and Racism: Black and Anti-Racist Feminism" *Feminist Review*, No. 37, Spring (1991).
- Wells, Diane E. "Between Difference: Trinidadian Women's Collective Action." Doctoral Dissertation, New York: New York University, 2000.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. "Women, Ethnicity and Empowerment" in Kum Kum Bhavnani and Ann Phoenix (eds.) *Shifting Identities, Shifting Racisms: A Feminism and Psychology Reader*, Berkeley, London and New Delhi: Sage, 1994.



ISSUE 1 • April 2007

A Space of Their Own: Indian Women and Land Ownership in Trinidad 1870-1945

Shaheeda Hosein

Abstract

Few places in the world offered 19th century women the opportunity that the British colony of Trinidad did: the chance to own land. Under the Land Commutation Scheme of 1869, the Indians who migrated there to work on the sugar cane estates for periods of five years or more were offered money and small parcels of land in lieu of their return passage to India. This paper shows how the scheme, and the sugar crisis in the West Indies, opened the door to a new world of opportunity for the Indian in Trinidad. By buying parcels of land together in certain areas, the immigrant who had never felt at home or accepted there was finally able to carve out and recreate the village he had left behind in India. For the Indian woman who inherited land from her parents, or who could use her savings from estate work to buy small lots on estates that were being broken up and sold, it was the chance to attain economic independence by cultivating her own land. Owning land also gave her social status in the community and more power within her own family. In some instances, it was the means by which she was able to walk away from an abusive marriage. As the keepers of the Hindu and Muslim faiths, women also tended to embrace their land as a space on which they could openly celebrate their religious festivals and weddings. Women saw the land as the source of her family's wealth and prosperity, and perhaps, more than the Indian men, saw the need to respect and preserve the environment and pass on these values to their children.

Introduction

One of the most significant activities in which rural Indian women in Trinidad were engaged over the period 1870 to 1945 was the acquisition and ownership of arable land. Not only did it afford them economic independence, but also to a great extent, it empowered them within the Indian community. In fact, acquisition and ownership of arable land was the fulcrum on which the autonomy of the Indian woman rested. It underlay her importance within the domestic sphere and her ability to engage in independent economic activities that further enhanced her autonomy within her family and her community. The strongest Indian women were those who could combine all three factors – land acquisition, the economic activities that it facilitated, and their role in the domestic sphere. Each of these reinforced the other, but the basis of power lay in the women's ability to acquire and use arable land. Up to the 1940s in Trinidad, Indian women were acquiring land while other women could not, or were doing so on a very limited scale.

One common stereotype of Indians in Trinidad, particularly after 1870, was that they possessed an insatiable appetite for land. When the opportunity for land acquisition and ownership became more available from 1870 onwards, significant numbers of Indian men and women jumped at it. The trend continued well into the 1940s. For a people who by 1900 had started to settle permanently in a country to which they had first come as transient migrant labour, the acquisition of land was a necessary prelude to settlement. With money saved from their wages as estate labourers, they invested in land, the sale of which was one of the few opportunities offered to them. It was an investment, moreover, that could be passed on to succeeding generations. At the turn of the century, when an increasing number of estates in Trinidad were being sub-divided into small lots and put on the market because of the continuing crisis in the sugar industry, an increasing number of Indian females became landowners. Although there is no clear evidence as to what the Indian female wanted from the migration process, like the Indian man, she considered land to be a wise investment.

When eventually they were able to move off the estates at the end of their term of indenture, Indians instinctively sought to acquire land, a space of their own. The barrack system had left an indelible mark on the Indian's psyche. In trying to form communities where they could restore kinship patterns and cultural practices, land ownership was a crucial first step. In addition, agriculture was the main income earner in the country, and private ownership of arable land meant economic and social independence from the largely hostile wider society

Land acquisition schemes

In 1869, the governor of Trinidad, Sir Arthur Gordon, instituted a system known as the Land Commutation Scheme whereby Indian immigrants could receive Crown lands and money in lieu of their return passage to India after their indenture had ended. This scheme became the catalyst for the acquisition of land by Indians in Trinidad.

Even before Gordon put forward his scheme, however, it had already been noted that some Indians who had completed their indenture in the island were desirous of acquiring property and becoming permanent settlers. Significantly, they made full cash payments rather than instalments, which meant that they regarded land as an investment; they were investing their savings in land. It is also significant that they wanted to settle together, as small communities among those with whom they were familiar, perhaps to form enclaves where they could reconstruct their identity as Indians, and from which they could deal with the wider society. It was a society, after all, that they had felt isolated from since their arrival and certainly up until the early 1900s.

The Land Commutation Scheme was short-lived, in active operation for only two decades; and even within this time, only sporadically so. Several factors contributed to its faltering operation, among these was official hesitancy by the colonial authorities to allocate lands specifically for Indians. There had been a public outcry at what was seen as the favourable treatment of Indians. The scheme did meet with success, however, benefiting both Indians and the island as a whole as the following report indicates:

The number of Indian immigrants who have commuted their return passage for grants of land or of money or of both up to the 30th. September, 1874, is 1,240. Of these 739 received 10 acre allotments. Their wives (175) have received money grants of 5 Pounds each, and 332 men have (received) 5 Pounds and 5 acres.

These settlements... serve as a centre of attraction to the Coolies from other colonies, including numbers (from) Guadeloupe and Martinique. The direct money saving irrespective of the future, by the establishment of these settlers, has been up to date over 12,000 Pounds besides an equal number of acres in course of cultivation and paying rates towards local revenue...A thousand houses and gardens owned by labourers contribute far more to the safety of the country, to the security of property and to a wholesome social state than one great acreage owned by one man, there being no conservative force so great as the possession of property by a large proportion of the people. (This) augers well for its (Trinidad) tranquil future...In the tropics to suitable races the possession of a few acres in fee simply assures the moderately industrious, perfect independence with comparative affluence...¹

Under the Land Commutation Scheme, Indian females were to receive five pounds, money that could evidently be used to purchase land. The women, like their male counterparts, were eager to invest their savings in land. In Trinidad there were no regulations on who could buy land and how much. In this situation, the authorities' refusal to recognise marriages that were performed solely according to religious rites worked in favour of the Indian woman. Unregistered marriages were deemed legal by the state. This meant that an Indian woman could own, inherit, purchase and dispose of property as "femme sole", without the intervention or consent of her husband. The fact that, legally, their property belonged solely to them could possibly have been further inducement for Indian women to purchase land.

¹ Council Paper #35: Agent General of Immigrants Report for 1874.

Avenues for land acquisition 1900-1945

At the close of the 19th century, the sugar industry throughout the British West Indies was in crisis, and an increasing number of estates were being put on the market. In fact, from as early as the mid-1870s there began to appear in both the *Trinidad Royal Gazette* and other newspapers, notices such as the following:

For Sale

1. The "Laurel Hill" and "Cane Farm" estates situated in the Ward of Tacarigua will be sold either together or separately.
2. Woodford Lodge – 600 acres of land: 300 acres in canes and 50 acres in fenced pastures. Cultivation in good order. Buildings in thorough repair. Last sugar crop reaped to 1st May present was 405 hogsheads. The estate is well-stocked having 40 American mules and 18 head of Creole working cattle.²

Purchasing an entire working estate was out of the reach of the majority of Indians. However, by 1900, in an attempt to recoup losses, owners of sugar estates that were no longer profitable began to cut up their acreage into smaller lots and sell them at 10 shillings per lot. Many Indians bought up lots within their means, including a significant number of women, as an examination of the Assessment Rolls revealed. The Rolls showed that large estates were divided into smaller lots and that in certain areas, Lower Caroni Ward, for example, the purchasers were almost exclusively Indians. Estates such as Belle Vue, Ste. Helena, Mon Plaisir and La Florida were divided into pieces ranging from one lot to three acres.

Around 1903, Mon Plaisir Estate in Central Trinidad went out of production and was apportioned and sold to private individuals. A large number of Indian women bought lots from this estate. The Assessment Roll shows for example that Doolareah had purchased one acre and one lot. Quite a significant number of Indians. Both male and female bought one or two lots. Jassodra had bought one and a quarter lots and erected a house in 1918 valued at 25 pounds³. Others, like Butania, had bought one lot on which she erected a four-room house. She subsequently sold this piece of property to an ex-indenture female Indian, Gangeiya. Where land was available in small, affordable portions, Indian women took full advantage of the opportunity. An examination of land deeds of the period also confirmed that they also bought land from estates. Deed #1663 of June 1910 reveals that Raghwantia, a free female Indian labourer, had purchased from Trinidad Estates Company Limited a parcel of land comprising one lot at Caroni Village for the sum of \$35. The land deeds also confirmed that Indians were buying land from other Indians. Land deed #1372 of April 1903 was made for Bisnee, a single woman who had purchased two lots of land at Cunupia from Buckreediah for the sum of \$40. Buckreediah had purchased that parcel of Crown land for the sum of \$9.60.

² 299/25. *Trinidad Royal Gazette*, 1875: Report of the Crown Lands Office re: Ward of Montserrat.

³ We need a footnote on the currency being used i.e. why the shift between pounds and dollars, plus value of each in today's currency.

In addition to these women, some of whom had relatively substantial landholdings and who increased their property over time, there were many others who from the late 1890s and well into the 1920s owned and paid taxes for pieces of land ranging from one to two lots. Evidently, these lots were bought from the government, which had continued with the sale of relatively small portions of land to Indians in specially designated areas.

From the evidence, it is clear that there were substantial numbers of rural Indian women who had the wherewithal to make purchases of land, build houses and continue to pay taxes on their properties year after year. This purchasing power came from several sources. As an integral part of the agricultural labour force in Trinidad, rural Indian women worked for wages which, although not substantial, provided not only a means of subsistence, but also purchase money for land. From their meagre wages, they saved and invested in land, among other things.

Another way in which Indian women acquired money was through succession. Throughout the period, the government was met with frequent requests from Indian women to inherit their deceased husbands' savings. Notices, such as the following, appeared with great frequency in the *Trinidad Royal Gazette*:

Savings Bank Notice. A female Indian Immigrant named Allagamah, the widow of Mahomed, an Indian Immigrant lately residing on the St. Clair estate and now deceased, has applied for payment of the sum of 23 pounds, 15 shillings, and 10 pence deposited in the Savings Bank by Mahomed, together with the interest thereon. Notice is hereby given that the said sum of 23 pounds, 15 shillings and 10 pence and the interest thereon will be paid to the said Allagamah at the expiration of thirty days from the date hereof, there being shown no reason to the contrary. 19th August, 1868.⁴

Another notice indicated that a mother was laying claim to her son's money:

Savings Bank Notice. A female Indian Immigrant named Amehcooty, the mother of Balahistanen, an Indian Immigrant lately residing on the Caroni Estate, now deceased, has applied for payment of the sum of 13 pounds, 10 shillings and 10 pence deposited in the Savings Bank by Balahistanen, together with the interest thereon. Notice is hereby given, that the said sum of 13 pounds, 10 shillings and 10 pence and the interest thereon will be paid to the said Amehcooty at the expiration of thirty days from the date hereof, there being shown no reason to the contrary. April, 1867.⁵

These amounts were typical of what Indians had saved during their stay in Trinidad. It is not unreasonable to suggest that an Indian woman, faced with the prospect of life on her own, in the case where her husband had died, would seek to invest a portion of that money in land, particularly since it was available at prices she could afford and would offer a livelihood.

In addition to purchasing their own land, Indian women also acquired land through inheritance. Until the first two decades of the 20th century, the government of Trinidad was besieged by petitions, largely from female Indians, seeking waivers of escheat on

⁴ CO299/18: *Trinidad Royal Gazette*, 1868

⁵ CO299/17: *Trinidad Royal Gazette*, 1867

property formerly owned by their deceased husbands or other relatives. In nearly all these cases, the deceased had not left wills and therefore had died intestate. Indians were not in the habit of making wills. Here, the condition of illegitimacy that resulted from the non-registration of Indian marriages worked to exacerbate the problems heirs faced when seeking inheritances. If the owner died intestate, the land automatically reverted to the Crown. Those seeking to lay claim to it, usually the wife of the deceased, had to petition the state. Some of these women made the petition on behalf of their minor children and were given the titles to the land until their children came of age. The government did not recognise the cohabitation rights of individuals, that is, the rights of two people living together in a common-law union. Hence, a situation developed whereby the women would most commonly petition the Crown for their husbands' property on behalf of their children.

In all the petitions for land, Indian women pointed out that they had lived with the deceased for a considerable length of time, and that they had, by dint of hard work, helped in the acquisition of the property. More often than not, the Crown granted the waiver in favour of the female petitioner, although it was not unusual for the Crown to make extensive inquiries into any other heirs that the dead man might have left. In some instances where heirs were found, whether in Trinidad or India, they would be awarded the property or the proceeds from its sale. Since cohabitation rights were not recognised, it is not surprising such situations occurred. However, this was not the norm. It is noteworthy that if Indians arrived in Trinidad already married, whether registered or not, they were regarded as legally married.

It is not difficult to see that there might have arisen, the notion that the law was bent on taking land away from Indian women. In this sense, the law ignored the equity of women in relationships. Such a notion may also have spurred Indian women to buy their own land. The Assessment Rolls for the Lower Caroni Ward show clearly that a number of women acquired their properties through inheritance. Rasmee acquired three acres, 53 perches of land and a house at Caroni Savannah in 1903. The Registrar noted that:

The land was in the name of one Beelar who died intestate about one year and three months ago – no children. Rasmee lived with Beelar for thirty years previous to his death. No credit on the land and no permanent cultivation. Land transferred to Rasmee. Another quarree of land added in 1905.⁶

In some instances women inherited land from their parents. Bacheah inherited 10 acres of land and one house at Madras Settlement from her mother, Soomareah, who died intestate in 1905. The land was originally granted to Beharree, the father of Soomareah, in lieu of a return passage to India. Mantranie, Basmateah and Bagmaneah inherited three acres of land and two houses from their mother, Sookbassiah, on her death in 1923.⁷ The oral evidence bears out the fact that female Indians did inherit land from their parents. This was especially so where there was an absence of male heirs:

⁶ Assessment Rolls for Lower Caroni Ward, 1903

⁷ Assessment Rolls for Lower Caroni Ward, 1923

My father give me this piece of land here. He give me this when I went to live with me husband. He (her husband) did not have any house or land and thing. He didn't have nothing really. So me father give me this. Everything here he did put in my name.⁸

Women's status and the land

Agarwal argues that one of the basic requirements for improving the status of women is to enable them to acquire land.⁹ In this way, the women become agents of change and contributors to development. Land has durability and a certain permanence that no other asset possesses. Within the context of early 20th century Trinidad, owning land was one way in which the basic needs of both the individual, male and female, and the family could be met. Even if the Indians in rural Trinidad were materially poor, their ownership of arable land meant that they could feed themselves. The daily diet of the rural Indian labouring class consisted mainly of vegetables that they grew themselves such as tomatoes, okras, peas and beans; as well as staples of rice and roti (unleavened flat bread made from wheat flour). Meat was eaten only on weekends and on special occasions, and this was usually chicken that they raised themselves. Fish was also part of their diet, obtained either from the rivers, or from the sea for those who lived on the coast.

Land ownership provided the Indians in Trinidad with a means of sustenance. They could grow crops and raise livestock both for domestic consumption and for sale. Some rural Indian women were also among a large number of cocoa contractors, particularly in the 1920s.¹⁰ Generally, though, Indian women tended to engage in market gardening, or were rice and cane farmers. They preferred it to any of the other agricultural activities:

I buy land in Pasea, rice land. I did have a 1/2 acre of land we use to get good yield from it. But in them days is penny a pound I sell rice. We use to grind it and carry it in the market and sell penny a cup.

Then I did buy land, hill land in Caura, and as I tell you, I use to plant peas and okra, tomato and sorrel and corn. That too I use to sell in the market. It was easier and profit me more. And is my land, I what buy that land to plant on.¹¹

This situation was common to several of the women whose oral testimonies are used in this paper. One woman had bought land jointly with her husband that was cultivated in sugar cane and rice. After some time though, when she felt that her husband was drinking too heavily and squandering the family's money, she purchased land on her own:

Well, when I see he only drinking and we working and selling, planting rice, planting cane and we still couldn't make money so much. So I go and I buy one acre of land not too far from where we other land was. I hire two or three people to work on it. Well, the money coming in from that piece is my money. He can't touch that. Is that what really use to help me run the house and help me with them children. I still continue to work on

⁸ Mrs. D. Personal Interview. Paradise, Tacarigua, Trinidad. 14 March, 1997

⁹ Agarwal, Bina. *A Field of One's Own Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. Cambridge South Asian Studies. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

¹⁰ Kathleen Phillips-Lewis, "Women in the Cocoa Industry in Trinidad" Ph.D thesis, University of Manitoba, 1994

¹¹ Mrs. S. D. Personal Interview. Cunupia, Trinidad. 27 November, 1997

the other land too eh. But I did get the idea to buy me own land from me mother, who did buy plenty land on she own in Sangre Grande.¹²

As a means of production, land gave rural Indian women an avenue to social and economic independence. They would engage in agricultural activities outside of the estate regime that generated income. And although the money was usually used for the family, it belonged to the woman to dispense with as she saw fit. Agarwal shows how the independent ownership of land by women empowered them:

Entitling women with land would, on the one hand, empower them economically, and on the other hand, strengthen their ability to challenge social and political gender inequalities. That is, land rights would enhance women's "freedom to achieve" (or "capability to function") in non-economic spheres as well.¹³

In the context of an emerging Indian community in the first four decades of the 20th century, this empowerment gave the woman a stronger voice within the family. According to the oral testimonies, women were aware that being landowners in their own right would give them their own income, and the ability to assert themselves. This is clearly shown in the following extract from a woman whose husband was at the time very much alive:

Look at all the things I do when I have me own piece of land. I don't have to depend on nobody. I work and mind me children. I build here (her house), and I even buy bicycle for he to sell on and he ent do that. So I had all this for meself because I could have buy land for meself.¹⁴

Such economic independence must be seen within the context of the family. From the oral evidence, it is clear that Indian women wanted to provide for themselves and their children. Land ownership facilitated this. It allowed them to make family provisions without having to depend on husbands. Clearly, within the context of the emerging Indian community of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, rural Indian women needed the economic security that land provided. They were not unaware that it also gave them leverage within the family and the Indian community. It was used almost as a guarantee that in old age they would be taken care of. There was always the tacit understanding that whoever took care of women would in all likelihood inherit her property.

Agarwal has shown how property mediates relationships between men and women, and also between women.¹⁵ Those who owned arable land had a range of possibilities. For one thing, within the emerging Indian village system this meant that Indian women could also claim a sense of identity, even 'rootedness' within the village, on their own, because as private proprietors, they had their own piece of earth within that village, an identifiable space as it were:

¹² Mrs. S. D. Personal Interview. Cunupia, Trinidad. 27 November, 1997

¹³ Agarwal, *ibid.* 39

¹⁴ Mrs. D. personal interview. Paradise, Tacarigua, Trinidad. 14 March, 1997

¹⁵ Agarwal, *ibid.* 15

Here in Las Lomas, when you see I get my own place what I buy for myself, nobody can't say I don't belong. Because this is mine. You know how it feel to have me own deed, it in my name. I feel more a part of this village. You know when you have your own land nobody can't thief that from you; and nobody can't put you out. Wheresoever you go you have that to claim as you own. You feel more a part of the place after that.¹⁶

Indian women needed to own land for themselves for many other reasons. If their priorities were different from that of their husbands, they were in a better position to act upon these. They were better able to control both what was produced on their land and the outcomes of production. They were also treated with a certain level of respect that they might not have had otherwise. The patriarchal structure of the Indian community was well established and was seen most clearly in the *panchayat*, the council of elders, made up of outstanding male members of the community.¹⁷ It was not unusual for these men to have considerable landholdings, a fact that perhaps enhanced their position within the village. Similarly, there were female landowners who could garner respect from the wider community because of their substantial landholdings. In addition, Indian women who were midwives or who possessed the knowledge of healing, and who were the custodians of the cultural practices of the group, had the respect of the entire community.

One respondent reminisced that her mother, who had owned a lot of land in the northeast of Trinidad, had had great influence within the village where they lived, largely because she was a landowner of some repute:

My mother first buy seven acres of land in Sangre Grande. That would have been in 1917. That was cocoa land that she start to work for sheself. In the 1930s, before the war, she start to rent 100 acres from the Mendez Estate, a cocoa estate in north Manzanilla. She eventually buy the 100 acres from the owners, buy a truck, give me father and then buy some more land for all she children. Well, people use to have a lot of respect for she though. In the village if anything happen, they must come and talk with she. She use to help out a lot of people, she give plenty people work on the cocoa, and she always have things, produce from the land, to give to people – like orange and fig (unripened bananas). So people always look to she nah. When you have the land, well in the village you standing.¹⁸

Independent land rights certainly made a difference to a woman's relationships with other family members. Not only did she gain economic equality with her husband, a fact that further enhanced her power and influence within the home, but also among other members of the family, particularly her sons. In the context of rural Trinidad, land offered both a sense of security and the potential for wealth. Particularly where women were widowed, if they had their own land, it was almost a guarantee that they would not be an economic burden on their children. If among Indians a widow was considered bad

¹⁶ Mrs. L. P. personal interview. Las Lomas, Trinidad. 25 April, 1998

¹⁷ See B. Samaroo, "The Indian Connecton: The Influence of Indian Thought and Ideas on East Indians in the Caribbean." in Dabydeen and Samaroo (eds.) *India in the Caribbean*, London: Hansib Publishing Ltd, 1987; and P. Mohammed "A Social History of Post Migrant Indians in Trinidad from 1917 to 1946: A Gender Perspective" PhD thesis, Institute of Social Sciences, The Hague, 1993, for information on the panchayat.

¹⁸ Mrs. S. D. personal interview. Cunupia, Trinidad. 27 November, 1997

luck, a widow who owned land was a different creature. The independent ownership of arable land gave her a certain degree of influence, if not power. As one woman recalls:

When the children father dead, he did leave some land. But I did have my own piece too. One of the bigger boys was already working the father land – cane and garden – before he dead because he did ailing for a long time. But I continue on my piece, and I have cow and thing too. So all the children know they woulda get something. Not only that, I have me own, so I don't have to depend on them, I wasn't a burden then. Sometimes, mostly, it better that way. They say, "Ma, let we help you", because they know I could do better, I could help meself.¹⁹

One of the most crucial benefits of land ownership by women was the ability to leave abusive relationships. Agarwal has noted that in the state of Bihar in eastern India in 1970, there was an extended struggle by men and women of landless households for rights to the land they cultivated. The women raised a demand for independent land rights, not only for the economic security it provided, but also because it impinged on marital relationships. She pointed out that the women:

...feared that if land titles went only to their husbands, they would be rendered relatively even more powerless, and vulnerable to domestic violence. Their fears proved correct: where only men got titles there was an increase in drunkenness, wife-beating and threats...while where women got the titles they could now assert: "We had tongues but could not speak, we had feet but could not walk. Now that we have the land, we have the strength to speak and walk."²⁰

Significantly, too, Agarwal found that by acquiring a piece of land, the woman had also acquired a separate, independent identity:

In Chaojua village, Croll (1978) notes, every poor peasant, man or woman, was allotted a piece of land. Where earlier women had been referred to as 'so and so' mother', now their own names were written in land certificates:" They had acquired a name alongside a share of land.²¹

These women knew that with the land in their own names they could leave their husbands, with or without their children, and be able to take care of themselves.

What is also evident is that Indian women, like Indian men, used land as an investment, recognising its ability to generate wealth. A perusal of the Country Books which contained copies of land deeds in Trinidad, showed not only patterns of inheritance among Indian landowners, but also that a significant number of Indian women were using their landholdings as mortgages and collateral. For example, land deed #1161 of 1900 showed that Sookanie of the Ward of Lower Caroni, shopkeeper, entered into an agreement with one Hasserat, also of Lower Caroni, whereby she mortgaged her land, a portion of the Belle Vue Estate, to him for the sum of \$198. Repayment was to be made by 25th May, 1901. A subsequent deed revealed that Sookanie did in fact repay the amount borrowed from Hasserat and discharged the mortgage.

¹⁹ Mrs D. personal interview. Paradise, Tacarigua, Trinidad. 14 March, 1997

²⁰ Agarwal, *ibid.* 39-40

²¹ Croll quoted in Bina Agarwal *A Field of One's Own Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*, 40

Other Indian women were wealthy enough to lend money and to hold lands as surety. Deed #4820 of 1921 showed that Ramsonneelal of Jerningham Junction in the Ward of Chaguanas mortgaged his land to one Lydia Boodhoo, a shopkeeper, from the town of Tunapuna as security against a loan of \$1,750.

Some Indian women engaged in the practice of using land as mortgage as was the case of Soomaria, labourer, of the Ward of Upper Caroni who, in 1903 (deed #2310), mortgaged a piece of land, four quarrees, to one Padarat Pandit, driver, as security against a loan of \$350. With the money received, she purchased 16 acres of land, also in the same ward. Deed #2132 of 1907 showed that she had by then paid to Padarat Pandit the sum of \$954.16, which represented monies owed and interest on loans borrowed from him. That deed was one of release whereby Padarat Pandit consented to reconvey to Soomaria the two parcels of land that she had mortgaged.

A large number of deeds throughout the period show that Indian women bought and sold land as a means of generating wealth. The land deeds also show that in most, but not all instances, their sons were the heirs. Several of the deeds indicate that women left their lands to all their children, male and female, and sometimes to female children only. Whether they excluded their sons deliberately, or they had none, is not clear. Deed #270 of 1910 showed that Rajwantea of Arima had conveyed to her daughter, Soomdaree, and son-in-law, Teeluck, for one shilling sterling, and “of the natural love and affection” which she had for them, 15 acres, 3 roods and 39 perches of land situated in the Ward of Upper Caroni. Rajwantea had purchased that parcel of land from the Crown for \$76.77, as seen in deed #269 of 1910.

The non-commercial relationship Indian women had with their land

From an examination of the land deeds, it is clear that Indian women used and disposed of land in the same manner as Indian men. But did they have a special relationship with the land that was different from the men? For want of a better term, perhaps Indian women had a more ‘spiritual’ attachment to the land, one not necessarily shared by the Indian man. This is particularly evident in their attitude to residential space. There was a clear difference in how women treated residential land and agricultural or commercial land. With agricultural land, their attitudes were very similar to the Indian men – it was a unit of production to be developed and utilised to its fullest potential. In the residential or domestic land, here ‘spirituality’ was expressed.

This is particularly so when one looks at the role women played in various cultural practices, particularly weddings and festivals, and the importance of having one’s own property. In the words of one woman who had lived in the barracks to have one’s own house and one’s own piece of land meant that one could celebrate important festivals in an appropriate manner. Since women were the ones generally involved in preparations for the festivals and rituals, they were they ones who perhaps felt a greater affinity to their private piece of land. What is also noteworthy is the great pride a woman took in having her own house and keeping it in the best possible order:

To have your own roof, your own house, was everything for me. I was glad to have me own place. When you living in the barracks, nothing is yours. When we get we piece of land in the village, first thing I do is plant plenty flowers, trees, I make a nice flowers garden. And I make a special place to put up me jhandi. There I plant sweet flowers, chamelhi and hibiscus and I keep there clean. I make a bedi and I have the Shiva Lingam, where every morning after I bathe I go to throw water. It give you a peaceful feeling to just have your own clean place and to do your worship.²²

What this woman has described is a daily morning ritual prescribed for Hindus. In every Hindu home there is a special corner of the front yard where a small space is reserved for the purpose of this private worship. This area must be spotless and beautified with flowers.

When an Indian built a house, no matter how humble, a simple but crucial ceremony had to be performed. Both Hindus and Muslims performed a similar ceremony, which indicated that the practice was perhaps part of Indian culture rather than a particular religion:

First, you have to put the four corners of the house. Then in one corner, the one facing the north-east, you have to dig a little hole. Here you going to make a small offering to Dih Baba – he was like the spirit in the earth. Whatever you doing, building house, or when is crop time – planting rice or cane, or anything, and cutting, you must give He something or things wouldn't go good. You just asking Him for things to work out.

Well now in the hole, you will put some silvers, like one shilling, a little rice, a sopenee (a small seed) and some doob grass. Sometimes the Pundit use to come and tell we what to do, and pray, but then we could do it by weself. When we build here, me husband didn't have time with that, but I wanted to see things go good. We have to give thanks to Mother Earth because is there where everything come from.²³

At weddings the earth played an even more central role, with Indian women being integral to the ritual:

Well, when wedding time come we have to go on the first night to get dirt. Only ladies and girls going and we singing and dancing. When we reach by running water, it have to be clean, so the water have to be running, all the women would sing and dance and they would share meethai, give everybody. Then the young sister of the bride, she what have the tray on she head. And we collect the mud and she carry that go for the wedding...From that we taking and making the bedi where the wedding will take place.²⁴

One festival of signal importance to Hindus is Divali. While resident in the barracks, they could not celebrate this festival in all its splendour. However, almost as soon as Indians started to form village settlements, there was an expansion in the way Divali was celebrated. Also known as the Festival of Lights, it symbolises the triumph of light over darkness, the return of Lord Rama from exile. Divali is celebrated on the darkest night of the year, and hundreds of small earthen pots, *deyas*, filled with coconut oil and a cotton wick, are lit and placed all around the house and the yard. Nowadays, *deyas* are

²² Mrs. P. personal interview. Guaico Tamana, Trinidad. 7 February, 1997

²³ Mrs. S.D. personal interview. Cunupia, Trinidad. 27 November, 1997

²⁴ Mrs. R. personal interview. Guaico Tamana, Trinidad. 7 February, 1997

commercially produced. However, long ago they were all handmade, as one respondent explained:

Long ago we making we own deya. Some weeks before Divali, we have to go by the river and collect white dirt. We bringing it home and putting a little water in it. Then we forming it into little pots with we hand. You making a lip in the top to put the wick in. We use to make plenty, two dozen, three dozen and thing. Then you have to put them out to dry. When they dry for a few days, they ready for you to use. Even when other people start to make deya to sell, the one you use inside the house to do the Lakshmi puja, that one we continue to make with we hand. Everything had to be clean and it wasn't hard to do. All the ladies them did know how to do that.²⁵

It is still the practice among some Hindu families for the woman to make one deya for the Lakshmi puja. For the festival of Divali, in particular, to have their own space was important to the Indian family, especially the women. It meant that their yards could be cleaned and filled with lighted deyas on the night, and that they could get the earth to make their own deyas.

Indian men tended to have a more commercial attitude toward the land, i.e. it was just another factor of production. They acquired land almost exclusively for commercial enterprises, whether for cane, rice, livestock or as a form of investment. Although the same is true of Indian women, their approach to land use was more holistic. Indian women seemed to be more aware of the interconnectedness of land use and its impact on the environment. It was the woman who tended to plant fruit trees, flowers and shrubs around the house, and who tended to engage in market gardening. One interviewee expressed a rather interesting point about the difference in attitude:

When you buy a piece of land, the man want to cut down all the trees and clear it out, so he could plant whatever he want easier. So he go come and cut down all the trees and thing, and just plant what he want. But you see, he not cooking, he don't have to worry where we getting firewood. Is we the woman who cooking every day and who have to get the firewood, we know how hard it is. So for we it better if you leave some of the trees in the land. At least that way we have wood (for fuel). Then them man and them only want to see money to spend, to drink. I want to feed me family, sell a little something. But I like to see the trees and thing too. We taking from Mother Earth, we must give she back something too. So we don't take away everything, we leaving some trees and the grass and thing.²⁶

Land ownership in practice

The life histories of two women show how important owning land was in rescuing them from abusive relationships. These life histories must be seen as representing circumstances that although not rare, were hardly the norm. It was more usual for Indian men and women to live together regardless of the domestic situation, and to buy property in common. Even when the woman bought property on her own it was with the full knowledge of her husband, as was the case of the third woman interviewed. That the following situations existed, however, is also undeniable.

²⁵ Mrs. S. D. Personal Interview. Cunupia, Trinidad. 27 November, 1997

²⁶ Mrs. G. M. Personal Interview. Maracas, St Joseph, Trinidad. 4 February, 1997

SP was born in 1908 on the Aranjuez Estate where both her parents were indentured. At the age of 13, she had an arranged marriage to DD who lived and worked on a cocoa estate in Maracas, St. Joseph. On marrying him she moved to this estate. Her marriage was to be a short-lived affair. DD was an extremely cruel husband who subjected SP to continuous physical abuse. Five years and three children later SP returned to her parents' home in Aranjuez. They did not accept her: she had become a source of shame to them, and they were prepared to send her back to her husband as was the custom in the 1920s. She then took matters into her own hands. With her meagre savings, she rented a barrack room in the San Juan area where she moved with her three children.

To maintain her children and herself, SP became a milk vendor. Leaving her children in the care of barrack neighbours, she would go to the village shop at four o'clock in the morning where she would purchase milk from the dairy farmers, who brought the milk to the shop from their farms. She would then make her way into Port-of-Spain, from where she would walk to Belmont, a suburb of Port-of-Spain about four kilometres away to sell the milk to regular customers.

With this money, SP bought vegetables at the Central Market on George Street in Port-of-Spain, which she would retail at the San Juan market on a Saturday morning. During this period, she started a relationship with another man, a fellow vendor. The relationship soon turned abusive. When he threatened to kill her, she and her three children moved from San Juan in north Trinidad to Penal in the southern part of the country, some fifty kilometres away, in 1935. She lived here for 10 years and sold vegetables at the Penal market. She would travel into Port-of-Spain to the Central Market on a Thursday to purchase market goods, vegetables and fruits from wholesale vendors which she would then retail at the Penal market on Fridays and Saturdays.

It was at the Central Market she heard that an estate owner was selling pieces of his estate in the Santa Cruz valley in foothills of the Northern Range. She purchased one acre from him in instalments. She moved to Santa Cruz in 1948 with the younger of her two daughters, leaving her elder daughter and a son in Penal. The land she purchased was very near to a small river. SP employed two men to divert the river into her land to grow watercress. She and the workers cultivated other short-term crops too, such as patchoi and tomatoes, which she sold in the San Juan market on Sundays. She also planted banana trees on a portion of the land and sold the green bananas. She continued to sell at the Penal market on Fridays and Saturday mornings, staying at the home of her elder daughter who had married a man from Penal when she did so. By selling at both markets, and by throwing "sou-sou", a system of savings, with her acquaintances, SP was able to pay off the instalments on the land by 1954.

Until her death in September 1985, she continued to live on her own land. In the 1960s, she had stopped cultivating watercress. She bequeathed the land to the daughter who had lived with her in Santa Cruz. She continued to sell at the Penal market and the San Juan market until two weeks before her death.

Another woman for whom owning land was a blessing was RB. She was born in 1905 and lived in Curepe. She had an arranged marriage at age 14 to IM, and went to live with him at Tacarigua. Both she and her husband worked on the Orange Grove Estate. Her husband bought nine acres of land in Caura, where they grew crops for home use and for sale in the Central Market at Port-of-Spain.

RB subsequently left the estate entirely and went to work full time in their garden at Caura. She also bought several cows and sold milk. With the help of her children, she cultivated the nine acres at Caura in peas, sweet potatoes and eddoes which were then sold wholesale at the Central Market. Her husband had also left the estate and worked hauling and transporting gravel from the river.

By the mid-1940s, RB had borne 12 children, six girls and six boys. Her life with IM was filled with constant physical abuse and violence. He was an alcoholic and a stick fighter who attracted many women and was in turn a womaniser. In November 1946, IM dealt her a blow to her left shoulder with an axe. She managed to escape him and fled to her sister's place.

After this attack, she took out a restraining order against him and never returned. Through her vending at the Central Market, she heard from her friend, SP, of land being sold in Santa Cruz. She purchased one acre of land quite close to where SP had bought hers, and moved at the beginning of 1949. She brought with her four of the cows that she had left at Tacarigua, and her second youngest son. In Santa Cruz, with the help of this son and two workers, she cultivated the land, while continuing to sell milk to a large dairy farmer who was contracted to supply a factory.

RB insisted on educating her daughters rather than her sons. All of her daughters were educated, four up to secondary school level; two went on to tertiary education. She did not want her daughters to suffer the same fate that she had. Eventually two of her daughters moved to Santa Cruz with her. When they got jobs, they insisted that she stopped working. True to her word, RB never visited IM, even during his prolonged illness. He continued to live at Tacarigua until his death in April 1985. RB died in October 1985, one month after the death of her friend, SP.

Born in 1895 in India, AK was a very young girl when she came to Trinidad with her parents. They were indentured on a cocoa estate in Sangre Grande where she grew up. She had an arranged marriage in 1909 at the age of 14. She moved with her husband, who was born in Trinidad, on to one lot of land that was given to him by his mother. They lived quite close to her mother-in-law who owned five acres of cocoa land. AK worked for her mother-in-law on the estate "breaking cocoa", for which she was paid. Her husband was a road worker. AK bought a cow and was encouraged by a Spanish woman to sell the milk. With this extra money and what she earned from working with her mother-in-law, plus some of her husband's income, they bought seven acres of land in Sangre Grande. They moved there with their four children in 1917. On this land, which had bearing cocoa trees, AK began working for herself. Her husband continued to work on the road.

In the 1930s and after 11 children, AK decided to expand her landholdings. The Mendez Cocoa Estate in north Manzanilla had gone out of business and was being offered for rent. Its 425 acres were being offered for \$400 annually. She discussed this with her husband who, according to her daughter, adamantly refused to rent the estate. AK eventually rented about 100 acres and moved with some of her children on to the estate. Her husband stayed in Sangre Grande. She chided him for being a coward, for being afraid of “Loupe Garhou”, a mythical figure akin to the werewolf, who was said to live in the heavily forested areas of Trinidad.

AK hired workers to grow citrus and bananas, which she then sold at the wholesale market. Just before World War II, according to her daughter, the 100 acres started to make a profit and AK renovated the house in which she and the children had been living. When her husband saw the turnaround in profits, he came to live with her, bringing the rest of the children. She bought a truck, which her husband used to deliver gravel. With profits from the estate, AK bought land for her children and educated the last three boys and her youngest daughter. On her death in 1990 at the age of 95, AK had seen three sons migrate to England. By then her landholdings had increased by a further 100 acres in Sangre Grande and north Manzanilla. AK had eventually bought the piece of land which she had first rented from the Mendez Estate.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been the central role that land played in the lives of rural Indian women up to the 1940s. What was termed by others as the insatiable Indian thirst for land was in fact a logical step for migrants establishing themselves as a permanent community within a host society that, for a relatively long time, from 1870 to 1945, viewed their permanent presence as their interlopers into the society. The Indians who migrated in the 19th century as indentured labourers in the other British colonies were generally landless peasants who had been victims of the economic policies of the British in India. As Marina Carter has said:

The policies which the British in India introduced to stimulate economic growth contributed to deprive peasants of their land and artisans of their craft.²⁷

It was little surprise therefore that one of the first things Indian migrants sought to acquire was land. They had understood in India firsthand the economic and social effects of land ownership. In India, women would have had very little say in issues concerning land distribution, but in Trinidad, the situation was different. Here they had direct, unhindered access to land, and they took full advantage of it. Like the Indian men, they were only too aware of the value of private land ownership: it was a means of production; some land ended up in large-scale, commercial agriculture, although the majority remained at the subsistence level.

²⁷ Marina Carter, *Lakshmi's Legacy: The Testimonies of Indian Women in 19th Century Mauritius* (Stanley, Rose Hill, Mauritius: Editions de L'Océan Indien, 1994) 18.

In rural communities that were agrarian based, ownership of land was crucial. It gave Indian women the ability to be producers, to generate independent income, and in some instances, very real wealth. Independent ownership of land also gave her a tool that could be used in gender negotiations within the home and in the wider community, and economic independence from the state. It was the most crucial lever that these rural Indian women held within the Indian community. And as parents, they perhaps naturally conveyed a concept of land veneration and acquisition to succeeding generations.



<http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/index.asp>



ISSUE 1 • April 2007

Racialised Identities, Caribbean Realities: Analysing Black Female Identity in Hispanic Caribbean Poetry

Nicole Roberts

Abstract

The genius of our black foremothers... was to create powerful buffers to ward off the nihilistic threat, to equip black folk with cultural armor to beat back the demons of hopelessness, meaninglessness, and lovelessness.¹

Women do not figure prominently among the revolutionary leaders of the Hispanic Caribbean. In fact, the modern Caribbean society is still largely patriarchal. Indeed, much of Caribbean literature in the 20th century depicted women as sexually passive and subordinate to males. The intersection between race and gender, however, continues to inform Hispanic Caribbean societies, and representations of women, whether clear-cut or stereotypical, still have an impact on them. The 1980s saw a surge in the publication of poetry by women that attempted to develop language, to articulate a new female Hispanic Caribbean identity; specifically, an identity that recognized blackness and sought to present new representations of female sexuality. It portrayed women in various social roles, but mainly centred on the mother/grandmother figure and on female sexuality. This article seeks to analyze representations of femininity in contemporary Hispanic Caribbean verse. In privileging the black female voice, it looks at women and representations of them in the poetry of three contemporary female poets. In a sense, it seeks to inform our understanding of their lived experiences. Further, it examines to what

¹ Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 15.

extent the poets see themselves in the role of definers or shapers of Hispanic Caribbean identity. The angst and sense of suffering of women in the Caribbean and the fact that they are equipped with the tools for survival, as well as the emphasis on female creation, distinguishes these poets as valuable to any study of contemporary Hispanic Caribbean poetics.

Introduction

Mothering blackness

This study analyses a genre which, to date, has not received widespread critical attention, though it is increasingly being noted in contemporary literary studies. To describe it as simply feminist poetry is neither adequate nor apt. At the same time, the staunch feminist slant cannot be ignored because of the reality it reflects. Feminist epistemology has transformed the world for many Caribbean women, as it questions women's lived experiences and their role/s in identity formation. In the introduction to the essay "El éxito según San... Hacía una reivindicación de la poesía femenina en República Dominicana" [Success according to Saint... Reclaiming female-authored poetry in the Dominican Republic], poet Sherezade Chiqui Vicioso says:

Hace unos meses un escritor dominicano, notorio por su mordacidad, me preguntó por qué las mujeres, independientemente de las muy conocidas, no han jugado un papel más importante en la literatura universal.²

[A few months ago, a Dominican writer, well known for his mordacity, asked me why it was that women, aside from the more well-known ones, had not played a more important role in universal literature.]

In response to the query, Vicioso first highlights the role of hegemonic masculinity, but she also points to the need for the reordering of Caribbean societies which must take place if gender oppression is to cease. She says:

Para las mujeres la situación es diferente. No se trata tan solo de entender la comprensión masculina de su mundo. Es la doble tarea de primero hacerse entender en un lenguaje aceptable a los standards masculinos para luego poder crear los propios, siempre con el riesgo de quedarse al margen.³

[For women the situation is different. It is not only about understanding the masculine construct of their world. It is also the double task of first making oneself understood in a language acceptable to masculine standards so as to then be able to create one's own standards, while always risking remaining marginalised.]

² Sherezade (Chiqui) Vicioso, "El éxito según San... Hacía una reivindicación de la poesía femenina en República Dominicana," in *Algo que decir: Ensayos sobre literatura femenina (1981-1991)*, (Santo Domingo: Editora Búho, 1991), 25. All translations in the article are the author's.

³ *Ibid.*, 25.

Female power, sexuality and desire are intrinsic themes in the study of contemporary Hispanic Caribbean poetry, in the main because of the role of women in the [pro]creation of society. They are decisive factors in the creation of female identity, specifically in light of an historical repression of Caribbean women and men. Feminist Critic Judith Grant suggests that:

Feminist ideas about self-determination must include both men and women, while being aware of race and capitalism as interactive with the gender structure.⁴

Black⁵ women across the Caribbean, in their roles as grandmothers and mothers, have mostly preached a strong work ethic and promoted a strong social identity. Their awareness of race as well as their role/s in society tends to influence their attempts to provide a home for their children and an education. These works must be read not merely as a reflection of the social reality of black women but also as a configuration of the cultural identity of black Caribbean women. This article seeks to analyse representations of femininity in contemporary Hispanic Caribbean verse. In privileging the black female voice, it looks at representations of women in the poetry of three contemporary poets and seeks to inform our understanding of their lived experiences. Further, it examines to what extent the poets see themselves as definers or shapers of Hispanic Caribbean identity.

In the essay “Dominican writers at the crossroads: reflections on a conversation in process”, Daisy Cocco de Filippis argues that:

...as we approach the closing of the century and consider the changes in what constitutes ‘Dominicanness’, we understand that no longer will geography be the defining factor. The lives and stories of many members of the Dominican community have broken the spell of many years of official silence. Consequently, as Dominicans move from Quisqueya⁶ to Washington Heights, and as Dominican geography is expanded, a number of positive changes have begun to take place:

- Racial discrimination against Dominicans has had the positive effect of making Dominicans begin to come to terms with our own racial identity.
- The leading role of women in the migration process has underscored our social inequalities and has resulted in more freedom for women, equal partners in survival.⁷

Long before this, the poet Aída Cartagena Portalatín (1918-1994) took up the challenge of writing women into Dominican history. Her poetry insistently emphasises that Caribbean women constantly struggle with life and their voiceless status as they play out traditional roles in society. Her poetry was a succinct attempt to present the lives of women and the problematic of racial origin in the Dominican Republic.

The symbolic creation of mankind begins with the mother and the theme of *la patria* [country] as represented by the mother pervades much of the poetry analysed in this

⁴ Judith Grant, *Fundamental Feminism: Contesting the Core Concepts of Feminist Theory*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 187.

⁵ The term black in the Caribbean incorporates a range of colours and mixed ethnicities rather than a fixed opposition between Black and White, Caucasian and African.

⁶ Daisy Cocco de Filippis, “Dominican writers at the crossroads: reflection on a conversation in process,” in *The Cultures of the Hispanic Caribbean*, eds., Conrad James and John Perivolaris, (London and Oxford, Macmillan, 2000). In the article, the author notes that Quisqueya is the Indian name for Hispaniola.

⁷ *Ibid.* 159.

article. The poets celebrate the mother figure as integral to the construction of their identities. This interrogation takes many forms. Central to this is the use of the motif of the mother to emphasise creation. The poets highlight the notion of a Hispanic Caribbean in which the mother is always revered, despite official patriarchal domination supported by a culture of *machismo*. Usually the mother is presented as a strong figure, someone intrinsically linked to the creation of a sense of purpose in the people of the Hispanic Caribbean. She is the recipient of constant praise and recognition for her hard work and enduring love of family. Praise of motherhood is in fact a prevalent theme in the black poetry of the Hispanic Caribbean as well as black literature across the Diaspora. Often the poets compare the mother-child attachment to that of the citizen to *la patria*: in the same way, a mother gives life to and nurtures her child, *la patria* nurtures culture, and is therefore owed a great debt, as all mothers are.

Portalatín focuses on women's innate strength, which she learns from her mother. She confronts the very real issue of black shame and describes how women can learn to overcome it. In 'Elegía segunda', Portalatín describes how her mother helped the people in her community: "Mi madre fue una de las grandes mama del mundo" [My mother was one of the great mothers of the world.] She is not simply a good mother, but a great woman, who shows by her deeds how to live. Portalatín has written many other such poems about her mother's strength, suggesting that she is a strong woman herself because of her mother's teachings. Motherhood is in fact the biggest test of a woman's strength. In the following poem, Portalatín suggests that her mother's life work was a universal quest to ease the unnecessary suffering of the poor. It has been argued that central to Portalatín's premise are the disparities of life in the Caribbean and the many differences between Caribbean blacks and their North American counterparts.

Mi madre fue una de las grandes mamas del mundo.
De su vientre nacieron siete hijos
que serían en Dallas, Memphis o Birmingham un problema racial
(ni blancos ni negros).
(p.93)

[My mother was one of the great mothers of the world.
From her womb seven children were born
who would be in Dallas, Memphis or Birmingham a racial problem
(neither white nor black).]

Portalatín subtly raises the issue of race and colour in Caribbean societies where one family can have children of startlingly varied tones. In talking about how her mother takes care in raising her children, who would be "un problema racial" [a racial problem] in North America, she skillfully oscillates between the notions that the mother did an exceptional job of caring for and educating her children despite what would be seen as a big problem elsewhere, and the unbiased nature with which she did it. The poet suggests that her family background is similar to that of numerous people in the Caribbean. This is not an attempt to justify her racial reality but a portrayal of life as it is lived in the Caribbean. She goes on to point out that from her mother, she has learnt a way of perceiving the world in which race is not a major issue, especially with so many other issues plaguing the people of the Caribbean. Certainly, for her mother who raised all of

her children in the same way, race was not her main concern, but rather, teaching them the right values.

The mother figure does not focus on blackness or black identity. She elevates all people and seeks to value humanity and promote a collective struggle. Her self-determination is evident in the work, which she carried out tirelessly. She acquired a mental privilege which was above that of race, not by sacrificing her blackness but rather embracing it as well as an understanding of her role in helping her children and others to accept themselves and their role/s in life.

Lala al servicio de la casa por más de treinta años
no la olvida
En cada frío que se hace en nuestro valle
la recuerdan también los que recibieron en el pueblo
sus frazadas baratas. (p.93)

[Lala who worked in the house for more than thirty years
never forgets her
Every cold season that comes to our valley
They remember her also those in the village who received her
cheap blankets.]

Portalatín's concern, like her mother's, is not only for blacks but for all victimised people in the world.

Mamá ignoraba las Teorías Políticas. (Encíclicas y a Marx).
Sólo entendía que el pobre sufre, reclama pan y
necesita abrigo.
Un periodista dijo que ella era un programa privado
de Asistencia Social.
Mujeres de vida buena y de vida mala aún la lloran. (p. 93)

[Mama did not know political theories. (Manifestos and Marx).
She only understood that the poor suffer, need food and
need shelter.
A journalist said that she was a private programme
for Social Welfare.
Good women and bad women still mourn her.]

One life lesson the poet has learnt from her mother is that the debt of love human beings owe to each other transcends religion and politics ("manifestos and Marx") which the poet lumps together. Food (bread) to sustain life is needed by everyone, rich or poor, black or white:

Sus cosas eran deber de amor.
Mamá. Olimpia. Mamá. El público no debe por fundas de alimentos
ni frazadas y techos
levantar estatuas. Deber de amor son esas cosas.
Deber del hombre por todos los HOMBRES (p. 93)

[Her duties were those of love.
Mama. Olympia. Mama. The public should not because of food drives,
nor blankets and roofs

erect statues. These things were a duty of love.
The duty of mankind towards all MEN]

In this poem, Portalatín presents a vision of cultural homogeneity, which may seem idealised. However, as one of the first Dominican women to confront racial attitudes, she puts it in a universal context and shows the Dominican reader that race and colour are not important. Portalatín underscores the strength of will that permeates her identity and suggests that her life is sustained by her universal aspiration: her “deber del hombre por todos los hombres” [duty of mankind towards all men].

Although the mother figure is central in the configuration of cultural identity, several of the poets also focus on the importance of the grandmother. The grandmother represents the repression of women and the sheer strength of the black woman. In a sense, this group of poets seek to dialogue with the ancestors and presents the grandmother figure in the role/s of seer and teacher to younger generations. Cultural traditions, racial identity and norms are learned through interaction with her. The mother figure looms large in the poetry of Cuban poet, Excilia Saldaña (1946-1999). The anthology *La Noche* is presented as a long letter to her grandmother. As an introduction, Saldaña uses a dedication that she wrote to her grandmother, dated ‘3 de febrero de 1985’: “una viejita gorda, carapachito de jicotea, maga, dulcera, campanita de bronce, libro de todas las respuestas, mito, verdad, raiz... abuela.”(p.11) [“...an old, portly woman, the shell of a tortoise, magician, confectioner, bronze bell, book of all answers, myth, truth, root... grandmother”] Here and throughout the anthology, Saldaña presents her grandmother as a seer, who passed on a wealth of knowledge. The description is almost mythic, filled with warmth and love. Most importantly, it documents the legacy of strength that black grandmothers have passed on to generations of Cuban women.

‘Madrigal de abuela’ appears in “Nocturno 1” (the first part of the anthology). It is not a madrigal in terms of versification but the rhythm does suggest a song-like quality and it is faithful to the 16th century madrigal poems’ thematic concern of love and nature:

Mariposa,	Butterfly,
primorosa,	graceful,
cadenciosa,	rhythmic,
tan mimosa,	so delicate
ven a mí.	come to me.
Cariciosa,	Endearing,
vergonzosa,	modest,
sé dichosa:	be happy
vuela en mí.	live on in me.
(p. 25)	

Saldaña’s imagery conjures up nature and its beauty. The poem is much more than an exposition on love, which centres on womanhood. Only 15 words are used to create the polemical image of fleeting yet enduring beauty. The use of the word “mariposa” [butterfly] immediately brings to mind the perfection of the grandmother, evoking an image of her grace, wisdom and loving-kindness. It is clear that her teachings live on in

the poet, who sees her as an ancestral source of wisdom and inspiration. The suggestion is that it is the same for all women who will in turn give birth and do the same.

Many of Saldaña's poems harp on this theme. For the poet, her strength and pride in her identity, in this case both her "Cubanidad" and her black identity, come from her grandmother. In terms of the physical description of the grandmother, Saldaña says in the poem entitled '¿Que cómo era mi abuela?'

—¿Que cómo era mi abuela? Abuela
estaba hecha de vuelo de ZunZún y
miel de abeja. Era como una vieja guitarra
guajira cantando en la noche cuando
la faena termina. O como un tambor,
que cuanto más tenso el parche,
habla más alto y mejor. (p.26)

What was my grandmother like? She
was made of the flight of Zun Zún and
honey. She was like an old rustic guitar
strumming in the night towards the
end of the shift. Or like a drum
on which the tighter the cover
the higher and the sweeter the beat.

The poem is testimony not only to her grandmother's beauty, but also to an affirmation of the poet's black heritage. The image of the 'tambor' [drum] harks back to the African connection of the grandmother and the image of the "guitarra guajira" [rustic guitar] emphasizes her wild spirit and strong will. Saldaña then goes on to reaffirm the wisdom and faith of her grandmother:

— ¿Que cómo era mi abuela? Abuela
era tan sabia que no sabía palabras
oscuras, pero podía conversar con los
astros o con la humilde matica de ruda.
(p.27)

What was my grandmother like? Granny
was so wise that she did not know dark
words, but she could speak with the stars
or with the humble rue plant

The poet's response to the initial question posed "What was my grandmother like?" links the grandmother's knowledge with divinity. She is able to converse with the stars, and this suggests that she is endowed with a gift of supreme knowledge, which unites worldly wisdom with strength of character and these with blackness.

¿Que cómo era mi abuela?
Abuela era una jícara de magia cotidiana.
Elemental y simple como el milagro
cotidiano del agua. (p.28)

What was my grandmother like?
Granny was a calabash of daily magic
Basic and simple like the daily
miracle of water

In a sense, one can argue that the grandmother figure is almost mystically presented. She is portrayed as flawless, with a timeless, almost magical quality. This notion of ancestral knowledge, that is, a sort of ethereal knowledge gained from divinity and passed on through generations, is a common theme in black Diaspora writing. Saldaña describes her grandmother as being elemental and simple, and we can read this to mean that the essence of the grandmother lies in her timeless belief system, both as miraculous as the everyday existence of water. The poem evokes a depth and a rootedness that the poet suggests is epitomised by her black grandmother.

Puerto Rican, Mayra Santos Febres (1966-) speaks to the spirit of her ancestors. It is from them that she obtains her sense of self; in the first instance, she is able to recoup lost

memory about the history of blacks in her country. Additionally, she is transformed into a black woman who can stand up to those in society who discredit and look down on blackness. In much of her poetry, Santos Febres praises her grandmother as well as her mother; both were strong black women who recognize (d) her beauty and sought to teach her their way of life. In the following trilogy, the grandmother figure is central to thematic content. ‘Abuela’ takes the form of a conversation with her grandmother and opens with the words:

<p>Abuela si tu fueras iyalocha todavía me dirías “hija de Yemayá” carne salina y yo te entendería (p. 20)</p>	<p>Granny if you were iyalocha you would still call me “Yemaya’s daughter” salted beef and I would understand you.</p>
--	--

In the African tradition, Yemayá is the wife of Changó and is herself a god. The poet states that no matter what or who she becomes in life, for her grandmother, she will always be “hija de Yemayá” [Yemayá’s daughter], that is, a beautiful black girl with an innate spirituality and strength that is liberating. With this point Santos Febres immediately highlights the fact that race is problematic in Puerto Rico. She presents the dichotomy of the significance of race in her strong black self-image and the concurrent mental colonisation of the internalisation of racist ideology.

To her grandmother, Santos Febres is grateful for the substance of a spiritual existence, that her grandmother always showed a belief in herself and projected that self-love on to her granddaughter, so that the poet never denied her black identity, as many Puerto Ricans do. The poet points out that despite the “personas planchaditas” [whitewashed people] with whom she inevitably comes into contact, she is able to live the strength of her conviction in her love of self:

<p>...a pesar de personas planchaditas que me dicen “enfermedad vernácula, anécdota de tierra mito hueco para algunos antropólogos. Zambúllete en el mainstream minoritario; lee a Safo” (p. 20)</p>	<p>...despite the whitewashed people who call me “native illness earthly anecdote hollow myth for certain anthropologists. Plunge into the minority mainstream; read Sappho.”</p>
--	---

In the poem, Santos Febres’ criticism of the majority of the blacks in Puerto Rico is scathing and is aptly demonstrated by her use of the quite knotty metaphor of “personas planchaditas”. The double entendre in this phrase serves both as a comment on the ‘straightening’ of black hair and the blacks in Puerto Rican society who deny their blackness in an attempt to present themselves as whites.

Unlike Saldaña, Santos Febres mixes voices in her poetry. On the one hand there is a demotic Caribbean voice intermixed with a confrontational resistant voice, which manipulates language in a fascinating way. The poem uses anecdotes (which still inform black tradition) to expose some of the more salient examples of prejudiced beliefs regarding blacks, which are internalised by many people, including blacks themselves. The relaxing of their hair is one such example because blacks are said to have “bad hair”.

In addition, they are seen as a minority group who speak badly and are mostly uneducated. In the poem, the poet is advised to read Safo [Sappho], an allusion to the Greek female poet known for the intense subjectivity of her poems, versatile metrification, and her lesbianism. Indeed, homosexuality remains a taboo subject in Hispanic Caribbean culture and society. In a poem such as this, it allies with race and language to articulate and even legitimize identity. Thus, Santos Febres launches a defence initiative in favour of her personal form of nationhood drawn from her ancestral connections and personal conflicts, against those who feel that her form of expression as a black Puerto Rican is not in keeping with mainstream ideology.

In reopening the age-old argument on black identity versus the idealised collectivity of Puerto Rican identity, Santos Febres signals both the debt owed by all Puerto Ricans to their black ancestors as well as her own rejection of the docility required to live the myth of Puerto Rican racial communality. The defining moment of the poem is contained in the last five lines:

<p>yo soy sal abuela sal negra que entiende a Safo desde el hermenéutico sabor [del hueso propio y no tengo intención de plancharme ni una greña más. (p. 20)</p>	<p>I am salt Granny black salt who understands Sappho starting with the hermeneutic flavour [of one's own bone and I have no intention of straightening out not one more bit of kinky hair.</p>
---	---

She describes herself as “sal negra” [black salt]. Salt is integral to the earth and to mankind/life, as a preservative and as a major component of the Caribbean Sea. Salt is therefore the lifeblood of the islands, in this case, Puerto Rico. Santos Febres’ comparison makes the allegory that “sal negra” is similarly essential to Puerto Rican society, while the poet’s role is that of preserver of the black history and presence in Puerto Rico. Her suggestion that she understands Sappho may well be an attempt to reveal her lesbian sexuality. She also underscores the fact that she sees herself as a strong black woman and she questions her position in the society because she does not fall into the stereotypical categories of blackness. Educated and proud of her black heritage, she is at once positive and singular in showing her pride. She stands for an emergence of blackness from behind the imposed barriers of prejudice and racialism. From her grandmother, Santos Febres has the spirit to address problems of race and invisibility in Puerto Rican society. Her message is direct: the black woman must lead the race forward, first by a positive acceptance of blackness then by demonstrating strength of purpose in not being swayed by aspirations to being the white other. She must speak for herself and define herself in her own terms; this way of being and self-confidence, Santos Febres suggests, was learnt from her grandmother.

The second poem ‘Abuela hoy’ also portrays an almost idealistic lauding of the grandmother while simultaneously exploring the relationship with the mother as central to the formation of identity, through a description of their legacy. Santos Febres suggests that she has learnt from her grandmother to be prepared to work hard to fulfil her goals in life. The poem opens:

Abuela hoy

Granny today

me toco suavcito el ventanal de musgo;
rodando sale la primera voz dentada.
la historia propia
reaparece bailoteando
como un quipus ancestral
desde lo ínsolito.
me toco suavcito
el ventanal del musgo. (p.25)

I softly touch the window of moss;
the first serrated voice comes out gyrating.
History herself
reappears dancing around
like an ancestral quipus
from the extraordinary.
The window of moss
softly touches me.

This “coming of age” poem makes the point that the poet had to learn to accept her history and her black identity. The rest of the poem describes the hard work the mother does on a daily basis and recounts the poet’s own role in the household, in which the grandmother is no longer present. The memories reappear, as do the challenges of daily living:

mami corre de las duchas
al suministro de cucharas agrias,
la emoción a porción chica,
y me baja hasta el sillón a que la ayude
a corregir descripciones
de un pájaro escapándose. (p.25)

mama runs out of the showers
straight into the supply of bitter spoonsfuls,
small portions of emotion,
and she lifts me down to the armchair to help her
to correct descriptions
of a bird escaping.

The poem ends with the words:

mami sale de las duchas,
habla sola
sobre el error de estar casada
parir y correr tras la hija
que se trepa a un árbol de grosellas.
me dice--tú no permitas demasiado
pero a mí el vecino, la familia...
yo le toco la carne dura de ser hembra,
la insondable negrura de su espalda.
(p.25)

mama comes out of the showers
talking to herself
about the mistake of being married
giving birth and running after the child
who climbs up a fruit tree.
she tells me “you don’t allow too much
but me, the neighbour, the family...
I touch the harshness of being a woman,
the inscrutable blackness of her shoulders.

A comment on the difficulties of being a black woman in Puerto Rico, the poem also underscores the harsh reality of life for all women. It demands respect for them, specifically black women, who must always be strong.

Santos Febres lengthy, five-part poem ‘Sale a darle clemencia al universo’ is moving and provocative as it treats with the subject of passing on black culture and traditions. The grandmother, who has a special place in the universe, is the keeper of knowledge, a fountain of information on motherhood and aging:

Sale a darle clemencia al universo.
a su lado
se coagula toda bruma
en paralela negritud:
mi abuela
reordena el caos nómada
de todas las mañanas
cuando todavía no bullen

She goes out to give mercy to the universe.
at her side
the mist is all around
in parallel negritud:
my grandmother
reorders the nomadic chaos
of every morning
when her purposeful ample breasts

<p>sus deliberadas tetas opíparas de querer atrapar el escándalo y volverlo hojas secas para barrer. (p.11)</p>	<p>still do not seethe from wanting to trap the scandal and turn it like dried leaves for sweeping up.</p>
---	--

The chaos refers to both the mysteries and the vagaries of life. Yet the grandmother's wisdom is infinite:

<p>Mi abuela es como la tierra, tú sabes: mujer helicoidal que extiende su ceiba seca a contrapunto, a contraluz, para trenzar la ruta que el viento ha de seguir al día y obligarlo a entregar los huevos y obeliscos que arrancara de las vitrinas anteayer. ella es así mi abuela, (p11)</p>	<p>My granny is like the earth, you know: a helicoidal woman who extends her dry branches counterpoint, against the light to line the route that the wind has to follow by day and force it to turn over the eggs and the obelisks that she takes up the day before yesterday from the windows. That's just how she is, my grandmother,</p>
---	---

In her grandmother, all of nature is united and she is seen as a perfect creation. Repeatedly the poet compares her grandmother to the earth. She not only accepts her role in life, but also she constantly seeks to challenge herself and to better inform herself, then she passes on the wisdom of the ancestors to her granddaughter.

<p>me recomunica toda la sabiduría adquirida en mi niñez entre tabla y tabla de multiplicar (2x1=2 el té de jengibre alivia el aire en la barriga 2x2=4 que sólo son espíritus encajados 2x3=6 el mal de amor se cura con semillas de caoba 2x4=8 guardadas donde más le duele a una el amor) por eso es que la pubis de mi abuela es raíces de caobo por eso es que los mozambiques del barrio anidan en sus greñas de carbón y tanto se restringen en ellas que se han transubstanciado en proteínas. (p.12)</p>	<p>she connects me to all of the knowledge acquired in my childhood between tables and tables of multiplication (2x1=2 ginger tea alleviates wind in the stomach 2x2=4 that they are only spirits who fit 2x3=6 lovesickness is cured with seeds from the rubber plant 2x4=8 kept where love hurts one the most that is why my grandmother's pubis is made of rubber plant roots that is why the mozambiquians of the neighbourhood nest in their kinky coal hair and so much do they burrow in them that they have transubstantiated in protein.</p>
--	---

The experiences and thinking of the ancestors guide us today. The examples that the poet gives (such as ginger tea relieves menstrual cramps) are about mythical knowledge, based on common sense and the recognition that the cure for all of life's ailments and mysteries lies in nature. This poem is about belief systems as much as it is about faith in God and in the universe. The poet describes her quest for knowledge and enlightenment in the following words:

<p>y al pecado de conocer porqué roto se sale el tiempo por qué filo se escapa lo cercano cómo hace una para encontrarse</p>	<p>and the sin of knowing why time ends up broken why hunger closely escapes what one does to meet</p>
--	--

la gravedad.

with gravity.

Life is an endless search for enlightenment. By the end of the poem, the poet communicates with her grandmother, now deceased, and she suggests that answers or greater truths lie with the ancestors, such as her grandmother:

Y después de todo
mi abuela retorna
lenta de saber direcciones,
envuelve un pedazo de clemencia
en papel de estraza
me lo coloca bajo las axilas
me peina la frente de un beso aforístico
y desde el escalón
alza su brazo de yagua seca
y enreda el viento en su mano
como si borrara una pizarra. (p.14)

And after everything
my grandmother comes back
slow to know directions
wraps a piece of mercy
in parchment paper
puts it under my arms
combs my forehead with an aphoristic kiss
and from the staircase
she raises her arm like dry palm
and wraps the wind in her hand
as if she were cleaning a blackboard.

In acknowledging her grandmother's mortality, Santos Febres suggests that infinite knowledge lies in love; the love of the grandmother for the granddaughter and vice versa. Her grandmother is the essence of truth, light and being.

Self-identity is important in constructing a nation's identity. The women poets of this study individually use their works to focus on the role of women and how they find strength in the face of adversity. None single out blackness as hindering self-understanding. Perhaps more importantly, they present the notion that it is their womanhood that gives them strength and a positive identity. They suggest that although they face daily challenges in overcoming many stereotypes regarding blacks in the Caribbean, it is their strength as women that often guides them to a place of self-understanding and ultimately helps them to transcend negativity.

Mayra Santos Febres argues that contemporary Caribbean societies need a redefinition of marginality as well as a re-examination of the self-deprecating nature of blacks. She points out that even though Hispanic Caribbean blacks are educated, among themselves, they continue to perceive blackness negatively and thus marginalise themselves. Blacks must take control of their lives if they are to begin the process of reconstructing identity; and it is among black women that this process of reconstruction, which has already begun, will flourish and be sustained. She begins the poem 'Las yerbas y los ríos son para mí' with the lines:

Las yerbas y los ríos son para mí
para esta negra que nació en Carolina
que ha vivido en urbanizaciones
en satélites hermenéuticos
una avenida hacia la boca propia
hacia el líquido poema que se sueña
cada noche en mi cabeza. (p. 39)

The shrubs and rivers are for me
for this black girl who was born in Carolina
who has lived in housing developments
in hermeneutic satellites
an avenue towards the mouth
towards the liquid poem that is dreamt
every night in my head.

Blackness and black identity are integral to Santos Febres' sense of self. Her race is a central thematic concern. Her poetry, the filter through which she shows her world, is used to present that social vision:

no recuerdo nada más y para esta hembra urbanizada universitada blanqueada y reblanqueada sin éxito (p. 39)	I don't remember anything else and for this urbanised woman university educated whitened and rewhitened without success
---	--

She presents the idea that adaptation to whiteness is not an option for her because it requires denial of the self and a consequent crisis of the black self. Rather, she is searching for “el pecho común” (p.39) [the common breast], the basis upon which all Puerto Ricans and the people of the Caribbean can come together, neither in imitation nor denial. By turning an ironic lens on Puerto Rican society, she shows women that they must be prepared to recognise the loss of identity and take steps to reclaim a voice:

la sal iodizada en la cabeza no es progreso abuela, madres, no es progreso. (p. 39)	iodized salt in the head is not progress grandmother, women, this is not progress.
--	--

The image of iodized salt ties into socio-cultural beliefs in Puerto Rico; the notion that everything created outside of the Caribbean is better than that made within. In a way, this image can be interpreted as the desire to obtain whiteness. Caribbean women pass on these beliefs to their children, which heightens their sense of inferiority and maintains a denial of the racially black segment of the population. Santos Febres uses irony to distance herself from black women who do not love themselves. She suggests that with self-confidence and strength, they can attain a cultural ascendancy, as was perhaps envisaged by Mexican writer José Vasconcelos (1881-1959) in his vision of a cosmic race. The repetition of “no es progreso” [this is not progress] focuses the reader on what would be considered progress in Puerto Rico. Here Santos Febres' condemnation is clear. Progress is not the whitening of the country but rather, it lies in the hands of strong women who accept themselves: their sexuality, gender and race.

Women's strength

In contemporary Dominican poetry, it was Aída Cartagena Portalatín who first began a tradition of writing that attempted to define the psychic identity of the Dominican woman. Before Portalatín, the status of women in Dominican poetry, often written by men, was one of lofty idealised images or base, sexual imagery. However, in Portalatín's poetry, she puts her self-image up for inspection. The identity is usually that of a strong woman, certain of her role in society but unsure of her place in a male world, which expects a woman to know her place and to remain there. The idea of self-preservation through inner strength is often repeated in Portalatín's attempt to give voice to the women who populate her poems. The voice in her poetry is always female, struggling to resist the norms of patriarchal Dominican society. In ‘2000 años después’ Portalatín admits: “No he sabido hacer el juego” (p. 83) [I didn't know how to play the game.] As a woman, she

is isolated, in a world where men have made the rules. This is about to change, now that the poet has a language which she can use to speak out:

Cuando la mujer no tenía la palabra
yo era una estrella colgada del cielo,
de un cielo de palomas y de lluvia
donde la mujer es una feliz hormiga inútil
anegada de Dios.
(p.83)

When the woman did not have the word
I was a star hanging in the sky,
from a sky of pigeons and rain
where the woman is a happy, useless ant
overwhelmed by God.

The collective voice is now prepared to speak up. This is a strong rejection of the passivity of many Dominican women who readily accept brutal treatment from men then turn passively, often to religion, for salvation and healing. Portalatín's use of the analogy of the ant, described as happy but useless, suggests that women are powerless creatures in Dominican society. It is a strong criticism of the way in which they have allowed themselves to be treated. Repeatedly, she says they have no voice:

Ahora soy como cualquier mujer
y se puede llamarme con cualquier
otro nombre
porque todos somos iguales
en el mundo
y estamos como muertos
cayendo por el mismo agujero
de la tierra.
(p. 83)

Now I am like any woman
and I can be called by
any other name
because we are all equal
in the world
and we are like the dead
falling through the same hole
in the earth.

Now Portalatín suggests that there is nothing to impede her progress, or other Dominican women. We can interpret the poem's title to suggest that 2000 years after the birth of the supposed saviour of the world, Portalatín believes it is time for women to assert themselves by speaking out and interrogating their status in society. They must constantly strive to regain the word and to reclaim their world. They should not accept their victimization or the traditional role ascribed to women. Portalatín condemns the limited strides they have made and their inadequate attempts at assuming leadership. The poem ends with a call to arms:

Después de todo, ¿por qué debo llorar?
Yo no abrí este sendero,
yo no enseñé la pena,
¡ni yo inventé estos 2000 años
jugando al escondite de la redención! (p. 84)

After everything, why should I cry?
I did not open that path,
I did not teach the pain,
nor did I invent these 2000 years
playing hide and seek with redemption!

Women, according to Portalatín, are not the creators of a society of inequality. Yet it is in reading between the lines that women can realise they will only reach an understanding of themselves if they understand how society has wronged them and take a stand against this oppression.

Often, the world Portalatín presents is one of desolation, where she has no place as a woman. The poet's dream is to change her world and that of all women. Interestingly,

there are a number of recurring images and motifs in Portalatín's works, such as the calming effect of nature. In 'Tarde en el parque', the poet sits in one corner of the park, watching life pass by. The park is symbolically a refuge, which she calls a "refugio de recuerdos" (p.27) [a shelter of memories]. On this particular afternoon, she is alone: "El parque, quejido de ramas vacías" [The park, a complaint of empty branches]. The dying park is filled with emptiness. The children are gone: "La risa de los niños es sueño" [The laughter of children is now a dream] and even the raindrops die as they descend unhappily to the earth - "en la hiedra tiembla la gota su vuelta/al firmamento" [in the ivy, the trembling raindrop is afraid of her return/to the earth]. She feels she has no control over nature, or her thoughts. She feels a void and expresses a sense of not belonging while wanting to return to her place. Here in the park: "relámpago, claro con guiones de sombra" [lightning, with shadows] as with her life, there are many dark shadows and she despairs.

In Portalatín's poetry, nature exists to echo our presence on earth. Women are essentially lost in a world that is wild, created by men, and one in which they find themselves alone and lonely. With images of the dying "naturaleza" [nature] she emphasizes the significance of nurturing to the survival of a strong female identity. In 'Vispera del sueño', Portalatín marks the emergence of women in the Hispanic Caribbean, indicating her freedom to speak out as a strong Dominican woman. "Vispera" means twilight. While it can be read as a period of restlessness, signifying a lack of direction in the lives of Dominican women, it is also the time when dreams are made, when we see less clearly. But instead of feeling a fear of the shadows, in this poem, all becomes possible:

Tierra se hará silencio
 risa no harán los hombres para que me haga eterna
 llanto no harán las piedras para que me haga eterna (p.23)

[The earth will be silenced
 Men will not laugh so as to make me eternal
 The stones will not mourn so as to make me eternal]

This stanza cuts to the heart of the voiceless nature of women in Dominican society and the collusion that exists to keep them in their place. But Portalatín is no longer willing to be complicit in this shadowy dance - she will not remain silent: "Mi sangre se ha herido y se parece al fuego" (p. 23) [My blood has been wounded and seems like fire.] She burns with the desire to speak out, yet this very act is infused with shadows and doubt. In the article "Between the masques", Diane DuBose Brunner explains:

Dealing with the tensions produced by my own position in a society that justifies domination and, therefore, subordination, my writing, performing, invoking art becomes a forbidden pleasure. As the squirming, signifying body (re)positions itself over and over under the masque, writing becomes a sorting activity.⁸

⁸ Diane DuBose Brunner, "Between the masques" in *As we are now: Mixblood essays on race and identity*, (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997), 170.

'Víspera de sueño' is Portalatín's attempt to sort out her world, while at the same time she rages against the scarring of women in the Caribbean. It is also a call to the woman reader who is no longer willing to accept the outmoded male definitions of her world. Portalatín urges her to listen and to join in this act of confrontation. The image is that of a fire sweeping out of control, much like Portalatín's desire to speak out. The process of self-discovery has begun for the poet, and she suggests that there can be no stopping this heady movement or journey towards self-discovery and self-identification.

Nieve se irá al cielo y vestirá la luna.
Se talarán los bosques para que la desnuden.
Sabrá a dulzura la raíz de la hierba.
Amor:
los ojos de la luz quemarán sus pestañas;
te soñaré a mi lado,
es víspera del sueño. (p.23)

[Snow will go to the sky and dress the moon.
She will fell the forests to lay them bare
The roots of grass will know sweetness.
Love:
The eyes of light will burn her eyebrows;
I shall dream of you at my side,
It is the dawn of the dream].

Love is truth, according to Portalatín; so she calls on women to love themselves. Only through self-love will they escape all that is false in life. She calls for a resistance to all masking and demands that women look closely at themselves and their situation, to see the truth. Although Portalatín is at times whimsical, she is quite a confrontational poet. Themes of racism and the experience of the pain of womanhood are trademarks of her work and this poem is a response in dream for a new world. She dreams a world for women where they are seen as equals:

Mundos de pies cansados descansarán. La sed de los recuerdos tendrá lluvia de olvido. (p.24)	Worlds of tired feet will rest. The thirst of memories will have a rainfall of loss.
--	--

The poem ends with the following stanza:

El tiempo desde el cuerpo del Sol con temblor de ceniza ha reído a los hombres. Cielos, mares, tierras. Nacer, vivir, morir. Los astros tienen sueño, soñaré con los astros: es víspera del sueño. (p.24)	Time since the body of the sun with the tremble of ashes has laughed at mankind. Skies, seas, earth. Birth, life, death. The Stars have dreams, I shall dream with the stars it is the dawn of the dream.
---	---

Here Portalatín suggests that life is an infinite sea of possibility. Her response is to make her own way and to map her own identity. Yet again, the identity articulated is that of a strong woman, who is at peace with herself. This need to awaken self-awareness in

women is the antithesis of the image of passivity normally associated with women in the Dominican Republic and by extension, the Hispanic Caribbean. Portalatín's "brave new world" is one of women who are strong and wish to better themselves.

Conclusion

This article is not concerned with exploring stereotypical representations of black female sexuality, which has dominated Hispanic Caribbean poetry and narrative fiction for decades. Images of the mulatto woman, who was perceived as exotic and desirable have been much examined. Whether female Hispanic Caribbean identity must be informed by blackness is a dialogue that continues to be debated by those of us interested in the ways in which race and gender contribute to shaping black women's lives in the Hispanic Caribbean. The poetry written by women in the Hispanic Caribbean today demands that women stand up and affirm their place in the society, while, at the same time, repudiating stereotypical portrayals of women as sexual products or objects.

For many of the poets, the black woman's most desirable quality is her strength because it is this ancestral legacy that has ensured the survival of the black race. These progenitors of entire populations are also authors who document life experiences. Yet, racial inequality continues to divide women and prevent their solidarity. All of the poets have highlighted the subject of black identity and the central role black women play in female empowerment. Moreover, we have seen that the tension inherent in black identity provides for constant interrogation and is evident across the entire Hispanic Caribbean. Excilia Saldaña's poetry re-defines the Caribbean self through a re-examination of the role of women as well as the traditional symbols of beauty in Caribbean society. Puerto Rican Mayra Santos Febres highlights the social experiences of being restricted because of her colour and the psychic dilemma which *blanqueamiento* (the desire to lighten oneself) causes. For Aída Cartagena Portalatín, the search for psychic wholeness begins with revisiting notions of identity and the entire process of cultural conditioning to change the way in which black women see themselves and in which traditionally they have been seen. These three poets in some measure succeed in deconstructing myths surrounding black female identity. Most importantly, they provide us with a broad platform for discussion of the racially problematic reality of black women in the contemporary Hispanic Caribbean.

Bibliography

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, (eds.) *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Cabrera, Rosa M. "La búsqueda de la identidad en la poesía afroantillana" in Cartagena Portalatín, Aída. 1944. *Vísperas del sueño*. Santo Domingo: La Poesía Sorprendida, Colección El Desvelado Solitario, 1978.

- _____. *Una mujer está sola*. Santo Domingo: Colección La Isla Necesaria, 1955.
- _____. *Del desconsuelo al Compromiso: A Bilingual Anthology of the Poetry of Aída Cartagena Portalatín*. Daisy Cocco de Filippis (ed.). Santo Domingo: Colección Montesinos (Nº10), 1988.
- Castro-Klarén, Sara, Sylvia Molloy, Beatriz Sarlo, (eds.). *Women's Writing in Latin America: An Anthology*. Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1991.
- Cocco de Filippis, Daisy. *Sin otro profeta que su canto: Antología de poesía escrita por dominicanas*. Santo Domingo: Taller, 1988.
- _____. "Dominican writers at the crossroads: reflection on a conversation in process" in James Conrad, John Perivolaris (eds.) *The Cultures of the Hispanic Caribbean*. London and Oxford: Macmillan, 2000.
- Davies, Catherine. *A Place in the Sun? Women Writers in Twentieth-Century Cuba*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1997.
- De Costa-Willis, Miriam (ed.) *Daughters of the Diaspora: Afro-Hispanic Writers*. Kingston and Miami: Ian Randle, 2003.
- DuBose Brunner, Diane. "Between the masques" in *As We Are Now: Mixblood Essays on Race and Identity*. Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997.
- Grant, Judith. *Fundamental Feminism: Contesting the Core Concepts of Feminist Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Jackson, Richard L. *Black Writers and the Hispanic Canon*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997.
- James, Conrad and Perivolaris, John (eds.) *The Cultures of the Hispanic Caribbean*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000.
- Mohammed, Patricia. "Unmasking Masculinity and Deconstructing Patriarchy: Problems and Possibilities within Feminist Epistemology" in Rhoda Reddock (ed.) *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*. Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago: University of the West Indies Press, 2004.
- Montefiore, Jan. *Feminism and Poetry Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing*. London and New York: Pandora Press, 1987.
- Roberts, Nicole. "Discovering resemblances: Language and Identity in Hispanic Caribbean Poetry" in *Derlas: Delaware Review of Latin American Studies*, 2004.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1993.
- Saldaña, Exilia. *La Noche*. La Habana: Editorial Gente Nueva, 1989.
- Santos Febres, Mayra. *Anamú y Manigua*. Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial La Iguana Dorada, 1991.
- Vicioso, Sherezade (Chiqui). "El éxito según San... Hacia una reivindicación de la poesía femenina en República dominicana" in *Algo Que Decir: Ensayos Sobre Literatura Femenina (1981-1991)*. Santo Domingo: Editora Búho, 1991.
- West, Cornel. *Race Matters*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.
- Williams, Claudette M. *Charcoal and Cinnamon: The Politics of Color in Spanish Caribbean Literature*. Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 2000.



ISSUE 1 • April 2007

Man Talk, Masculinity, and a Changing Social Environment

Linden Lewis

Abstract

Masculinity has been under the academic microscope for some time now, and especially so in the Caribbean. The urgency of the need to examine the phenomenon is a result of not only feminist activism and the changing role of women globally, but also the dramatic social, economic and technological shifts occurring across the globe, and indeed the globalization of ideologies, attitudes and beliefs. In the region, discourse on the issue has reached the level of governments and CARICOM as societies grapple with seismic shudders in the world order, and patriarchy finds the ground moving beneath its feet. This paper reflects on how Caribbean men have traditionally communicated with each other, directly and indirectly, and how the internal debate among themselves must take cognisance of women's rights to be treated equally before the law, in the workplace, and in the home. It notes the results of decades of feminist discourse and activism in the region, but sounds a warning that the increased participation of girls in the education system has not necessarily led to higher rates of employment for them. The author warns that these gains by women should not be sacrificed or begrudged because boys and young men are perceived as being marginalized, but that a new socialization of males must take place, one that gives them a reviewed sense of purpose and identity as men.

In grasping the full range of pressures and influences on Caribbean men's conception of what masculinity means in the region today, the author highlights issues of job insecurity, heterosexual male violence against women and homosexuals, and between men, as well as the need for sexual harassment legislation.

Introduction

Man Talk, Masculinity, and a Changing Social Environment

The idea of man talk is rooted in two very famous pieces of work among others. First, the expression resonates with an article written by Gordon Rohlehr (1992) of the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies. Rohlehr has written extensively about the calypso, and the extent to which within that genre of music, men are essentially always talking to each other. Second, there is the very provocative play created by the late Earl Warner entitled *Man-Talk: Profiles of the lives of West Indian Men* (1995) in which male characters ruminate on a wide range of subjects. If as it is said in religious circles, in the beginning was the word, then we get a very clear sense of the importance of communication to our existence as human beings. The famed Martiniquan psychiatrist, philosopher and revolutionary, Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), spoke eloquently about the importance of language in the recovery of the psyche of the black man. Fanon notes for example: “The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to this mastery of the French language.” Although Fanon is being sarcastic, the message is clear: being able to speak the language of their oppressor gave the black man living in a colony remarkable power. Paul Valéry knew this for he called language “the god gone astray in the flesh” (1967, 18).

The people of the Caribbean have, to a large extent, moved beyond the idea that language, as speech, will free them of notions of inferiority. It is through the language of discourse that men speak to each other in ways that are quite intriguing. So man talk is important, because men are constantly talking to each other, both verbally and non-verbally. Moreover, men claim the right to speak, and speak all the time, irrespective of whether or not they are knowledgeable about their choice of topic. Some men have knowledge claims that are essentially incredulous. Note the following claim of perspicacity by Mr. F [Man-Boy], a respondent in one of Erna Brodber’s (2003, 104) portraits of Jamaican men:

I was well versed in what I was looking for because I reach the stage where I could look on a young lady walking outside here and know whether she would make a good wife or no. A little psychology, you know.

. . . as I was trying to tell you I could even look at the young lady walking out there and I could tell according to the movements of the body, if that person would be an active person to do service. According to how you handle you limbs, your hands – you see some young ladies, they walking, along but they trying to prevent the hand from going to the side and all like that. Those are actually invalids; they don’t have any use, you know. Soldier-like women would make a good hustling wife.

So how do men speak to each other? In the Caribbean, men speak to each other directly, in terms of boasting, in terms of ridicule and insult. Men are usually comfortable discussing politics, sport and sex. Some men speak to each other in

religious terms. Religion in the Caribbean, as elsewhere, is often viewed as the site of authority of masculine roles, especially those in the realm of leadership. In the context of generational differences, sometimes older men offer advice to younger men. Men speak to each other in parables and in indirect form. Both men and women in the Caribbean have perfected the art of indirect speech. A couple of examples might suffice here. One of the boys in George Lamming's *In The Castle of My Skin*, (1979, 175) Trumper, is observing the residence of the landlord from behind a wall that separates it, physically and metaphorically, from the rest of the community:

‘When you up here,’ said Trumper, ‘on a night like tonight you see how it is nothin’ could change in the village. Everything’s sort of in order. Big life one side an’ small life a next side, an’ you get a kin’ o’ feelin’ of you in your small corner an’ I in mine. Everythin’s kind of correct’

Above, Trumper is in his own way deconstructing the class relations of the village and despairing over what seems like a remote possibility that there can be any change in the social arrangement of life in his community. Second, as I have noted elsewhere (Lewis, 1998), Earl Lovelace in *The Dragon Can’t Dance* (1979, 86) captures an important way in which man talk is negotiated in the Caribbean. Lovelace points to an interesting encounter between Fisheye (the community’s bad man) and Aldrick, which provides the reader with some insight into the nature of male negotiation of territory and spheres of influence. Aldrick, acting on behalf of his dragon-making acolyte, the young boy Basil, who turns out to be Fisheye’s son, approaches the latter with a sort of empty braggadocio:

‘I just bringing home your little son. I hear you does beat him for nothing’.
 ‘So what’?
 ‘So’, he plunged on, for he was aware of the boy standing tensely beside him. So, I come to warn you. If you beat him again I going straight to the gym and lift some weights and learn some jujitsu and come back for you’.
 ‘I ain’t making joke tonight’, Fisheye said coldly.
 ‘If you think is joke I making, touch him’, Aldrick said, maintaining his tone.

Despite maintaining the ‘warrior’ talk, Aldrick does not in fact challenge Fisheye directly; the tension between them is deflected by the humour. Aldrick has to present himself as fearless to defend his reputation as man to Fisheye, but also to Fisheye’s son Basil, on whose behalf he is in fact interceding. He acknowledges his inadequacies by suggesting that he has to go to the gym to be in readiness to take on a fight with Fisheye. Nevertheless, Aldrick is in fact stung by Fisheye’s dismissal of him and his pseudo-aggressive pose. The above dialogue points to the way different types of masculinity may collide from time to time, but avoid destroying each other¹, Lovelace notes that this aggressive, anticipatory and conciliatory humour is the means by which men say to each other what they have to say, while avoiding conflict.

It is common knowledge that a lot of truth is said in the context of humour, and that it is only through humour that one man may be permitted the space to convey his feelings

¹ See Lewis, 1998 for an extended discussion of the gender dimensions of *The Dragon Can’t Dance*

toward another. It should be made clear however, that sometimes the conflict cannot always be averted and such conversations end quite differently from that involving Aldrick and Fisheye, especially when issues of reputation and honour are at stake. What is also interesting is that a lot of man talk is very shallow and trivial, and for the most part, men get to know each other only superficially. The spectre of homophobia haunts such encounters, preventing the establishment of more meaningful relationships between men.

Furthermore, not only do men speak to each other in words but in also actions, in behaviour, and through objects that on the surface have seemingly nothing to do with masculinity. There is a particular quality, style and code of male fashion and aesthetic among men in the dancehalls of the Caribbean. In fact, this form of dress in some cases is not permissible outside the realm of the dancehall without public opprobrium. Men are speaking to each other in the manner of their dress, in the swagger of their walk and in the pose they adopt. Men in the Dominican Republic and in Puerto Rico speak to each other through the roosters they carry to the gayelle to fight other cocks to their death. As Stuart Hall has observed, the rooster is often an extension of these men (cited in Lewis, 2003). Some men speak to each other through the reputation of the dogs they breed, or the size of the car they drive, and yes, some speak to each other through the women who accompany them in public. It is perhaps unnecessary to address the way in which women are objectified in this process of ‘man talking to man’ through the embodiment of woman at this juncture. One should hasten to recognize however, that this objectification could be a two-way street, with women, desiring to be, and be seen with particular types of men for a whole range of reasons that are equally multi-layered.

It would be useful at this point to offer some conceptual clarity about what is meant by the term masculinity. For some individuals, especially those of who labour in the vineyard of gender affairs, this is no simple or routine task, largely because there is a commonsensical understanding of masculinity as experienced in everyday practices of men. Masculinity is something men do, not something they necessarily define in any systematic way. Beyond this taken-for-granted view however, there is something bigger about the unarticulated nature of masculinity for most men. As Pierre Bourdieu once noted, masculinity, as a hegemonic ideology, dispenses with the need for justification. This “anthrocentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it. The social order functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded . . .” (Bourdieu 2001, 9). Rather than be comforted by the arrogance of such thinking, one could approach the phenomenon not merely in definitional terms, but by raising a more provocative kind of question about when do men become conscious of themselves as men? When do they become conscious of their own gendered subjectivity? This question is perhaps more intriguing than simply defining what is masculinity, because it immediately raises profound issues about identity and about the nature of being. In order to illustrate this point about being and consciousness, this idea will be illustrated through an exchange between two leading African writers, Chinua Achebe of Nigeria and Nuruddin Farah of Somalia. In 1989, these two men held a

public conversation in London about the business of writing, African and Nigerian identity, and related matters. In responding to Nhuruiddin Farah's question about when did he begin thinking of himself as a Nigerian, Chinua Achebe said that he knew he was Nigerian from birth but then he added a very important caveat: "In a situation your various identities manifest themselves with varying intensities at different times. You have them all along".

Though reflecting on the question of national identity, Achebe nevertheless brings us to a point that is important to an understanding of masculinity as a gendered identity and allows us to raise the question, when do men become conscious of their masculinity? When is there an ontological sense of being? Under what conditions do men become conscious of their subjectivities as men? What is being suggested here is that Achebe provides us with some insights into these questions when he says that your multiple identities manifest themselves with varying intensities at different times, but that we only become aware of them under specific historical, cultural, economic and political circumstances. What Achebe was getting at was the specificity of consciousness and he quite rightly reflected in the end, that it was not at a precise moment that one identifies the awakening of the consciousness necessarily, but rather, it is the confluence of social forces and practices that interpellates, or calls forth this subjectivity.

For some men the onset of this consciousness of their manhood and masculinity comes in various disguises. A youngster in the Caribbean might be repeatedly told by an older boy or young man that "not because he may be seeing froth on his urine that that observation in and of itself made him a man". The implication of this injunction always seemed to be that at the first sight of such an occurrence, there was a sense that at least one was approaching manhood. Having a girlfriend, or at least developing an interest in the other sex was definitely the heteronormative marking of not merely acquiring a consciousness of masculinity but a sense of the recognition of gender difference and a time of budding sexuality. In his ethnographic work in the area he called Grannitree, Chevannes raises a more troubling observation about this transition: "Another example of the inequality between genders, this time between sexually mature men and women, is ability, if not the right, of man physically to discipline women, without social sanction. Boys do not have this right. When they do, it is a sign of having made the transition to men (2001, 56). Chevannes notes further:

At sixteen years old, Everton was quite at home in the company. He was already a man. A number of developments mark the transition to manhood in Grannitree. First is the ability to make income earning the principal activity. Everton was already out of school, forced by economic circumstances

Maas James and his other friends were asked when did a boy become a man. His reply was as soon as boys started earning their own money and taking care of themselves. Milverton, his friend, introduced a qualification and second point, namely that the boy must also be assuming responsibility, which is having someone dependent on him. This, according to Juki, a third member of the group, meant having a girlfriend, disobeying one's parents and coming home late (2001, 58).

For many in other parts of the Caribbean however, the transition was more clearly marked at least culturally. Some felt that you become a man and therefore aware of your masculinity when you were able to leave home without asking for your parents' permission. Far more convincingly for many however, was fathering a child. This act was proof beyond question that a boy had made the transition to manhood.

Consciousness of one's masculinity then, emerges out of a constellation of social practices or behaviours of men. It is also connected to an ideology that orients men to an understanding of themselves as gendered subjects for whom society has devised specific roles and expectations. Men are not born with this awareness of themselves. Society must impose this understanding on them. It is very commonly said these days that masculinity is socially constructed, and by this it is meant that not only does the society play a determining role in shaping the general contours of this subjectivity but also that it proceeds through sanctions and rewards to police the boundaries of the identities it establishes.

Inasmuch as masculinity has to do with how men become conscious of themselves culturally, it is not merely limited to behaviours designed to win the approval of other men. Masculinity also has much to do with men's relationships to women. There is a sense in which men in society collectively define masculinity for themselves but they are always cognizant of the way women influence the trajectory of their identity, validating it, interrogating it or rebuffing some or all aspects of its practice. In short, women help to shape the general terrain of masculinity at some level. Hence, at the level of performativity therefore, masculinity has as much to do with seeking the approval of men, as it is to do with obtaining the approval of women². As Pierre Bourdieu argued very provocatively: "Manliness, it can be seen, is an eminently relational notion, constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity, in a kind of fear of the female, firstly in oneself" (2001, 53).

Bourdieu's observation here is perspicacious. Since men are all born into pre-existing social contexts, which already have an established understanding of manliness, the fear of the female in them, to the extent that some actually acknowledge such a phenomenon, has to do with what David Plummer recently described as the "aversion to male gender transgression" (2005). To deviate from notions of how real men are supposed to act and what real men are supposed to represent, often leads to feminization – hence the tendency to conform to ideals of normative masculinity. It should be pointed out that femininity, as an ideological practice of women, follows a similar relational trajectory, as does masculinity. Here too hegemonic notions of the feminine conspire to suppress the masculine in women because of similar fears of being viewed as too aggressive, unladylike, masculine or lesbian. Here again, the spectre of homosexuality looms large.

² For a more detailed discussion concerning the specific cultural configuration of Caribbean masculinity, see my "Caribbean masculinity: Unpacking the Narratives" in *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, ed. Linden Lewis, University of Florida Press, 2003.

What separates masculinity from femininity are not mere expressions of behaviour but the element of power. Masculinity is not only a hegemonic ideology but also a practice that facilitates access to power, privilege and valued resources. One should hasten to say that clearly not all men exercise power but all men benefit from patriarchal privilege. As is often the case with privilege, whether the result of race, class or sexual orientation, recipients are usually blissfully unaware of its benefits. It is therefore left to those who are without access to stated privileges to point out the lopsidedness of their impact. Consequently, those men in the Caribbean, as elsewhere who are essentially blocked from access to the apparatuses of power, have a hard time understanding the nature of patriarchal privilege, in light of the denial of class and social privileges in other spheres of their own lives. In this regard, the reconfiguration of gender relations occasioned by economic globalization further exacerbates this problem of recognizing privilege for these Caribbean men³. It is this element of power however, which underpins masculinity that gives it its resilience, its ability to adjust to new challenges and crises. The power that underpins masculinity is particularistic but represents itself as general thus obscuring its influence at some levels and naturalizing or normalizing privilege that does not extend to women. As is always the case with the exercise of power however, it is constantly contested and resisted both by women and marginalized men.

Marginalized men are homosexual or transgendered men. Transgender is an umbrella term for people who do not conform to typical gender roles. The masculinity practiced by marginalized men, though very much recognized throughout the Caribbean, falls outside the accepted norm of masculine behaviour largely because of religious, cultural and other moral and ethical objections. The fact remains that transgendered and homosexual men are very much a part of Caribbean society. They do not stop being men because of their sexual orientation. If this claim is true, then Caribbean professors, researchers, social workers, state officials, religious leaders and policy makers have an obligation to understand the type of masculinity embraced by these men, and to move beyond expressions of narrow sexual politics, which focus on policing the boundaries of masculinity.

Consideration should be given both the historicity and the cultural construction of masculinity. In the context of the Caribbean, the weight of history and culture can never be overstated. Slavery and indenture have exerted tremendous pressures on the construction of masculinity, forcing adjustments and accommodation to circumstances over which men at times had no control. Similarly, specific and continuing cultural influences, particularly through the practice of religion and religious beliefs, become important in the lives of many men. It is therefore important to begin to understand and assess the influences of Christian principles and precepts on men's thinking and their understanding of themselves as men. Equally significant to our understanding of this phenomenon in certain parts of the Caribbean, especially in places such as Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname, is the teaching of the Qur'an and the way it fashions the consciousness of some men in their thinking about an ideal model of masculinity.

³ See Lewis, 2004 for an elaboration of this point.

There are also important insights one might glean from the teaching of Manu Samhita⁴ and those who seek to follow the Brahminical principles more strictly. In addition, there are those who find answers to the challenges of learning to be a man through the epic tales of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Having indexed the more traditional religions of the region, it does not in any way mean that one should be insensitive to the role played by Rastafari, Santeria and Voodoo in the social construction of masculinity in the Caribbean, particularly for men of African descent. Masculinity is not a fixed entity. It is constantly adjusting and changing with different circumstances. This quality, it can be argued, participates in the dynamics of social relations.

A reasonable question to ask at this point is, why is the region now engaged in a discussion about the features of masculinity? What has happened to elicit such importance around a topic that many have taken for granted for so long? The easy answer to this question is simply that the social environment is changing fundamentally. This however is not a satisfactory response. Part of the answer however has to do with a wider global dialogue that is taking place about the role and changing status of men, to which the Caribbean concerns are related. This expanding discussion also has to be seen not only in *reaction* to feminist activism but as Connell states, in *response* to feminism and also in relation to governmental actions strongly recommended by international organizations, to involve men in the process of gender equality (see Connell, 2005 *inter alia*). As Raewyn Connell recently pointed out: "The rapid internationalization of these debates reflects the fact, increasingly recognized in feminist thought – that gender relations can be shown to have a global dimension, growing out of the history of imperialism and seen in the contemporary process of globalization" (2005, 1804). One can argue further that the process of globalization has led to political and economic changes taking place in contemporary Caribbean society, the impact of which has in the words of Achebe, tended to cause identity [in this case masculinity] to manifest itself much more intensely. The responses to these changes have been expressed locally but the root causes are profoundly globally engineered.

What then are these profound changes? In a recently published book *Between Sex and Power*, Göran Therborn (2004) described patriarchy as the big loser of the twentieth century. He argued that patriarchy has conceded far more than other powerful ideologies. His argument in defence of this position is much broader than traditional responses. Therborn observes that the inroads against patriarchy were made as a result of three powerful political currents. At the global level, Therborn identifies Sweden in the aftermath of the First World War, as the backdrop from which was established full legal equality between husband and wife. This precedent was followed and more radically expanded by the enactment of broader and more sweeping gender legislation in Russia following the October Revolution of 1917. The *second* major assault on the foundation of patriarchy came in the period following the Second World War where in Japan, at the time occupied by the US, a constitutional proclamation was imposed by General MacArthur, that legislated equality of the sexes. In China, the victory of communism there, in the words of Therborn, "meant a full-scale assault on the most

⁴ London: University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 1996

ancient and elaborate patriarchy of the world". This assault in the process eliminated all legal vestiges of the Confucian era. For people in the Caribbean, it would be important to note that the improvement of the status of women in Cuba has been largely because of the Cuban Revolution of 1959. This Revolution opened up opportunities for women, particularly in Higher Education and in medicine that had not been experienced in Cuba before.

A *third* factor in the wearing down of patriarchy globally according to Göran Therborn, occurred in the tumult of the student rebellion of the 1968 in France. This student movement pushed for and won important rights for women among other constituencies. Therborn also cites the United Nation's inauguration of the Decade for Women in 1975. He notes that this action represented a pivotal juncture in the global erosion of patriarchy. Therborn's point should not be misinterpreted here. These legislative initiatives facilitate institutionally change, but their implementation does not necessarily mean that patriarchy is removed or eliminated in the process of social interaction between men and women. Change is much more likely to take place in a legislative environment conducive to gender equality than one in which there is no institutional will to make this happen.

The argument thus far is that the attacks on patriarchy at the global level are forcing men to become more aware of their gendered identity, and for some, to begin to examine critically the meaning of masculinity. In the more specific context of the Caribbean, some four decades of feminist theorizing and mobilization around issues of gender, identity, equality and broadened citizenship rights have forced men to sit up and take notice. In a recent article, this author argued that consciousness is always the product of specific historical and material conditions. These conditions shape the political matrix of this consciousness (Lewis, 2004). Indeed, as Rhoda Reddock recently reminded us, there was mobilization of women around labour issues as far back as the 1930s in central and southern Trinidad and in places such as St. Vincent (Reddock, 2005). There were also women who were very active in the struggle for decolonization, who may or may not have seen themselves as feminist activists but who, nevertheless, placed the issue of women and women's concerns on the agenda in those early years.

Peggy Antrobus' recent reflections on feminist activism also revealed the role and contributions of the Caribbean Women's Association, the Women's Revolutionary Socialists Movement of Guyana, the Women's Auxiliary of the People's National Party of Jamaica, Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA), Development of Alternatives for Women in a New Era (DAWN) and other NGO organizations, as all making a significant impact on the status of women in the Caribbean. At the level of scholarship, there has been a tremendous outpouring of research and theoretical work produced namely through the Women and Development Studies Group, the Women and the Caribbean Project, the DAWN occasional papers, CAFRA and the Centre for Gender and Development Studies on all three campuses of the University of the West Indies. Joycelin Messiah nicely summarized these developments in her recent survey of feminist scholarship and society (Messiah, 2004).

One additional issue worthy of consideration in this regard is that many regional governments have been responding to the Beijing Declaration to encourage men and boys to participate in the process of gender equality and transformation.

The point then is if the Caribbean region is witnessing a heightened interest in the phenomenon of masculinity, it is in part because of these decades of feminist scholarship and activism over gender equality and the status of women in the region. This growing consciousness of male subjectivity is also related to the arguments presented earlier about the global debates on the changing role of men, and institutional adjustments aimed at involving men more specifically at all levels. The cumulative effect is that these interventions have forced men to come to terms with their political identity and the basis of the privilege of some men. It is difficult to identify a period in the region when there was more popular and academic discussion about men's vulnerability, their frailty, their marginalization and the seemingly purposelessness of male groupings on the streets and sidewalks of many Caribbean societies.

In addition, to the foregoing, one of the main reasons for this outpouring of discourse about masculinity in the Caribbean is the heated and controversial claim about male marginalization. There is a developed literature on the discourse of male marginalization, which has taken place since the late 1980s in the region. It is not the intention of this article to join this debate; there are several people who have dealt eloquently and decisively with this topic, suffice it to mention the work done in this area by Eudine Barriteau (2003), Rhoda Reddock (2003), Odette Parry (2000) and Jeanette Morris (2004) among others. Rather, the idea is merely to raise the following point. The concern about girls out-performing boys in schools seems not to consider historical changes, and seems insensitive to the impact of social class, race and poverty in determining why some boys seem to perform poorly, while others do quite well at all academic levels, as well as in the world of work. Moreover, talk about the changing status of men in the Caribbean, for the most part, does not refer to all races of men in the region but principally to men of African descent and, in some contexts, men of Indian descent. In addition, as the CARICOM Report of 2003 indicates the results of the perceived advancement of girls and women via education is rather mixed. Citing the work of Barbara Bailey, the Report concludes that though women have higher participation rates than men in education, men continue to out-perform women in some of the more critical areas of science and technology (2003: 5)

Commenting on the issue of change that has been taking place within the educational system in the Western world, Pierre Bourdieu (1998, 90) observed:

One of the most important changes in the status of women and one of the most decisive factors of change is undoubtedly the increased access of girls to secondary and higher education, which together with the transformation of the structures of production (particularly the development of large public and private bureaucracies and the social technologies of management), has led to a very important modification of the position of women in the division of labour. Women are now much more strongly represented in the intellectual professions, in administration and in the various forms of sale of symbolic services – journalism, television, cinema, radio, public relations, advertising, design and decoration, and they have intensified their presence in the occupations

closer to the traditional definition of female activities (teaching, social work and paramedical activities). This having been said, while female graduates have found their main career openings in intermediate middle-range occupations (middle management, technical staff, medical and social personnel), they remain practically excluded from positions of authority and responsibility, particularly in industry, finance and politics.

Bourdieu's observation has relevance to the Caribbean and is corroborated by a study done by the CARICOM Secretariat on *Power and Decision Making: Men and Women* (2003). Barry Chevannes (2001) also arrives at a similar conclusion about what the progress of women in higher education has meant in real terms in the Caribbean. Given these findings, it is reasonable to conclude that while women have experienced some gains in society, patriarchy remains firmly ensconced in all the sinews of power in the region, and even though concessions have been made from time to time, there is no indication that patriarchy's collapse is imminent. Despite Therborn's argument about patriarchy being the biggest loser in the twentieth century cited earlier, even he sounds a word of caution: "The secular changes of the twentieth century, for all their character of epochal turn, do not mean that patriarchy has disappeared from the earth. In larger areas of the world, it is still strongly entrenched. And neo-patriarchal movements, usually with religious argumentation, have appeared" (2004, 107). This situation of entrenchment obtains in the region insofar as men across the Caribbean continue to dominate the corporate boardrooms, the structure of institutional power and the material wealth of these societies. Nevertheless, though patriarchy retains a formidable presence in contemporary society, it continues to be challenged both globally and locally in accordance with Therborn's primary argument. It might therefore be argued that some of the current efforts to defend male privilege are in recognition, albeit grudgingly so, of cracks in the armor of patriarchy and its hold on the social order of Caribbean society of the future.

A concern in this article about the apparent preoccupation with the under-performance of boys in the Caribbean has to do with the implications of most of the unease expressed to date over the situation. Where were all these concerned men, in government, university administration, in the clergy and in the wider community, who have now become so vocal, when there was at least the perception that boys were doing much better than girls were and had more access to educational opportunities? Why was there no similar concern for the future of young girls, who presumably were under-performing? What was the impact of the all, or mostly male, teachers on these girls, and which role models did they have to pattern their lives after? Would they not have been suffering trauma from so one-sided a socialization as is often heard to be the problem facing boys today? Who cared about how they coped?

Could it be then, that the current concern about under-achievement has less to do with the fact that girls are out-performing boys educationally, and more to do with the fact that the latter are defying tradition and acting out of character? Is there a fear of what it might be if women began to occupy all of the major decision-making positions in society? Apparently, things were quite acceptable when boys were in line to inherit all the privileges of the patriarchal order. Girls in today's society are simply messing up

the order of things, an order, which is supposedly natural and normal. This after all is the way that things were meant to be. It is the sort of despair into which Lamming's character Trumper resigned himself, convinced that it was the only way the village could be organized. It follows a simple traditional aphorism, men lead and women follow. The region must begin to devise ways of moving beyond such a narrow view of modernity.

Now, least there be any misunderstanding about the point being made in the foregoing, perhaps the matter should be stated as clearly as possible. If there is a concern with how boys are performing educationally, and how young men appear in some contexts to lack drive and purpose, then it is society's responsibility to begin to address that problem structurally, and in terms of attempting to improve motivation, and also by assisting young men in clarifying and achieving important life goals. The Caribbean must instill in its young men a renewed sense of purpose with values that do not conform to the prevailing ethos of materialism and hedonism. Among older men, the region should promote a greater vision of civic engagement and socially productive enterprise. Caribbean people and their leaders should not however, hide behind their failure to interest and engage boys and young men intellectually, by suggesting that their lack of achievement is somehow tied to the performance of girls and the advancement of women. The best interest of the next generation is not properly served by employing this sort of zero-sum approach. The point here is that this is not about one group of people replacing another – in this case women replacing men - but about attempting to build a society that is based on full citizenship rights for all, so that everyone could participate in a genuinely mature democratic environment. In addition, one should not lose sight in all this, the fact that deficits in education are still significant in the region and that public expenditure on education has been decreasing in some countries because of fiscal problems and the demands of global economic reforms (Mc Bain, 2005, 38).

What challenges do Caribbean men face in this conjuncture?

If we agree that there are powerful, global political and economic forces that are restructuring how people live, work, learn, communicate, and travel, among other developments, what would make masculinity, which is part of a social relationship, immune from this process of transformation? Gender does not stand outside of social relations. There are issues facing masculinity requiring men to make adjustments in their lives, and causing them to rethink their understanding of what is expected of them, what is actually possible in the current milieu, and how individuals might advance as men and women in this new millennium. This article focuses on consideration of three areas: Patriarchal erosion, unemployment including sexual harassment issues and the question of violence.

One of the first challenges that Caribbean men must face is as Pierre Bourdieu charges, that patriarchy can no longer impose itself with the transparency of something that is taken for granted (Bourdieu 1998, 88). This interrogation of masculinity and patriarchal power is unlikely to burn itself out. In addition to the efforts of women,

there are progressive men all over the Caribbean who have become convinced of the rectitude of a system based on gender equality and who work among themselves and in concert with women in the furtherance of such a cause. The reality is that the old order has essentially run its course. Men must face the challenge of coming to terms with a changing social environment in which they must embrace a more comprehensive understanding of the notion of gender equality as a fundamental and important part of genuine democracy.

One of the major challenges facing Caribbean masculinity at this time is that of unemployment and the related phenomenon of job insecurity. The workplace has long been a site of the construction and reinforcement of gender identity and meaning for men and women. However, the present situation exploits the differences between men and women for its own advantage.

Women have become preferred candidates for certain kinds of jobs needed in a global economy organized around services and JIT (Just In Time) production processes. The main reasons for this are that women remain associated with unremunerated and service-oriented reproductive labor and are often seen as physically better suited to perform tedious repetitive tasks as well as more docile and, therefore less likely to organize than men (Marchand and Runyan, 2000: 16).

Men perhaps more so than women, have tended to define their gender identity in part, through work. Work is integral to that idea of winning the ‘bread’ which men are expected to undertake. In the context of the Caribbean however, this breadwinning role appears to be more ideologically affirmed than real. It therefore becomes problematic for some men, if they do not participate in this particular construction of their masculinity. In the context of high unemployment levels in the Caribbean, the idea of measuring one’s masculinity in terms of one’s ability to work becomes unsettling to the performance of masculinity. What happens when the expectation of working and providing for one’s family is not an option? Are men no longer men, or do they feel less than men on such occasions?

Related to this problem requiring men to adjust how they understand themselves as men, is the issue of job insecurity which plagues those people, men and women who are currently employed. This condition of work raises the level of vulnerability for workers, engendering demoralization and a loss of militancy in the context of an industrial environment characterized by high levels of unemployment, underemployment and societies “haunted by the spectre of joblessness” (Bourdieu, 1998: 83). Such insecurities impinge not only on those immediately affected by it but also those indirectly touched by the phenomenon – namely spouses or partners and children. Some men fear that unemployment threatens their masculinity, while others often take these problems home where they play themselves out in dysfunctional ways.

A strong case can be made for the state, trade unions and Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) to intervene to help men, and women, cope with these challenges in ways that are more constructive. A lot of work has to be done in the Caribbean about assessing the social and psychological impact of unemployment on

men of all social classes. Programs and policies aimed at retraining and retooling men and women in these circumstances are critical to a healthy industrial environment. Having stated this point, and contrary to popular perception, while some men are becoming unemployed for the first time, women in most Caribbean countries are more consistently affected by unemployment than men. According to the previously discussed Caribbean Community Secretariat Report, “The gains women have made in the education sphere have not translated into real gains in the work sphere. Women’s economic activity rates continue to be persistently lower than men’s. Women experience higher rates of unemployment and remain unemployed for longer periods of time on average than their male counterparts” (2003, 4). The study showed that the unemployment rate for women aged 15 years and over –which ranged from ten to twenty-three percent - exceeded the rate for men of the same age category for all CARICOM countries studied (2003, 94). Moreover, the situation is no better for younger women in the region.

Youth unemployment rates in the later 1990s (or around 2000) were more than 20 per cent in most countries, and for women the rates were particularly high. Unemployment rates for young women were also higher than the rates for young men in the early 1990s, in some countries by a quarter (e.g., Trinidad and Tobago, 43 per cent for women and 33 per cent for men); and in some, young women’s rate was about twice the rate for men (27 and 28 per cent, respectively) (CARICOM Report 2003, 93).

In addition, while women with lower levels of education have higher unemployment rates, the fact remains that women experience higher levels of unemployment than men do at all levels of education (see CARICOM Report, 2003). It is reasonable to conclude therefore, that concerns about women dominating available jobs are largely overblown.

Sexual Harassment

This issue of sexual harassment has to be addressed because a number of men around the Caribbean have been indicating that they do not know how to act in the workplace these days. For the most part, sexual harassment is widespread in the region. Many men in the Caribbean fail to recognize the import of this problem. Indeed, many do not view it as a problem at all. Though some men would stop short of sexual battery, they see no harm in engaging in sexual banter in the workplace or of creating an uncomfortable environment for women, lesbians and gay men.

Nowhere is gender tension more pronounced than in the economic sphere of the workplace. The traditional hierarchical arrangements of the workplace are conducive to the reproduction of inequality and subordination, which are at the foundation of male domination. Recognizing the way power is distributed within organizations, demands that more vigilance and effort be expended at this site to ensure against patriarchy. The Caribbean workplace, though characterized by important industrial advances resulting from strong trade union representation in the past, has not always been as outstanding with respect to gender equality or gender transformation. It is true that some women have been able to transcend patriarchal obstacles but areas of important concern to

democratizing the workplace have largely been ignored. Despite global initiatives undertaken by the International Labour Organization and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions with respect to gender equality and gender transformation, trade unions in various parts of the Caribbean have not been eager to adopt or even embrace some of these ideas.

If the region is serious about transforming social relationships then greater emphasis needs to be placed on establishing a more democratic work environment. A democratic work environment means that more countries in the Caribbean need to adopt sexual harassment laws. While there has been some discussion of the topic in recent years, only the Bahamas and Belize within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), have established specific sexual harassment legislation.

There is a need for strong leadership by the state in this regard, especially considering that in the Caribbean the state remains the biggest employer. Moreover, the silence of the region's trade unions on this matter of sexual harassment is a cause for much concern. One would have hoped that given its charge of ensuring that the workplace becomes a more democratic site that the trade unions in the region would have been in the vanguard for change on this issue. For the most part, the issue has not been on the front burner for most unions in the Caribbean. Given its position of power and influence, and its long established tradition of struggle for democracy both in the industrial and political realm, the region's trade unions have to assume a more active role in the fight for workplace democracy that embraces the establishment of sexual harassment legislation. They must play their part in winning the right for work in an environment free of sexual harassment, coercion, innuendo and speech that alienate both men and women and marginalized men in the workplace.

Beginning with boys, and addressing the problem at the adult level, there needs to be a massive process of re-socialization to combat the attitudes which make some men believe that their behaviour is not offensive to others. In this regard, progressive men, young and old, have to be prepared to counsel their peers about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. The more men in trade unions, NGOs, Governments, and so on begin speaking out against the practice of sexual harassment, the more likely others would think carefully before offending their colleagues in the workplace. There is also a need to establish a new economy of exchange between men and women in the work environment. Men and women are living in different and more challenging times and must learn to negotiate relations with each other that are based on mutual respect.

The Question of Violence

One of the areas in critical need of change among men in the Caribbean is their resort to violence as a technique of conflict resolution. Men in general are the biggest perpetrators of violence against each other and against women. Many are socialized into a generally acceptable warriorhood, in that sense in which Earl Lovelace has so wonderfully described it in *The School Master* (1968), *Wine of Astonishment* (1984), *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979) and in *Salt* (1997). In defending this warriorhood in

terms of respect, honour, nation, country and God, men find it difficult to seek other forms of negotiating autonomy, difference and change. Violence is however not reducible to the physical, emotional or verbal. Violence also has to do with the deprivation of rights. Exclusion of women and marginalized men from participation in the major decision-making processes - political and corporate - of the society is also a form of violence. In addition, there is the phenomenon of symbolic violence, which is a form of persuasion exercised over individuals and involving their consent, often without their conscious understanding of their complicity (Bourdieu 2001). Gender domination in other words operates within the purview of symbolic violence. In summary, violence is a much broader societal phenomenon of which particular aspects of men's participation in this behaviour are but a part. We cannot isolate men's violence from the wider patterns of violence established historically and culturally.

Men in the Caribbean must begin to mobilize against verbal and physical violence meted out to women, as well as to marginalize or non-hegemonic men and to children. Every major report on the status of women in the Caribbean in the last ten or more years has pointed to an increase in the level of violence against them. The United Nations Inter-Agency Campaign on Women's Human Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean to Combat Violence against Women and Girls stated very forcefully that such violence constitutes the single most prevalent and universal violation of human rights. This situation of violence against women is acute in places such as Haiti, Guyana, Trinidad and Jamaica. Some 735 cases of rape were reported to the authorities in Jamaica for 2005 (Drummond 2006). In its 2004 report *Hated to Death: Homophobia, Violence and Jamaica's HIV/AIDS Epidemic*, Human Rights Watch details the type of abuses meted out to gay and lesbian individuals in Jamaica, and argues the case of police and state complicity in certain areas of this abuse. In October, the Guyana Human Rights Association expressed concern over what it perceived as the prevalence of violence against women. It also went on to denounce the judicial systems treatment of victims of sexual violence as "systematically and intentionally humiliating" (Amnesty International Report 2005). In other islands though the situation may be less severe the problem nevertheless persists.

Violence against women is of a particular quality because it involves people of different strengths (usually); people who stand in different relations to power, and who often have different types of institutional mechanism of support and protection. More importantly, violence against women participates in a general pattern of abuse of women, which is verbal, emotional and physical. This is a quality of violence that is different in kind from the violence that takes place between men or the violence some women occasionally mete out to some men.

The challenge facing men in a changing social environment is to start helping other men break the cycle of destruction. The initial work therefore of men's groups such as *Men Against Violence Against Women* in Trinidad and the objectives of *Men of Purpose* in Guyana, are to be encouraged as these groups grapple with the issue of re-socializing some men away from the brutality of domestic and other forms of violence against women. There are other men's groups that should be encouraged and

strengthened such as *Help and Shelter* in Guyana that specifically seeks to address the plight of abused children and domestic violence. In Grenada, the Legal Aid and Counselling Clinic established a program called *Say No To Violence*. This program was organized by and for men who are abusive to women and is the result of a men's forum of the Legal Aid Clinic known as *Man to Man*. These are all initiatives, which suggest that some Caribbean men are beginning to see the need to address these matters of violence and abuse. Though this is a desirable focus and a timely intervention coming from men across the region, the violence among men themselves should not be relegated to the back burner, especially as far as it also has implications for how men resolve conflicts with marginalized men, women and children.

Whereas the violence against women has received much popular attention, the violence of men toward other men is taken for granted and normalized, and therefore not considered particularly worthy of attention. Moreover, violence directed at homosexual men is not even considered really problematic. Both men and women, on religious grounds, by appeals to nature, or in accordance with social convention, often rationalize or excuse violence against homosexuals in the Caribbean. The region cannot afford to condone violence against people who may not share the heterosexual norm while condemning acts of violence when directed against women. People need to be more vocal in their condemnation of the physical and verbal abuse of all, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation. Failure to criticize all forms of violence is to be less than sincere.

Conclusion

In conclusion, if one accepts that masculinity is not a fixed notion but one that is constantly changing and adjusting to new circumstances, then clearly there exists a space within which men can navigate these new challenges that face them in the changing social environment of the Caribbean. The growing economic independence of some women, the advancement and achievement of the feminist movement in the region, the economic decline of the area, the problems in civil society, the loss of jobs of some men, have all had their impact on gender relations, creating different and new roles for men and women in the Caribbean. One cannot ignore the threat that all this represents for some men in the region. What is abundantly clear is that however people of the region have imagined the past to be, they cannot expect the present or the future to be exactly the same.

What is urgently required are ways of negotiating these changes, a massive process of gender re-socialization, the creation of an environment for dialogue between men and women, and the development of creative strategies for intervention in this phase in which the region finds itself. More men need to participate in thinking through what it means to be a man in the Caribbean and to map the terrain of masculinity in contemporary society. The dialogue about masculinity has to continue but when man talks to man, the talk has to become more substantive, more meaningful and more constructive. Man has to begin to talk about the weightier issues of being, of gender consciousness and sensitivity, and about economic alternatives to the pervasiveness of a

corrosive neoliberalism that currently blankets the region. Men have to begin a serious dialogue about the kind of history they are engaged in making and the retreat from progressive politics, which involves attention to issues of gender. Men can no longer sleep to dream but dream to make the world more conducive to the full flourishing of the potential of men and women. Rather than face the future with trepidation or resentment, men, working together with women, need to seize the opportunity to establish a better, more just, society.

Bibliography

- Amnesty International. Amnesty International Report, 2005. Online Resource.
- Writers Talk Ideas of Our Time* (video recording). Achebe, Chinua with Nuruddin Farrah. London, 1989.
- Antrobus, Peggy. "Feminist Activism: The CARICOM Experience." In *Gender in the 21st Century: Caribbean Perspectives, Visions and Possibilities*. Edited by Barbara Bailey and Elsa Leo-Rhynie, 35-58. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004.
- Barriteau, Eudine. "Requiem for the Male Marginalization Thesis in the Caribbean: Death of a Non-Theory." In *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*. Edited by Eudine Barriteau, 324-355. Kingston, Bridgetown, Port of Spain: University of the West Indies Press, 2003.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*. New York: The New Press, 1998.
- _____. *Masculine Domination*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.
- Brodber, Erna. *Standing Tall: Affirmations of the Jamaican Male – 24 Self-Portraits*. Mona, Jamaica: Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, 2003.
- CARICOM Report. *Women and Men in the Caribbean Community: Facts and Figures 1980-2001*. Georgetown: The Caribbean Community Secretariat, 2003.
- "Caribbean Masculinity at the Fin de Siècle." In *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*, edited by Rhoda Reddock, 244-266. Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago: University of the West Indies Press, 2004.
- Chevannes, Barry. *Learning to Be A Man: Culture, Socialization and Gender Identity in Five Caribbean Communities*. Kingston, Bridgetown, Port of Spain: University of the West Indies Press, 2001.
- Drummond, Nashauna. "Rape, A Life of Hurt." *Jamaica Gleaner*, January 16, 2006 [Internet Edition].
- Human Rights Watch. "Hated to Death: Homophobia, Violence and Jamaica's HIV/AIDS Epidemic." *Human Rights Watch* 16, no. 6 (B), November, 2004.
- Laming, George. *In the Castle of my Skin*. London: Longman Drumbeat, [1953], 1979.
- Lewis, Linden. "Envisioning a Politics of Change within Caribbean Gender Relations." In *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*, edited by Patricia Mohammed. 512-530. Kingston, Bridgetown, Port of Spain: University

- of the West Indies Press and The Centre for Gender and Development Studies, 2002.
- _____. "Caribbean Masculinity: Unpacking the Narrative." In *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, edited by Linden Lewis. 94-125. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003.
- _____. "Masculinity, the Political Economy of the Body, and Patriarchal Power in the Caribbean." In *Gender in the 21st Century: Caribbean Perspectives, Visions and Possibilities*, edited by Barbara Bailey and Elsa Leo-Rhynie. 236-261 Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004.
- _____. "Gender tension and Change in the Contemporary Caribbean." Forthcoming article in *Men, Boys and Gender Equality*, edited by R.W. Connell. To be published by the United Nations.
- _____. "Masculinity and the Dance of the Dragon: Reading Lovelace Discursively." *Feminist Review*, 59, (1998): 164-185.
- Lovelace, Earl. *The Schoolmaster*. Chicago: Regnery, 1968
- _____. *The Dragon Can't Dance*. London: Longman, 1979.
- _____. *The Wine of Astonishment*. London: Heinemann, 1982.
- _____. *Salt*. New York: Persea Books, 1997.
- Marchand M. and A. Runyan. "Feminist sightings of global restructuring: conceptualizations." In *Gender and Global Restructuring: Sightings, Sites and Resistances*, edited by M. Marchand and A. Runyan. London, Routledge, 2000.
- "Masculinity, the Political Economy of the Body, and Patriarchal Power in the Caribbean." In *Gender in the 21st Century: Caribbean Perspectives, Visions and Possibilities*, edited by Barbara Bailey and Elsa Leo Rhynie, 236-261. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004.
- Massiah, Joycelin. "Feminist Scholarship and Society." In *Gender in the 21st Century: Caribbean Perspectives, Visions and Possibilities*, edited by Barbara Bailey and Elsa Leo-Rhynie. 5-34. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004.
- Morris, Jeannette. "Gender and Schooling: Implications for Teacher Education." In *Gender in the 21st Century: Caribbean Perspectives, Visions and Possibilities*. Edited by Barbara Bailey and Elsa Leo-Rhynie. 82-98. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004.
- Mc Bain, Helen. "Challenges to Caribbean Economies in the Era of Globalization." In *Contemporary Caribbean Cultures and Societies in a Global Context*, edited by Franklin W. Knight and Teresita Martinez-Vergne. 17-42. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Parry, Odette. *Male Underachievement in High School Education in Jamaica, Barbados, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines*. Kingston: Canoe Press, University of the West Indies, 2000.
- Plummer, David. "Crimes Against Manhood: Homophobia as the Penalty for Betraying Hegemonic Masculinity." In *Perspectives in Human Sexuality*, edited by G. Hawkes and J. Scott. 218-232. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Reddock, Rhoda. "Men as Gendered Beings: The Emergence of Masculinity Studies in the Anglophone Caribbean." *Social and Economic Studies*, 52, no.3 (2003): 89-117.

- _____. "Women Workers' Struggles in the British Colonial Caribbean: The 1930s." In *Revisiting Caribbean Labour: Essays in Honour of O. Nigel Bolland*, edited by Constance Sutton. 19-40. Kingston, Miami, New York: Ian Randle Publishers and Research Institute for the Study of Man, 2005.
- Rohlehr, Gordon. *My Strangled City and Other essays*. Port of Spain: Longman Trinidad Ltd., 1992.
- Therborn, Götan. *Between Sex and Power: Family in the World, 1900-2000*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- UNIFEM Report. *A Life Free of Violence: It's Our Right*. United Nations Inter-Agency Campaign on Women's Human Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean. UNIFEM-UNDP-UNFPA_UNICEF-UNAIDS-UNHCR-UNHCHR-ECLAC. <http://www.undp.org/rblac/gender>
- Warner, Earl. Man-Talk [Profiles of the lives of West Indian men]. A play produced by A.W.W. B Production, Jamaica, 1995.



ISSUE 1 • April 2007

Dancehalls, Masquerades, Body Protest and the Law: The Female Body as a Redemptive Tool Against Trinidad and Tobago's Gender-Biased Laws¹

Michèle Alexandre

Abstract

The female body has long been the subject of awe, shame and controversy. 'Sexual profiling' in all cultures, cast assumptions about women who use their bodies to express themselves. Social stereotypes regarding 'morality' are generally used to evaluate women's behaviours and justify sexual profiling. An analysis of the effects of sexual profiling on female bodily expression reveals that laws and social constructs conspire to restrict women's autonomy and freedom of expression, and has even impacted on feminist jurisprudence's view of female bodily expression. This impact is evidenced by the fact that, thus far, feminist jurisprudence has neglected to embrace the female body as a tool for redemption and liberation. Such an omission, however, has not derailed female bodily expression. In all cultures, there are women who use their bodies to fight patriarchy and resist gender-biased laws and assumptions. Comparing and contrasting U.S. based concerns with those of Trinidad and Tobago, this article argues that feminist jurisprudence must identify women's bodies as tools for redemption against sexual profiling, sexism and patriarchy.

Introduction

¹ A version of this article was originally published with the Duke Gender Journal of Law and Policy.

Male domination of the female body is the basic material reality of women's lives; and all struggle for dignity and self-determination is rooted in the struggle for actual control of one's own body ...² (Dworkin, 1979)

The very word *erotic* comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects — born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creativity energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.³ (Lorde, 1984)

Aristophanes' play, *Lysistrata*, tells of a group of women who withhold sex from their husbands until the men make peace with the Spartans.⁴ This simple story creates a powerful image of these women's awareness of their bodies' inherent power. This awareness, arguably, pushes them to present the body as a tool capable of triggering change. While this may, at first glance, seem a story of manipulation, it is actually a celebration of the power and redemptive qualities of women's bodies.

Examples of Trinidadian women's use of their bodies to fight patriarchy are referred to in this article as 'body protest'. The term is used here to describe women's use of the female body as a mode of expression and as a tool for liberation and transformation. If we 'read' these women's bodies, we witness an 'organic feminism' that should allow us to recognize internalized sexism and limitations in arguing for women's liberation.

This article attempts to further the feminist discourse by demonstrating how embracing the female body as a redemptive tool can lead to a more liberated, inclusive and effective feminist movement. This article consists of six parts. The first part explores the concept of body protest. The second part provides a history of the traditional stereotypes attached to women's bodies and discusses the effects of body politics on women. The third part consists of an assessment of feminist theory's treatment of the female body. The fourth part deals with Trinidadian women's use of their bodies to reverse gender constructs and explores how body politics in Trinidad and Tobago might inform potential legal reforms. Finally, the fifth and sixth parts discuss the lack of protection provided by Trinidad and Tobago's jurisprudence to women and incorporate a proposal for women-centric legal reforms in Trinidadian law.

Body protest defined

Body protest consists of women's use of their bodies to challenge gender restrictions and to activate women-centric legal reforms.⁵ It also encompasses the therapeutic goals of

² Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (Boston: E. P. Dutton 1979, 1989), 203.

³ Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic" *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 53, 55.

⁴ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*. Douglass Parker trans., (New York: Signet Classic, 1970) centres on a group of women in Athens led by Lysistrata who, outraged at having lost their sons to war, agree to deny their husbands sexual intercourse until they make peace with the Spartans.

⁵ Body protest might also fall under critical legal studies' notion of flipping or "[a]ppropriating the central

asserting dominance over one's body and of facilitating one's expression of womanhood in revolt against a patriarchal society. Instances of body protest include, but are not limited to, women's use of their bodies through dance, dressing and the performance arts. For example, certain women choose to dance suggestively, dress contrary to societal standards of propriety, perform sexually explicit artistic roles, bring attention to specific body parts, and adopt sexually explicit personae in order to highlight the societal restraints imposed on them.

The non-legitimization of body protest by feminist jurisprudence is directly related to stereotypes associated with the employ of the female body. These stereotypes hinder potentially beneficial uses of the female body by designating many of its liberating functions as immoral. The societal attitudes engendered by these stereotypes also explain the legal system's reluctance to protect body protests. This lack of protection, consequently, leaves women who choose this valuable form of resistance both unprotected and vulnerable. An exploration of body protest reveals the existing diversity inherent in women's experiences and struggles. This diversity benefits rather than harms feminist jurisprudence. Including these organic feminists' remedies will result in a more inclusive feminist jurisprudence and thus a stronger task force against patriarchy.

Recognizing body protest as a feminist endeavour is not without its challenges. It requires accepting the possibility that women's experiences and struggles do not always fit into already established feminist categories. Still, analyzing the reasons that motivate body protest will also provide feminist jurisprudence with a clearer understanding of the tacit ways in which law oppresses women. Body protest is organic feminists' response to the widespread sexual profiling that they encounter daily in the social, political and familial spheres of their lives. Feminists must realize the entrenchment of sexual profiling in these spheres in order to effectively combat patriarchy. As suggested by Moira Gatens:

[F]eminists have offered little by way of a coherent theory of the body. In particular, there has been little critical work done on the *conceptual* dimension of the relations between women's bodies and the state: between the body of woman and the body politic. In the absence of such theory, it is culturally dominant conceptions of the body that, unconsciously, many feminists work with.⁶

It is time for feminist jurisprudence to understand how dominant conceptions continue to repress women both socially and politically, so it can combat gender-biased rules more effectively.

A history of the traditional classifications of the female body

idea of your opponent's argument-bite and claiming that it leads to just the opposite result from the one she proposes." Duncan Kennedy, *A Semiotics of Legal Argument*, 42 *Syracuse L. Rev.* 75, 87. 1991. This article, however, argues that organic feminists, as exemplified by certain Trinidadian women, go beyond flipping the patriarchal structure by actively questioning and combating it through the deliberate use of their bodies.

⁶ See Rose Weitz, "A History of Women's Bodies" in *The Politics of Women's Bodies*, Rose Weitz (ed.) 2d ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), for similar argument.

Sexual profiling is rooted in the gender stereotypes historically associated with women's bodies. The belief in the inferiority of women's bodies dates as far back as biblical writings.⁷ An analysis of Aristotle's writings,⁸ for example, reveals an interpretation of woman as a "misbegotten man" who, because of lack of heat, did not become fully human.⁹ Beliefs regarding women's physical and genetic inferiority were extrapolated to include their psychological and mental abilities. Biblical stories portrayed them as weak-willed sirens susceptible to sexual temptations. For example, according to Rose Weitz, Eve is blamed in *Genesis* for the fall of humankind in the eyes of the Creator and for the attachment of original sin to the human race.¹⁰ Women's lower standing in society was thus justified by their presumed lack of intelligence and ability to reason. While women generally had little legal protection, enslaved African women were even more vulnerable. They were considered property and therefore not treated as persons by the judiciary. Viewed as animals, these women were the physical and sexual subjects of their owners. Raping them was justified by labels such as "animalistic ally hypersexual" and thus "responsible for their own rapes".¹¹

Vestiges of these repressive views of women's bodies still remain not only in men's and women's psyches but also in societal norms and in legal concepts. For example, the United States, which purports to have achieved the greatest strides in the struggle for women's rights, still grapples with the idea of an autonomous female body. Debates over women's rights to abortions, as well as documented interference with black women's reproductive and parental rights, speak volumes about the attempts to subjugate the female body.¹² In her denouncement of governmental restrictions on black women's reproductive rights, Dorothy Roberts analyzes the roots of stereotypes associated with black female bodies, finding that many of them originate in slavery. According to Roberts, "the licentious Jezebel; the careless, incompetent mother; the domineering matriarch; and the lazy welfare mother [are images that] have reinforced and legitimated [black mothers'] devaluation."¹³ During slavery, black women were the victims of the most self-annihilating contradiction; the slave owners capitalized on black women's reproductive abilities while constantly defaming their bodies. That contradiction is poignantly exemplified by the method used to punish pregnant slaves. It was the custom for:

Slave owners [to] force women to lie face down in a depression in the ground while they were whipped, thus allowing the [slave owner] to protect the fetus while abusing the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Aristotle, *The Generation of Animals* 716A4-9. A. L. Peck ed. & trans., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press rev. ed. 1953), available at <http://duke.usask.ca/~niallm/233/Aristotl.htm> ("As we said one can easily identify the causes of birth as the male and the female, the male as the cause of change and development, the female as the supplier of the material.")

⁹ Weitz, *supra* note 6, at 3.

¹⁰ Ibid. at 4.

¹¹ Ibid. at 4-5.

¹² See generally, e.g., Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Random Publishing Group, 1997); Dorothy Roberts, *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare* (London: Perseus Books Group, 2003).

¹³ Dorothy E. Roberts, *Punishing Drug Addicts Who Have Babies*, 104 Harv. L. Rev. 1419, 143. 1991.

mother. It serves as a powerful metaphor for the evils of a fetal protection policy that denies the humanity of the mother... It is also a forceful symbol of the convergent oppressions inflicted on slave women: they were subjugated at once both as blacks and as females.¹⁴

In view of these negative classifications, it is not surprising that black women progressively migrated toward the opposite view, which presented them as more virtuous, chaste and genteel and did not leave them susceptible to physical and spiritual denigration. Although reactionary, this adoption of a more Victorian and European idea of virtue, at the very least, put the rest of the world on notice that such stereotypes of black women would not be tolerated. “Judged by the evolving nineteenth-century ideology of femininity, which emphasized women’s roles as nurturing mothers and gentle companions and housekeepers for their husbands, [b]lack women were practically anomalies.”¹⁵ Yet, today black women continue to be viewed as promiscuous beasts of burden, while contending with modern stereotypes derived from other legacies of slavery.

TV programmes such as *The Jerry Springer Show* and *The Maury Povich Show* capitalize on some black women’s economic despair and social challenges by depicting them as morally loose and unfit parents.¹⁶ At no time do these shows ever analyze the socio-economic elements affecting these women’s lives. Instead, they are caricatured and presented as objects for the public’s moral judgment. Regina Austin captures some of the pejorative characterizations of black women in *Sapphire Bound!*, where she states: “I grew up thinking that *Sapphire* was merely a character on *Amos ‘n’ Andy*,¹⁷ a figment of a white man’s racist, comic imagination. Little did I know that *Sapphire* was a more

¹⁴ *Ibid.* at 1438.

¹⁵ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), reviewing the negative stereotypes held in relation to black women and the intersection of race and class in black women’s status in America; see also A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., *In the Matter of Color* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), discussing society’s historical negative perception of black women.

¹⁶ These shows focus frequently on black women who don’t know the paternity of their children. Paternity tests are conducted on two, three or four contenders associated with each woman. While both shows periodically conduct paternity tests, *The Maury Povich Show* seems to conduct them more frequently. The audience waits anxiously to find out whether these allegedly promiscuous women will be able to determine the identity of their children’s fathers. The ultimate shame comes when, after the tests, none of the male contenders turns out to be the father. These narratives and other variations of them similarly questioning black women’s morals are repeated endlessly throughout the year, and these shows are not the only ones to denigrate black women. They only exemplify a common pattern in daytime television.

¹⁷ See *New Dictionary of American Slang*, Robert L. Chapman ed., (New York: Harper Row, 1986), defining “sapphire” both as an unattractive black woman and the name of a character on *Amos n’ Andy*, a radio comedy about two black men. *Bart Andrews & Ahrgus Julliard, Holy Mackerel! The Amos and Andy Story* (1986). It was first broadcast in 1951, with a cast of carefully chosen black actors. See *ibid.* at 45-49, 60-61. Various black civil rights organizations condemned the television version as “fostering racial stereotypes.” David Schutz, *The Original Amos ‘n’ Andy* Webpage: History, <http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/2587> (last visited Jan. 11, 2006). As the fight against racial discrimination heated up, sponsors became increasingly wary of associating their products with black entertainers—this fear of association in conjunction with criticism of the show’s depiction of black Americans led the network to drop the show in 1953. Pam Deane, *The Museum of Broadcast Comm’ns, Amos ‘n’ Andy Show*, <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/A/htmlA/amosnandy/amosnandy.htm> (last visited Jan. 11, 2006).

generally employed appellation for the stereotypical black bitch — tough, domineering, emasculating, strident and shrill.”¹⁸ For black women, liberation from the weight of these negative characterizations is sometimes challenging. Some end up internalizing the stereotypes. Consequently, the use of the body as a liberating force and as a way to assert rights generally receives mixed reception from feminist scholars as well as grassroots organizers.

Critique of feminist theory’s treatment of the female body

Feminist theorists have explored the social construction of women’s bodies extensively.¹⁹ More particularly, feminist discourses on the body have denounced patriarchal oppression and invasion of women’s bodies and the perpetuation of the superior/inferior dichotomy.²⁰ However, there are conflicting views about the idea of the body as a tool for renegotiating gender roles. While most feminists would acknowledge the traditional use of sex to oppress and dominate women,²¹ very few give real credence to female bodily expression as a successful and useful conduit for negotiating gender classifications. For example, over the past decades, some feminists have questioned their traditional analysis of heterosexuality, prostitution²² and pornography by suggesting the possibility of agency in certain circumstances. These feminists argue that it is possible for women to voluntarily choose to participate in heterosexuality and pornography without being the victim of false consciousness and patriarchy. Critics of anti-prostitution movements have also stated that laws designed to eradicate prostitution are inadequately enforced and perpetuate the oppression of female sex workers. As a result, the legal rules enacted to protect these women have made them even more vulnerable to harassment by pimps, customers and police alike. Priscilla Alexander finds that the failure of the anti-prostitution movement stems from its conviction that it is illegitimate. She argues that:

¹⁸ Regina Austin, *Sapphire Bound!* (1989) Wis. L. Rev. 539, 540 (1989); see also bell hooks, *Ain’t I A Woman* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); see also Patricia Bell Scott, “Debunking Sapphire: Toward A Non-Racist and Non-Sexist Social Science” in *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott & Barbara Smith (eds.) (New York, The Feminist Press, 1982).

¹⁹ See Weitz, supra note 6, at 9.

²⁰ Ibid. (discussing the social construction of the female body and promotion of women as inferior to men).

²¹ Catharine A. MacKinnon. *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) and *Feminism Unmodified* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

²² See generally Priscilla Alexander, “Prostitution: A Difficult Issue for Feminists” in *Sex Work*. Frederique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander (eds.) (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1987), reprinted in *Women and the Law* (Judith G. Greenberg, Dorothy E. Roberts & Martha L. Minow eds., 2d ed. (New York: Foundation Press, 1998), [hereinafter *Women and the Law*] discussing traditional feminists’ perceptions of sex workers as tools and prostitution as illegitimate; see also Priscilla Alexander, “Making a Living: Women Who Go Out” in *Women’s Experience With HIV/AIDS* (Lynellyn D. Long & E. Maxine Ankrah eds., 1996) discussing numerous aspects of prostitutes’ lives and issues in a global report that includes information about working conditions and health; Priscilla Alexander, *Prostitution Around the World* (Greenwood: Greenwood Press, 1993) unpublished database, on file with the San Francisco Public Library including information about laws, enforcement practices and issues regarding mandatory testing for a wide range of countries around the globe, survey forms and related materials; Priscilla Alexander, “Sex Workers Fight Against AIDS: An International Perspective” in *Women Resisting AIDS: Feminist Strategies of Empowerment*. Beth E. Schneider & Nancy E. Stroller eds. (Feminist Studies, 1995) discussing how AIDS discourse is changing as a result of the active involvement in the struggle to prevent infection.

If law enforcement is designed to reduce the amount of prostitution, it has failed miserably... Forced prostitution cannot be addressed until voluntary prostitution is legitimate. Feminists' attempts to simply stop it, and to 'rescue' the women who have been so badly abused, are doomed to fail until the laws that punish prostitutes are abolished and businesses that employ them are regulated...²³

Priscilla Alexander's statement illustrates the tension among feminists regarding prostitution and pornography. Disagreements with anti-prostitution and anti-pornography movements generally address the inadequacy of the laws regulating the industries rather than advocating the redemptive potential of body use by women.²⁴ Gail Pheterson exposes the underlying reason for this when describing the interactions and non-interactions between feminists and sex workers:²⁵ "Sex workers were rarely visible at feminists meetings. Given the dominance of abolitionist feminism during the late 1970s and early 80s, those feminists with either histories or present jobs in prostitution were careful to conceal their 'politically incorrect' occupation."²⁶ Fear of judgment from fellow feminists caused these past or present sex workers to hide their occupation and to work separately. Anti-prostitution activists' failure to address the complex nature of prostitution and to centre the debate on the protected nature of prostitutes' use of their bodies created a schism in the feminist movement, and excluded potential sympathizers, thereby weakening the fight for women's rights.²⁷

Pheterson describes a number of conflicts, such as Kathleen Barry's refusal to participate in a televised roundtable on sexual slavery with a prostitute or ex-prostitute.²⁸ However, the fact that some feminists and sex workers have finally teamed up to demand human rights protection for prostitutes and have even published a statement on the issue²⁹ offers hope that there can and will be future alliances among women of varied social, economic, educational and philosophical backgrounds. The inclusion of personal and authentic narratives from specific women should humanize the continuing struggle for equality.

²³ Alexander, *Prostitution: A Difficult Issue for Feminists* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1987) *supra* note 22, at 968.

²⁴ See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*. (New York, Allen & Unwin, 1991), *reprinted in Women and the Law, supra* note 22, at 1025, 1025-36; Andrea Dworkin, *Against the Male Flood: Censorship, Pornography and Equality*, (Harv. Women's L.J. 1, 1-29, 1985); Carlin Myer, *Sex, Sin, and Women's Liberation: Against Porn-Suppression* (Tex.L.Rev. 1097, 1097-1201, 1994); Mariana Valverde, *Sex, Power and Pleasure* 121, 121-45 (1987), *reprinted in Women and the Law, supra* note 22, at 1059, 1059-65.

²⁵ The term refers to people who offer sexual services.

²⁶ Gail Pheterson. "Not Repeating History" in *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1989).

²⁷ See *ibid.*. "[C]oncurrent and separate from feminist debates on prostitution and pornography was a growing movement of political prostitutes, especially in North America and Western Europe... as naïve or self-righteous agents of control and condemnation. Prostitutes were viewed by the same feminists as either victims of abuse or collaborators with male domination."

²⁸ *Ibid.* at 99, reporting that Barry justified her refusal with the claim that the "conference was feminist and did not support the institution of prostitution."

²⁹ International Committee for Prostitute's Rights, *Statement on Prostitution and Human Rights* (1986), *reprinted in Women and the Law, supra* note 22, at 998.

Feminist legal theory should focus not only on women's suffering and pain but also on their stories of resistance and triumph. The deliberate inclusion of narratives of resistance through the use of their bodies (as is often illustrated by body protest) in feminist legal theory will require suspension of moral judgement, restraint from quick accusations of "false consciousness" and an understanding of the diversity of women's cultures and realities. Robin West explains false consciousness:

As feminists know all too well, it is not just the legal culture which trivializes women's suffering, women do so also... an injury uniquely sustained by a disempowered group will lack a name, a history and in general a linguistic reality. Consequently, the victim as well as the perpetrator will transform the pain into something else, such as, for example, punishment, or flattery or transcendence, or unconscious pleasure. A victim's response to an injury which is perceived by the victim as deservedly punitive, consensual, natural, subconsciously desired, legally inevitable, or trivial will be different from a response to an injury which is perceived as simply *painful*.³⁰

Labelling female bodily expression as a product of false consciousness confuses the real issues and attempts to make women's actions fit into neatly established feminist categories. A re-evaluation of these categories does not, in any way, negate the existence of oppressive structures for women, nor does it dilute the argument that legal and mainstream structures continue to create systems that subjugate women and their bodies. Reassessing feminists' treatment of the female body will challenge the traditional analysis and categorization of women as passive victims. This portrayal already permeates feminist jurisprudence. For example, West states that, "[a]lmost all women, including those who have never experienced unwanted sex or battery, have experienced the fear of rape... One way that (some) women respond to the pervasive, silent, unspoken, invisible fear of rape in their lives is by giving their sexual selves to a consensual, protective and monogamous relationship."³¹ On the other hand, some women conquer their fears by making affirmative uses of their bodies in protest against societal restrictions. However, the lack of legal protection afforded such women renders these kinds of protests very risky.

False consciousness has been used to describe women who practise body protest in revolt against traditional gender classifications. These women are usually portrayed as superficial or 'floozy'. From American pop culture icons like Lil' Kim³² and Madonna³³ to everyday mothers and sisters, these women might be dismissed as representing the antithesis of feminism. Across cultures, a woman's worthiness and social acceptance is usually closely related to the way she chooses to express herself physically, for example, the way she dresses and her bodily expressions. Similar to racial profiling, judging a woman based on her clothes and bodily expressions, i.e. sexual profiling, marginalizes

³⁰ Robin West, "The Difference in Women's Hedonic Lives", *Wis. Women's L.J.* (1987), available at <http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/wiswo3&size=4&rot=0&collection=journals&id=87>.

³¹ *Ibid.* at 103-04.

³² Kimberley Jones is a rapper who became known in the mid-1990s for her provocative lyrics and sexually suggestive clothing. At the 1999 MTV Music Awards, she appeared in a lavender suit with one bare breast covered only by a matching pasty.

³³ Pop culture icon who is known for her controversial lyrics, provocative costumes and daring behavior.

the profiled woman. , sexual profiling and its consequences in all spheres of life, including the enactment of laws, continue to be less contested than racial profiling. Denouncing the negative stereotypes³⁴ associated with women who choose to wear suggestive clothing is just as crucial as denouncing those associated with teenagers wearing baggy clothes. In both instances, harassment of the two groups is condoned because of the judgment associated with their clothing or physical appearance. There is a sense that certain women and urban black men, by virtue of their clothes and physical expressions, should be treated with suspicion. They deserve to be harassed³⁵ and, therefore, are less worthy of legal protection. This rationale is demonstrated *ad nauseum* in rape³⁶ and sexual harassment cases³⁷ where the clothing of the victim is often an issue. The logic seems to be that certain types of self-expressions, for example, sexual self-expression, are completely forbidden to women and if a woman chooses to disobey the norms, she cannot prevent access to her own body by anyone. As stated by Susan Estrich, rape trials often adjudicate “the appropriateness of the woman’s behaviour according to male standards of appropriate female behaviour”³⁸ rather than according to the actual issues presented at trial.

Mike Tyson and Kobe Bryant are two such cases. In *Mike Tyson v. Indiana*, the court focused considerably on the victim’s style of dress.³⁹ In Bryant’s case, the alleged victim’s sexual history played a prominent role in the court documents’ description of the facts and in media coverage.⁴⁰ In a third case, *Commonwealth v. Killen*, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled that statements by the complainant that could be interpreted as sexually provocative “were not subject to the Rape Shield Law and were admissible in order to assist the jury in assessing the complainant’s credibility...”⁴¹ This narrow interpretation of the Rape Shield Law begs the following question: What factors should be used to determine the relevance of an alleged victim’s sexual conduct during and after the alleged incident? One commentator has said that in *Killen* “evidence existed tending to prove that the complainant was the aggressor and that following the alleged attack, she

³⁴ See generally bell hooks. *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. (Boston: South End Press, 1990).

³⁵ See, e.g., Elvira R. Arriola, “What’s the Big Deal?” *Women in the New York Construction Industry and Sexual Harassment Law, 1970-1985*, 22, *Collum. Hum. Rts. L.Rev.* (1990): 21, 22-57.

³⁶ See, e.g., Sakthi Murphy, Comment, *Rejecting Unreasonable Sexual Expectations: Limits on Using a Rape Victim’s Sexual History to Show the Defendant’s Mistaken Belief in Consent*, 79 *Cal. L.Rev.* (1991): 541, 545 stating that rape, historically, has been treated differently from other crimes); see also Susan Estrich, *Rape*, Yale L.J. (1986) 1087 stating that sexism is inherently present and ingrained in Rape Law.

³⁷ See generally Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol, *Sex, Culture and Rights: A Re-Conceptualization of Violence for the Twenty-First Century*, 60 *Alb. L. Rev.* (1997): 607; see also Jenny Rivera, *Domestic Violence Against Latinas by Latino Males: An Analysis of Race, National Origin and Gender Differentials*, 14 *B.C. Third World L.J.* (1994): 231

³⁸ Estrich, *supra* note 36, at 1094.

³⁹ *Tyson v. Indiana*, 619 N.E.2d 276, 282, 286 (Ind. Ct. App. 1993) “Woman who exited from the backseat of the limousine was approximately 5’6” to 5’7” in height and was wearing a black mini skirt and a top which had a collar . . . [she was] an African-American woman with shoulder-length curly hair. . . [or] with tinted hair”).

⁴⁰ See Blaine Harden, “Bryant Case is Called a Set-Back,” *Washington Post*, Sept. 3, 2004, at A08; see also *Re Probable Cause Determination, Bryant v. Colorado*, 03 CR 204 (Eagle County Ct. 2003), available at <http://news.findlaw.com/hdocs/docs/bryant/cobryant102003ord.pdf>.

⁴¹ *Commonwealth v. Killen*, 680 A.2d 851, 854 (Pa. 1996).

acted unlike an individual who had been raped.”⁴² What exactly is appropriate behaviour for a rape victim? If she becomes numb and does not fight off her aggressor, is she less worthy of protection? What if she initiates sex in the beginning and subsequently changes her mind: is she then prevented from saying no?⁴³ On the other hand, if she engages in sexual contact after the alleged rape, does her rape claim become less valid? If the purpose of the Rape Shield Law is “to prevent a rape case from turning into an attack of the victim’s sexual conduct and reputation”, how can that goal be accomplished when courts are now willing to admit what the law was designed to exclude?

The *Killen* ruling ratifies the perception that a woman who chooses to have sex with more than one man would not have refused to have sex on the alleged occasion. While *Killen* certainly does not state that evidence of prior or subsequent sexual conduct can be introduced if it has no probative value,⁴⁴ it does open the door to manipulation of evidence disguised under the rubric of relevancy. In other words, it opens the door to sexual profiling: using evidence of sexual behaviour unrelated to a specifically alleged crime to serve as a proxy for determining an alleged victim’s credibility (and in essence her moral character). It is as if a woman’s unrelated sexual decisions are interpreted as giving a *carte blanche* to men, i.e. a free pass to her body. This is a continuation of the mainstream view that the law should only protect women who follow the model of chastity dictated by society.

The discourse of the victim’s prior sexual experiences in the Bryant case resulted in the dismantling of her character and a complete negation of her honesty.⁴⁵ Elizabeth Iglesias confirms that “feminists have long recognized that the dominant images of women represent us as mother, virgin, or whore. Indeed, many feminists have linked violence against women to the ways in which these images circulate in cultural narratives and the psychic structures of individual men and women.”⁴⁶ Less attention has been paid to women’s symbolic expressions of resistance and liberation through their bodies which are generally unpopular, and run the risk of being seen as perpetuations of patriarchy. They can, however, be used as tools to combat sexism and the disenfranchisement of women. Welcoming these modes of resistance as legitimate feminist weapons will fortify

⁴² Brian J. Golias, Note, *Evidence – the Pennsylvania Rape Shield Law – Admissibility of Evidence Concerning Sexual Conduct Offered for Purposes of Impeachment*, (Duq. L. Rev. 1997): 953, 971.

⁴³ See Murphy, *supra* note 36, at 548. “According to the traditional analysis, whether ‘no’ means ‘no’ depends on what kind of woman the victim is. A woman’s sexual lifestyle has always been one of the prime criteria for deciding whether her ‘no’ indeed means ‘yes’. Thus, a ‘no’ from a ‘good girl’ might be respected, while a ‘no’ from a ‘bad girl’ might not. The dichotomy captures both the idea that sexually experienced women do not tell the truth and the idea that a woman who consents to sex once has a propensity to consent again and again.”

⁴⁴ See Golias, *supra* note 42, at 971. “One should not interpret *Killen* to mean that evidence of an alleged rape victim’s sexual conduct occurring during or after the alleged rape is admissible at trial even if such evidence has no probative value.”

⁴⁵ Elizabeth M. Iglesias, *Rape, Race and Representation: The Power of Discourse, Discourses of Power, and the Reconstruction of Heterosexuality*, 49 Vand. L. Rev. (1996):868, 886, 902 discussing how the language around rape and implications behind the terms used have strategic implications and social meaning.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* at 902.

the feminist movement and help overcome the misgivings and stereotypes that women themselves often carry about “proper uses” of the female body.

Body protest is similar to the “outlaw culture” enunciated by Monica J. Evans in her analysis of the systematic way in which black women have used their positions at the margins to subvert discriminatory and oppressive norms.⁴⁷ Evans describes outlaw culture as “the process by which African-Americans shift within and away from identities in response to mainstream legal systems and dominant culture” and “through which black women, develop and formalize strategies for coping with the terrifying exclusion of blacks from the protection of mainstream law.”⁴⁸ Evans focuses on the way black women have traditionally defied mainstream culture and created their own cultures, outside of the purview of the law, in order to obtain reprieve and remedies that the law could not provide for them. Evans describes such ‘outlaw women’ as Harriet Tubman and Rosa Parks.⁴⁹ Tubman was an outlaw woman because she dared to “disrupt the existing legal norms of property” and to “explode the boundaries of a destructive culture.”⁵⁰ Similarly, Parks, and Claudette Colvin before her,⁵¹ became outlaw women when they refused to obey Jim Crow laws. These women used a reversal tactic that oppressed groups have often used throughout the world. They converted a behaviour regarded as illegal and subversive into an instrument of power, hence, eventually reversing the legal definition traditionally associated with their actions. Consequently, Tubman, who formerly would have been described as a contrabandist, and Parks, who would have been viewed as a troublemaker, became two of the most celebrated women in American history. It is of great importance that some women who stood outside of the law were able to trigger legal change and reform. Using non-legal methods they brought people and behaviours traditionally located at the margins of the law within its purview, thereby making them legal. This methodology is still used by women today in their struggle for empowerment.

The mainstream and feminist theorists alike often misinterpret this struggle. bell hooks’ criticism of feminist activists who denigrate women’s choice of heterosexuality⁵² can be applied to some feminists’ blanket prejudice against the use of the body to negotiate rights. hooks purports that “feminist activists must take care that our legitimate critiques of heterosexism are not attacks on heterosexual *practice*. As feminists, we must confront those women who do in fact believe that women with heterosexual preferences are either

⁴⁷ Monica J. Evans, “*Stealing Away*”: *Black Women, Outlaw Culture and the Rhetoric of Rights*,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* (2000):500, 501-13. Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic eds., 2d ed.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* at 501.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*; see also Stephanie L. Phillips, *Claiming Our Foremothers: The Legend of Sally Hemmings and the Tasks of Black Feminist Theory*, 8 *Hastings Women’s L.J.* (1997) 401, 407-15 discussing historical black female figures that have defied mainstream definition of who they should be.

⁵⁰ Evans, *supra* note 47, at 502.

⁵¹ Claudette Colvin is reported as the first African-American woman to defy Jim Crow and refuse to give up her seat on a public bus. As a result of her refusal, the fifteen-year-old was handcuffed and jailed. Colvin subsequently became part of Rosa Parks’ youth group. Parks then became the leading figure in the organized bus boycotts during the civil rights movement. E.g., Amanda Dawkins, *Unsung Bus Boycott Hero Cite 50 Years Later*, *The Decatur Daily News*, Feb. 6, 2005, <http://www.decaturdaily.com/decaturdaily/news/050206/bus.shtml>.

⁵² bell hooks, “Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center” reprinted in *Women and the Law* (1984): 148-58, *supra* note 22, at 929, 932..

traitors or likely to be anti-lesbian.”⁵³ A similar admonishment should be issued regarding feminists’ view of female bodily expression. Underlying desires to appear proper and be accepted by the general mainstream have led some feminist activists to “de-gender”⁵⁴ the female body and to perpetuate stereotypes regarding female bodily expressions. Such a characterization is dangerous, not only because it continues a tradition of denigrating the female body but also because it creates a schism between feminist scholars and the women existing and fighting at the margins of the law. How can feminist theory truly address the inequalities suffered by women if feminists are disconnected from the realities faced by certain groups of women?

Women’s struggle for control and domination of their bodies permeates all aspects of their lives. It is a constant struggle to force the world to respect and accept their own definitions of themselves, their bodies and their beings. This battle has not been given appropriate attention or recognition because of feminist theory’s over-emphasis on ‘sameness/difference’ theories. While such theories illustrate the existing conflicts between the sexes, they do not, however, fully explore the complexities of various and endless struggles carried on by women at different levels of our social echelons. In contrast, Regina Austin’s work examines body resistance by black women.⁵⁵ In order to resist societal classifications of adequate femininity and heterosexual norms of attractiveness, certain groups of black women have deliberately adopted non-conformist garments and physical behaviour. Austin states that:

The impact of the attack on the femininity and sexuality of low-status black female workers is quite broad... black women of any class who choose to look and act like they survive without a man, experience a reproach that is not unrelated to the negative assessment of the beauty and sexuality of black women of low economic status. Racist heterosexism and fear of black lesbianism, within and without the black community, denigrate the sexuality and sensuality of black females who eschew the primping of the pampered and privileged and/or thrive as sexual beings within the orbit of a social order controlled by women. All of these modes of vilification seek to control more than black women’s sexual expression; in addressing how and for whose benefit we ought to work, they affect exploitation of our labour force.⁵⁶

The extent to which feminist theory has co-opted mainstream definitions of femininity and female expression is hard to determine. Still, the influence of the dominant discourse concerning adequate forms of femininity is widely reflected in feminist jurisprudence’s treatment of prostitution and pornography.⁵⁷ While arguments targeting the arbitrary

⁵³ Ibid. at 932.

⁵⁴ De-gendering here refers to the process of rendering the female body less female and controversial (both in actual practice and in rhetoric) in order to achieve more social gains.

⁵⁵ Regina Austin, “Black Women, Sisterhood and the Difference/Deviance Divide”, 26 *New Eng. L. Rev.* 877 (1992), reprinted in *Women and the Law*, *supra* note 22, at 973.

⁵⁶ Ibid. at 977.

⁵⁷ It should be noted that a few feminists have acknowledged the issue of agency in women’s use of their bodies in the context of pornography and prostitution. In addition, recently, two feminist authors presented an argument for prostitution as legitimate labour by the women who practise it. See Bertha Hernández-Truyol & Jane Lawson, “Prostitution, Work, and Human Rights”, address at the Thomas Jefferson School of Law Fifth Annual Women and the Law Conference (Feb. 18, 2005), available at <http://www.tjssl.edu/downloads/Her.pdf>. However, there is still a general lack of recognition by feminist

appropriation, domination and subjugation of the female body are necessary, there is little room in these analyses for the acceptance of women's choices, in addition to a reluctance to recognize a plurality of experiences. Feminists' constant representation of the female prostitute as a misguided woman, or as a victim, negates the possibility that a 'prostitute' or 'pornographer' could be a valuable contributor to the women's rights struggle. Rather, these women are portrayed as unwitting beings that better-knowing and more knowledgeable protectors, i.e., non-prostitute feminists, have to protect. This characterization creates a schism among women that prevents a consideration of their diverse needs. Focussing on the debate in the U.S., the arguments in this paper do not reflect the very progressive debates in Europe, particularly in the Netherlands, which have confronted the issues of female autonomy and the body since the 1980s. As stated by Shannon Bell:

Prostitutes' collective public demand for the legal right to be recognized as citizens just like all others is not a demand for equality in spite of difference but a demand for equality based on the distinct difference of being a prostitute. What lies just beneath the surface of the demand [is]... an affirmation of a 'negative' identity and a revaluation of values through the recognition of commercial sex as being just as valid and worthy as non-commercial sex.⁵⁸

It would be counterproductive to continue to impose preconceived notions of proper feminist conduct or to assume that certain modes of expression through the female body are inherently tainted and invalid. If the female body is dismissed as a non-legitimate tool in fighting patriarchy, is feminist theory then saying that the female body's only purpose is to perpetuate patriarchy?⁵⁹

Examples of women's liberative uses of their bodies in Trinidad and Tobago and the challenges they face

Women in Trinidad and Tobago have a long history of both overt and covert resistance.⁶⁰ The two-island republic, which is located off the northeastern coast of Venezuela, was under English colonization until the 1960s. Intermittent occupation by the Spanish, French, and Portuguese, as well as the British, influenced the language and customs of the people. Further influences of cultural formations come from the aboriginal Amerindians as well as the Chinese and Lebanese populations. Africans were brought to the islands as slaves; today, their descendants make up over a third of the population. Another forty percent consists of Indians who migrated to the island as indentured

jurisprudence of the body as an effective tool against patriarchy. Fewer feminists have advocated the use of the body as a type of symbolic speech that should be protected by legal systems, including certain instances of prostitution that involve women's agency and are not controlled by men or the police.

⁵⁸ Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

⁵⁹ Pheterson, *supra* note 26, at 17. "Women's liberation movements throughout the world have not been immune to social, legal and ideological distortions of the lives of prostitutes... most contemporary feminists are isolated from women in the sex industry. A common misconception among feminists is the belief that women are protected by efforts to abolish prostitution..."

⁶⁰ See generally Patricia Mohammed, *Gender Negotiations Among Indians in Trinidad from 1917-1947* (Basingstoke: ISS and Palgrave Press, 2002).

servants in the second part of the 19th century after the abolition of slavery in Trinidad.⁶¹ The balance comprises a growing proportion of a “mixed” group. This cultural diversity is instrumental when analyzing the ways in which Trinidadian women negotiate gender.

While the feminist movement in Trinidad and Tobago has made tremendous gains since the 1940s, these have been limited by the faulty implementation of laws geared towards the protection of women.⁶² These faulty implementations are not accidental but rather the result of mainstream resistance to the idea of governmental regulations in favour of women. Where dominant groups are forced to accede to the demands of subjugated entities, it is common for these groups to create a legal system where deficient rules masquerade as legal rules that promote the formal equality of those who are subjugated.⁶³ Paulette Pierce describes this subterfuge as a common response “by hegemonic classes to demands from marginalized groups, for greater inclusion in modern systems of control and resource distribution.”⁶⁴ Pierce labels this substitution as a “structural deflection” and “an adroit substitution of a formal equality for a true equality that would require fundamentally changing the way things are done, changing the goals of the organization, or both.”⁶⁵

The enactment of Trinidad’s Domestic Violence Act and its subsequent faulty application in the court system is a perfect example of Pierce’s aforementioned adroit substitution of formal equality for true equality. Despite mainstream objections that the act was an attempt to criminalize “husband and wife business”, it was passed.⁶⁶ Its enactment was hailed throughout the Caribbean as a symbol of women’s gains over Trinidad’s entrenched patriarchal system. It is reported that “thousands of women from all over the

⁶¹ The Government of Trinidad & Tobago Government Online – General Information, <http://www.visittrinidad.com/General/about/general.html> (last visited Feb. 26, 2006).

⁶² Rhoda Reddock reports that women’s organizations in Trinidad and Tobago flourished during the 1940s and 1950s due to better opportunities for women, as a result of the war and the establishment of universal suffrage in Trinidad in 1946. Education soon became the means for entrance into formerly exclusively male social arenas. As women gained more access to education, many organizations sprang up, such as the Housewives’ Association of Trinidad and Tobago, the National Commission on the Skills of Women, Trinidad’s Women for Progress, and the Centre for Gender and Development Studies at the University of West Indies in Trinidad and Jamaica. See also Patricia Mohammed, “Reflections on the Women’s Movement in Trinidad: Calypsos, Changes and Sexual Violence” in *Feminist Rev.* (1991); Selwyn Ryan, “Social Stratification in Trinidad and Tobago: Lloyd Braithwaite Revisited” in *Social and Occupational Stratification in Contemporary Trinidad and Tobago* (St. Augustine, Trinidad: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1991).

⁶³ Formal equality here refers to the legal laws that purport to confer the same status on women as men, but do not necessarily provide them with substantive equality.

⁶⁴ Mindie Lazarus-Black, *The (Heterosexual) Regendering of a Modern State: Criminalizing and Implementing Domestic Violence Law in Trinidad* 28 *Law & Soc. Inquiry* (2003) 979, 985 available at <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/LSI/journal/issues/v28n4/284001/284001.web.pdf> (quoting Paulette Pierce, “Boudoir Politics and the Birthing of a Nation: Sex, Marriage, and Structural Deflection in the National Black Independent Party” in *Women Out of Place: The Gender Agency and The Race of Nationality*. Brackette F. Williams ed., (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* at 994 (quoting *Trinidad Guardian*, Mar. 10, 1991).

country filed applications for protection as soon as the act became law”.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, passing the law did not take into consideration the cultural forms of domination present everywhere in Trinidad, including the courtrooms and the clerk offices. As a result, “the vast majority of applications for protection orders do not result in restraining orders”.⁶⁸ In addition, as stated by Mindie Lazarus-Black, “when lawmakers and activists passed the Domestic Violence Act, they imagined a regendered state attuned to the problem of violence against women. As many anthropologists and linguists have shown, however, implementing rights and protections requires attention to everyday ideologies and practices of the culture at the courthouse.”⁶⁹ Such is the task faced by a number of states enacting formal rules similar to Trinidad’s Domestic Violence Act. To achieve true equality, it is necessary for states to pay attention to the way in which formal equality masquerades as true equality, and also examine closely the ways in which women undertake feminist activism through everyday tasks and actions. Only by referring to specific women’s struggles and by understanding the forms they take and the issues they raise, can there be true equality for women.

Poor Trinidadian women illustrate the power of an organic feminism in the way they choose to display their bodies. Both Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian women, especially those belonging to the lower social echelon, have consistently resisted society’s gender classifications and patriarchal oppression. From slavery to modern times, these women have been able to manoeuvre around societal constraints, create their own sub-reality, and sub-culture as a coping mechanism and a way of asserting their independence and identity. Historically, they have used their bodies as liberating forces and as a means of obtaining political, societal and sexual power. They are from different cultural legacies but they come together in these settings and join each other in liberating expressions.

Afro-Caribbean women initially used masquerading, or ‘dressing up’, at Carnival to invent new social structures and/or reverse already existing ones.⁷⁰ As Pamela R. Franco pointed out, dressing up is a “non-confrontational style that allows women to be visible, not as objects, but as agents and producers of meaning in their performances”.⁷¹ Afro-Caribbean women who participated in early European-based celebrations were concerned with self-representation and symbolic repositioning because they were unable to perform the masquerades of their homelands, which were representations of ancestors, guides and teachers in initiation ceremonies. For example, historians describe costumes, such as the French-Creole Martiniquan dress, with “elaborate underskirt... turban, foulard, and a profusion of jewellery” as a dress of “‘high affect’ juxtaposing highly contrasting colors and designs.”⁷² While these elaborate costumes resembled variations of the existing European style of dress, they were, in fact, used by Afro-Caribbean women “as public

⁶⁷ Ibid. at 985 (quoting Merri Creque, “The Shelter for Battered Women and Coalition against Domestic Violence: A Study of the Incidence of Domestic Violence in Trinidad and Tobago from 1991 to 1993” (1995)).

⁶⁸ Ibid. at 985.

⁶⁹ Ibid. at 986.

⁷⁰ See Pamela R. Franco, “Dressing Up and Looking Good: Afro-Creole Maskers in Trinidad Carnival” in *African Arts*, Spring 1998, at 62, 62-96.

⁷¹ Ibid. at 63.

⁷² Ibid. at 64.

displays of rank and authority⁷³ rather than simple imitations of European women. Costumes were used by Afro-Caribbean women as encoded signs and masks that helped recreate a social order in which they, an oppressed group, occupied positions of power.

Indo-Trinidadian women had their own way of resisting dominance and traditional patriarchal norms. Those who came to the island as indentured servants had the unique opportunity to depart from the established gender roles perpetuated in their homelands. While gender inequity in wages and treatment certainly existed among indentured Indians, researchers suggest that at least “the system of indentureship did offer conditions under which [women] could earn an independent wage. The 1847 Immigration Ordinance granted... \$2.40 to male Indians, \$1.45 to female Indians...”⁷⁴ The capacity of women “to commodify their labour power in Trinidad...despite the lower value attached to their labour, must have provided a material base from which they could achieve a degree of economic independence.”⁷⁵ While the immigrants and the regulators strove to maintain traditional family life, housing conditions created a close proximity that facilitated gender interactions and negotiations, especially for single men and women.⁷⁶ Thus, “[a]way from the watchful eyes of parents and kin, women and men had the option of choosing from several willing partners. This was a fundamental break with the patriarchal tradition, where marriages were arranged by parents, and families kept intact by a host of kin relationships and duties.”⁷⁷

To say that indentured women were given the chance to create new opportunities and break way from some of the patriarchal restraints does not negate the fact that these women were also physically vulnerable to rapes and other crimes and the incidence of rape and violence against them during their indentureship was high. Nonetheless, they were able to negotiate some advantages that rendered life on the island preferable to a return to India. This is supported by the fact that a much higher percentage of men than women returned to India.⁷⁸

This phenomenon seems to be in great part due to the fact that, while Indian men found it quite easy to resume their roles in society on their return to India, women were considered to have lost their caste or status and found it hard to readjust to life on their return to the subcontinent.⁷⁹ By leaving India, these women had already transgressed traditional female conduct and the new habits they adopted in the colony were

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Mohammed, *supra* note 60, at 43; *see also* Bridget Brereton, “General Problems and Issues in Studying the History of Women” in *Gender in Caribbean Development*. Patricia Mohammed and Catherine Shepherd eds. (Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados: University of the West Indies Press, 1988). Brereton notes that many Indian women who came were single, and that such circumstances allowed them to escape rigid classifications by earning and keeping their own wages.

⁷⁵ Mohammed, *supra* note 60, at 43. *See also* Kapil Kumar, “Rural Women in Oudh 1917-1947: Baba Ramchandra and the Women’s Question” in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (Kumkum Sangari & Sudesh Vaid eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

⁷⁶ Mohammed, *supra* note 60, at 44. “All Immigration Ordinances deemed it illegal to separate husbands and wives and children under the age of 15.”

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid. at 50.

⁷⁹ Ibid..

unacceptable in the old setting.⁸⁰ For example, in 1893, “females who upon their arrival [to Trinidad] would veil their faces with their ornie at the approach of a man... [would] after some years’ residence in the colony, merely touch the ornie with the hand, and in many cases neglect to do so altogether.”⁸¹ Furthermore, many of the single Indian women who migrated to Trinidad did so in order to escape some form of societal constraint or difficulty in their lives and found in the island more freedom than in India.

When settled in Trinidad, it is reported that the immigrant women found many ways to carve out new identities and challenge the patriarchal structure. These attempts at independence, however, often triggered violent responses from the male population.⁸² They sometimes defied the established norms by changing sexual partners at will and by taking paramours of different races. These actions alarmed both the Christian missionaries and Indo-Caribbean men. When Sarah Morton, a missionary, narrated her conversation with Indo-Caribbean women on the issue of sexuality, she recorded her dismay:

The loose actions and prevailing practices in respect of marriage here are quite shocking to the newcomer. I said to an East Indian woman whom I knew to be the widow of a Brahmin, ‘You have no relations in Trinidad, I believe?’ ‘No Madame,’ she replied, ‘only myself and two children; when the last immigrant ship came, I took a ‘papa.’ I will keep him as long as he treats me well. If he does not treat me well, I shall send him off at once; that’s the right way, is it not?’⁸³

Some Indo-Caribbean women renegotiated their standing in relation to their male counterparts through the politics of the body. Setting the standards for appropriate treatment in male-female relationships, they defied the norms of patriarchy and Christianity by even indulging in polyandrous practices and interracial intercourse. Risking violence against them by their male counterparts,⁸⁴ the women “continued to challenge normative expectations of Indian female sexuality and simultaneously

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid. at 50, quoting Dennis Wood Deane Comins, a note on emigration from India to Trinidad 38 (1893).

⁸² There were a great number of recorded of murders and “chopping” of women by men who became jealous either because a woman lover replaced them with another man or because he suspected her of romantic involvement another man. Mohammed, *supra* note 60, at 188-90.

⁸³ Ibid. at 183, quoting John Morton of Trinidad 343 (Sarah Morton ed., 1916).

⁸⁴ Ibid. at 188. “Even when the indentureship system ended . . . ‘crimes of passion’ persisted with some regularity . . . In Chaguanas, an inquest was held into the death of Antee, an Indian woman, killed on the Montrose Estate on February 28, 1918. The verdict delivered by Mr. R.M. Van Buren, Senior Magistrate, was that the ‘woman came to her death by the severing of the spinal cord as a result of wounds inflicted by Lutchmarsingh who has since hanged himself’ . . . In April 1919, Narinesingh, a middle-aged Indian man, was indicted for wounding one Jusoral on Thursday, October 27th at the San Pedro estate. The case for the Crown was that Narinesingh and Jusoral had been living together for a considerable period of time. She left him about four months before, having ‘transferred her affections’ to another Indian male. ‘On the day in question, the accused went to the house of his rival, called the woman out and inflicted a severe cut on her forehead. The cut went through a considerable portion of the bone and the brain matter was almost exposed’. . . Men were sometimes also the victims of jealousy-motivated violence: “Jealous at the idea that his sweetheart had transferred her affections to another labourer on the Caroni estate, by the name of Stephen Rogers [most likely a non-Indian man], Dookie, one morning in July last, inflicted two severe wounds on Rogers with a brushing cutlass. Dookie giving evidence said ‘Rogers took away my wife . . .’”).

redefine[d] femininity in the Trinidad-Indian context.”⁸⁵ These indentured women shook the fabric of patriarchy in such a way that in 1916, a year before the end of indentureship, a group of indentured labourers filed a formal complaint against Indian women.⁸⁶ The complaint specifically deplored the freedom the women were able to exercise in their choice of sexual partners and the inability of their husbands, brothers and fathers to prevent their behaviour. It stated in part:

Is it plausible that those females desire to live as paramours with males of a different race to hers. Fathers nor husbands, nor brothers, who are their lawful protectors have power over them and are not in the least heard when such matters are brought before the authorities.⁸⁷

With the greater reconstitution of an Indian community in ensuing decades, the number of Indian women on the island increased and patriarchal structures re-established a stronghold over their lives on the island. Still, through body protest, both Indo- and Afro-Caribbean women continued to challenge normative concepts of sexuality and women’s roles in various arenas.

Body protest and resistance as expressed in modern-day settings in Trinidad and Tobago

It is not only during Carnival that Trinidadian women appropriate and invert the dominant culture’s norms. Faced with the constraints of a male-dominated culture, Trinidadian women challenge social norms at dance clubs and in neighbourhood streets. Such metamorphoses are so convincing that it becomes difficult to determine where the performances end and reality begins. Women are also subject to great dangers because they are often viewed as loose and easy prey. While literally masquerading by wearing costumes, women also figuratively do so by adopting personae that normally would not be deemed acceptable by Trinidad and Tobago’s patriarchal society.

Masquerading in non-carnival settings takes various forms: from women dressing the part of the courtesan of old, to the sultry, sexually experienced, aggressive woman who defies society, to the woman who is completely in control of her own body and expresses it to music. We see her in the club, ‘wining’ suggestively to calypso or reggae,⁸⁸ overpowering her male partner with the thrust of her hips, becoming the pursuer. In sharp contrast to her domestic or professional identity, she takes on the role of the sexual aggressor, through explicit sexual acts with and without a partner. She uses the movements of her body to exert control over her male partner.⁸⁹ For example, she might use fast, strong and

⁸⁵ Ibid. at 188.

⁸⁶ Ibid. at 190.

⁸⁷ Ibid, quoting *Petition of Indentured Labourers in Trinidad, 1916*. 913, *Duke J Gender Law and Policy*, 177.

⁸⁸ To wine is a term used in the English-speaking Caribbean which refers to dance movements involving the lower part of the body. Wining is usually associated with soca and dancehall music.

⁸⁹ Trinidadian women’s attempt to control their bodies and resist patriarchy is also present in soca songs by female artists such as “I’m Going to Kill You with My Wine Tonight” and “Carnival Is a Time for Freedom” by Denise Belfon (stage name Saucy Wow), and “Bonnie and Clyde” by Destra. The songs clearly show these women’s intention of resisting patriarchal structures and defeating restrictions imposed

provocative hip movement to throw her male partner off-balance. The man becomes the hunted, the woman the hunter. The male partner in the above scenario is overwhelmed by this form of expression and not truly understanding the source of it, may categorize it as odd, licentious and problematic, even while fully participating in it. The adoption of traditionally masculine roles in chance settings begs the question of whether this behaviour ultimately benefits women or whether it simply duplicates the patriarchal system. While it is certain that some women definitely emulate a pattern of behaviour expected by patriarchy, others have attempted to carve out an identity that is contradictory to that delineated by the Caribbean patriarchy.

Regardless of the actual cause of the behaviour and of whether the masquerader is, in fact, the puppet of an omnipresent puppeteer, I contend that the masquerades that play out in our sub-cultural settings should inform a more women-centric reform of Trinidad and Tobago's jurisprudence. This reform is necessary and urgently needed because the aforementioned efforts at sexual liberation make those women who are sexually liberated easy targets of sexual predators and sexists. Women's attempts to forge a more complex identity seem to have gone unnoticed by Trinidad and Tobago's jurisprudence. An exploration of criminal, family and succession laws reveal that not only are women's complexities not addressed in Trinidad and Tobago's jurisprudence, but also that some of their basic needs for legal protection are ignored.

The need for women-centric reforms in Trinidadian and Tobagonian jurisprudence

Trinidad and Tobago's jurisprudence is young and pregnant with possibilities for reform. The need for indigenous reforms and a move away from the neutral language of English jurisprudence is evidenced by the fact that the legal statutes do not address specific problems experienced by the women of Trinidad and Tobago. To appreciate this need, let us first look at aspects of Trinidad and Tobago's law that are discriminatory towards women; and second, analyse aspects of Trinidad and Tobago's law that are neutral, but discriminatory in their application.

A wide variety of laws in Trinidad are discriminatory; most importantly, those dealing with rape, as there has been a rise in the number of reported cases in Trinidad. Women who are raped or violated have very little recourse to justice. Marital rape was only recently outlawed in the country.⁹⁰ This fact reveals the lack of protection once afforded to married women and clearly shows disregard for a woman's right to consent to sex and to control her body after marriage. The rationale underlying this statute was flawed and its reasoning tacitly condoned other acts of physical violence against women. This

on their bodies. In "Bonnie and Clyde", for example, Destra specifically creates an ode to her rag as her sole reliable companion and rejects the presence of any male companion in a desire to remain autonomous. Similarly, when performing, Denise Belfon usually invites a man on the stage and unflinchingly overpowers him physically, thus publicly shaming any attempt he makes at controlling her body.

⁹⁰ Press release, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women Concludes Consideration of Trinidad and Tobago Report, U.N. Doc. WOM/1316 (Jan. 29, 2002).

rationale also ratified the domestic abuser's feeling of entitlement to commit acts of violence against women.⁹¹

A case that is the seminal precedent for determining consent in rape case states that:

Rape is not a word in the use of which lawyers have a monopoly and the question to be answered in this case, as I see it, is whether according to the ordinary use of the English language a man can be said to have committed rape if he believed that the woman was consenting to the intercourse and would not have attempted to have it but for his belief, whatever his grounds for so believing. I do not think that he can.⁹²

The problem with consent being established subjectively is that it mutes the women's voice and negates the possibility that she might have withdrawn her consent.

Another example of gender bias in the actual drafting of law is seen in Trinidad's statutory rape laws. Strict liability is applied to statutory rape crimes committed against girls aged 13 and younger, but not to statutory rape crimes committed against girls between 14 and 18.⁹³ The law thereby treats young women as sexual actors and sees them as active contributors to their fate, no matter how immature they may be. The law may be so written in part because sexual involvement with girls as young as 12 is so high in the Caribbean that legislators are perhaps reluctant to change the status quo. Sexual offences such as abductions of unmarried girls under 14, as well as "attempting to procure any girl...not being a common prostitute, or of known immoral character, to have unlawful carnal connection" are only punishable by two years in prison.⁹⁴ The age of consent for a female minor's ability to contract marriage can be as low as 12 years old.⁹⁵ This rule might speak specifically to the diverse racial make-up of Trinidad's population, which is 39.6% African descent and 40.3% East Indian descent, with the rest being of mixed, European and Asian descent.⁹⁶ Traditionally, arranged marriages among Indians were contracted at a young age explains the Trinidad and Tobago legislature's to set the

⁹¹ See Leela Ramdeen, "Eliminating Violence Against Women" in *Trinidad Guardian* (online edition), Nov. 22, 2004, available at <http://www.guardian.co.tt/archives/2004-11-22/LeelaRamdeen.html>

⁹² *Director of Public Prosecutions v. Morgan*, [1976] A.C. 182 (H.L.), available at http://www.nuigalway.ie/law/Common%20Files/larry_donnelly/nameMorgan_and_rape_rtf (emphasis added) (discussing the mens rea of rape and the effect of mistake on this mens rea requirement under the common law. This is the leading House of Lords decision on this issue. Mr. Morgan brought three men from a pub to his home and requested that they have intercourse with his wife. Mr. Morgan told the men to ignore his wife's protests or resistance, saying his wife was "kinky". The men forcibly overcame the wife's resistance and each penetrated her without her consent. The three men were charged with rape. Though charged with aiding and abetting the men, the husband was not charged with rape because the marital immunity was thought to apply. The trial judge directed the jury that the defendants would not be guilty of rape if they honestly believed that the woman was consenting and the belief in consent was reasonably held).

⁹³ Offences Against the Person Act, 1990, c. 11:08 § 32 Trinidad & Tobago.

⁹⁴ Offences Against the Person Act, 1990, c. 11:08 §§ 37, 48 Trinidad & Tobago.

⁹⁵ U.N. Comm. on the Rights of a Child, *State Party Report – Trinidad and Tobago*, U.N. Doc. CRC/C/11/Add.10 (Feb. 16, 1996) stating that under the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act, c. 45:02, a girl may marry at 12 and a boy at 16, and that under the common law, the ages are 12 for a girl and 14 for a boy.

⁹⁶ The Government of Trinidad & Tobago Government Online – General Information, available at <http://www.visittrinidad.com/General/about/general.html> (last visited Feb. 26, 2006).

minimum age of consent for females at 12 years old for Muslims and 14 years for Hindus. The law, nonetheless, requires the consent of the parent or guardian to solemnize the marriage.

Abortions are illegal in Trinidad and Tobago, except to protect the life or health of the mother; those who are found guilty of procuring an abortion can be imprisoned for up to four years.⁹⁷ Despite being illegal, the abortion rate in Trinidad and Tobago is thought to be higher than in the United States, and abortion has turned into a lucrative business for those willing to perform them.⁹⁸ The issue of whether women should have access to legal abortions is a delicate subject in a deeply religious country. However, granting the right to legal abortions would raise the standard for legal protections granted to Caribbean women, because it would recognize the sovereignty of their bodies.

There is also a need for a revision of laws affecting common-law marriages in Trinidad and Tobago. While great strides have been made in giving Caribbean women in common-law unions maintenance or inheritance rights, this legislation is not reflected in the day-to-day realities many face. In Trinidad and Tobago, the law recognizes common-law unions as valid, and the women are entitled to both maintenance and inheritance rights if they can prove cohabitation for an extended period of time.⁹⁹ The legislature, however, has failed to address the existing problem of men having more than one common-law union, in addition to being legally married. Even though the law recognizes common-law marriage, it seems that the multiple common-law wives of a decedent are still faced with having to compete for the label of sole wife at the death of their husband.

Trinidad and Tobago's jurisprudence, thus far, has been blind to the *de facto* polygamy that exists in the Caribbean and, consequently, has been unable to hold men accountable within this structure.

In addition to clearly discriminatory laws, Trinidad and Tobago has many others that are gender-neutral, but are applied in a discriminatory way by the courts. The country's constitution supports the equality of all citizens under the law and the legislature has in many ways attempted to pass laws that would ensure equality between the sexes. Why, then, are the women of Trinidad and Tobago still subordinated and subjected to unequal treatment in certain aspects of the law?

One of the reasons lies in the current inefficiency of the legal machinery in Trinidad. Mindie Lazarus-Black asserts that the failure of the domestic violence law in Caribbean countries to provide meaningful protection to its victims is due to four factors: (1) the sheer number of protection applicants (2) that few applications result in extended protections (3) that the majority of applications are withdrawn or dismissed, and (4) the considerable time that these cases take to be resolved.¹⁰⁰ Another challenge to obtaining

⁹⁷ Offences Against the Person Act, 1990, c. 11:08 §§ 56-57 Trinidad & Tobago.

⁹⁸ Paul Nowak, "Planned Parenthood Targets Trinidad and Tobago to Legalize Abortion" on ttgapapers.com, Aug. 10, 2004, <http://www.ttgapapers.com/Article801.html>.

⁹⁹ Suzanne Shephard, "How TT's Laws Cover Common-Law Unions" in *Newsday*, Jan. 22, 2006, http://www.newsday.co.tt/stories.php?article_id=32708.

¹⁰⁰ Mindie Lazarus-Black, "The Rites of Domination: Tales From the Domestic Violence Court" The Centre for Gender and Development Studies, Working Paper No. 7, 2002.

adequate legal protection for women lies in a lack of organization and a proper means of tracking cases in the court system.¹⁰¹ In this context, it is very easy for women to get discouraged and eventually decide not to pursue a case. The fact that the system is so disorganized speaks volumes about how little importance members of the legal system accord domestic violence cases. In addition to their inefficiency, women seeking remedies from the courts have to deal with intimidation, the humiliation factor of having their personal lives on trial, the effects of judicial discretion (which is often formed by the decision-maker's own bias and socialization), and the numerous second chances given by courts to their abuser, even when they have already violated court mandates.¹⁰²

Inherent flaws in the proper application of the law reveal a need for gender reform in attitudes as well. Gender sensitivity workshops might serve to counter the long-term effects of the inherent sexism in Trinidad and Tobago's culture. While gender law and relations are far from perfect in the United States, such workshops in offices have helped acclimatize Americans to the idea of women in power and have forced individuals to be more careful about the use of gender-biased language. For these workshops to be successful, however, they must be implemented in conjunction with a movement to amend laws that protect women more adequately. In addition, organizations, individuals and officials implementing gender-sensitivity workshops must especially target primary and secondary school students since they will set the tone for Trinidad and Tobago's gender relations in the future.

Reform proposal

To reform the traditional English law-based Caribbean system, a new generation of Trinidadian women must lobby lawmakers to make greater use of indigenous concepts of identity and of gender equality. In order to accomplish this, both men and women will have to be educated about how law is both made and applied,¹⁰³ so they can organize grassroots reformation movements to promote change. While women's rights movements have had successes, feminist activism in Trinidad and Tobago should not be limited to an educated class of women 'helping' the less privileged. Combined efforts to recognize the potential contributions of women from all social spheres will not only create a healthy, egalitarian feminist movement in Trinidad and Tobago, but will also put more pressure on the male-dominated legislature to represent women's interests.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ The author personally witnessed the difficulties presented by the courts' case indexing system when she went to the courthouse and was not able to find a case after nearly an hour, despite the presence of numerous clerks. This inefficiency might also point to the problems created by the digital divide that exists between the Caribbean and more technologically advanced nations like the United States.

¹⁰² Lazarus-Black, *supra* note 105, at 14-16.

¹⁰³ See generally Stephen Heath, "Male Feminism" in Men in *Feminism* Alice Jardine and Paul Smith eds., (New York: Methuen Ltd, 1987) and *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism* (Joseph A. Boone & Michael Cadden eds., (New York: Methuen Ltd, 1990).

¹⁰⁴ While this comment refers specifically to women in Trinidad, the abolition of the divide between social spheres among women as well as the sameness/deviant divide enunciated by Regina Austin would benefit feminist movements worldwide and maximize our efforts.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to infiltrate the political system in Trinidad and implement ways of holding the legislators accountable for their indifference towards women's concerns. Lobbying and forceful protests against politicians' decisions might force them to enact useful, women-centric laws in a quicker fashion. Such lobbying led to the passing of the Domestic Violence Act in Trinidad and Tobago. It is important to show lawmakers that the majority of women are unhappy with the laws.

Both male and female attorneys should advance women-centric, equitable arguments in court documents without fear that the judges will not take them seriously or that they will be labelled as being too sensitive. A new generation of female attorneys can be instrumental in advocating for change inside and outside of the courtrooms. Many professional women in Trinidad readily admit the oppression that they experience from the 'good ole boy' network in the legal profession. Breaking the vicious cycle of that network will require a constant denunciation of its existence and its nefarious effects.

Conclusion

Body protest is not particular to a country or region. Sexism and patriarchy are inherent problems in all societies, as are legal systems' inability to protect women who contest the status quo. Throughout the world, sectors of women use body-inspired tools to renegotiate society's restrictive and oppressive gender definitions. Exploring such uses, however, demands that we eradicate preconceived notions and learn to appreciate the potential utilitarian and redemptive functions of body politics. Body protest demonstrates that the female body is a symbol loaded with meaning and that its use can constitute protected speech. Body protest is evoked in the context of Trinidad and Tobago's traditional custom of masquerading because the terms 'body protest' and 'masquerade' both refer to the presentation of physical elements which mask underlying messages and social commentaries.

The purpose of discussing Trinidadian and Tobagonian's women's body protest is not to say their gender issues are unique, but to demonstrate how women's symbolic conduct constitutes feminist activism. Trinidad and Tobago is but one example where this type of struggle takes place daily. The goal is for all those who are committed to 'global feminism' to find ways to exert pressure on local governments to obtain more legal protection for these protests. This article recognizes that while countries are currently in various stages of the struggle for women's rights, all legal systems need to accept women's use of bodies for resistance and redemptive functions.

Female bodily expression has generally been associated with eroticism, which is a concept that is "often... misnamed by men and used against women."¹⁰⁵ Eradication of these biases will remove a monumental obstacle to trans-cultural, trans-economic coalition-building among women. Acknowledging the impact of sexual profiling on all members of society is the first step in accepting one's own internalized sexism. The changes proposed will not take place overnight and will necessitate cross-cultural and

¹⁰⁵ Lorde, *supra* note 2, at 54 (stating that these stereotypes have led us to "turn[] away from the . . . erotic as a source of power and information...")

cross-generational coalition-building. A study of law-making in American jurisprudence shows that legal changes occur over long periods because of social, political and international pressure.¹⁰⁶ This recipe may also be successful in pushing for change in Trinidad and Tobago. This does not mean that American standards and views should be forced on other countries, but that women activists from around the world should team up to accelerate reforms that would increase women's rights. The success of these coalitions will depend on feminist theorists' ability to accept and understand non-traditional forms of resistance to patriarchy. Understanding non-traditional tools of resistance, like the female body, will not only facilitate a greater discourse among women internationally but also reinvigorate the domestic feminist movement.

¹⁰⁶See Mary L. Dudziak, *Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative*, in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000) 106, 106-08 (Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic eds., 2d ed



ISSUE 1 • April 2007

Love and Anxiety: Gender Negotiations in Chutney-Soca Lyrics in Trinidad

Aisha Mohammed

Abstract

Chutney soca is commonly perceived to be a fusion of chutney, an Indo-Trinidadian folk music performed during Hindu weddings, and soca, which is Afro-Trinidadian fête music that developed through a mixture of calypso with soul.¹ Marriage, sex and the family are recurring themes in “classical” chutney music. When chutney makes the transition to chutney-soca, the themes remain but their articulation changes both literally, in the sense that English becomes the primary language, and figuratively, as their articulation is influenced by multiple sex/gender systems. It is my contention that in chutney-soca, Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian sex/gender belief systems come into intense interaction, causing symbolic disruptions in the Indian system of gender relations. These disruptions can result in the reconfiguration of gender relations for Indian women and men at a metaphoric level.² The desire of organizers of the Chutney-Soca Monarch competition to make it marketable to a foreign audience by conforming to ‘international’

¹ For the rest of the paper, when referring to Indo and Afro-Trinidadians, I use the terms ‘Indian’ and ‘black’ respectively. See also a glossary at the end of the paper for non-english words or idioms used.

² Although chutney-soca is a fusion music, and depends on the participation of both black and Indian artistes, it is still widely considered to be an ‘Indian artform’ due to the prevalence of imagery derived from Indian homes and customs, as well as the mostly Indian audiences at chutney soca events. Newspaper headlines like “Plenty chutney, too little soca” (*TnT Mirror*, 6 February 1998) and “Too much ‘jump and wave’ in chutney soca” (*Trinidad Guardian*, 15 January 2001) point to this perception. They also reveal the anxieties of Indians invested in defining an Indian culture distinct from the ‘dominant Creole’ culture due to fears of assimilation and cultural erosion. For this reason, I contend that the disruption resulting from interaction primarily affects the Indian system of gender relations.

standards also introduces North American gender ideologies. In this paper, I will look at how women and men, within the framework of the competition, negotiate gendered identities primarily through song lyrics, simultaneously challenging and reinforcing prevailing gender ideologies.

A history of chutney-soca

Research on the art forms reveals that the origins of both chutney and soca are contested, and that both resist easy definition (Ramnarine, 2001). The blending of the two is seen as a ‘natural’ development as both are celebratory in nature, create spaces for expressions of sexuality, especially women’s sexuality, and emphasize rhythms at the expense of melodies and lyrics. Yet chutney is said to have emerged from the religious context of Hindu wedding songs, and soca from the secular context of calypso. It is perhaps due to these diverse roots, or what are widely perceived to be diverse roots, that controversy about acceptable topics for compositions and judging have emerged during the Chutney Soca Monarch competition.

Race, gender and sexuality are deeply implicated in the development and expression of both chutney and soca. Chutney was a genre of songs performed by Indian women in some of the sex-segregated rituals of the Hindu wedding ceremony, before it became a popular art form. When chutney made the transition to the public sphere and adjusted to include men as performers and audience members, it was still considered an exclusive space for Indians. The art form was labelled ‘Indian soca’ and chutney shows ‘Indian alternatives’ to Carnival. Women’s sexuality, whether celebrated in *matikor* or exhibited during public chutney shows, has always been a focus of the art form and has been interpreted through the male gaze. The themes, relying on domestic imagery, are preoccupied with sexual relations between men and women, and gender relations in general. Some observers believe that the transition to the public sphere gave the art form a new lease on life. Folk songs and melodies that would have died with the women who sung them were revived, remixed and re-presented, largely due to the promotional efforts of the Mohammed brothers, with Mastana Bahar, Indian Cultural Pageant and weekend chutney fetes (see below).³

Ras Shorty I, a black calypsonian who is considered to be the ‘father’ of soca, stated that the music came about as an effort to revive calypso, which he, along with other artistes, perceived to be a dying art form:

³ Not all Indians, especially orthodox Hindus, appreciated these efforts. The Mohammeds (brothers who were producers of Mastana Bahar) were “severely criticized for being unscrupulous about the desecration of Hindu culture. They have been accused of exploiting the chutney phenomenon and the Hindu individual for commercial gain” (Ribeiro 1992).

I was looking for new avenues to improve the music, and from *Indrani*⁴ I went to Soul Calypso Music...Soca comes from calypso. It's the nucleus of calypso, the soul. I felt that everybody had tried with calypso. They called it soul calypso to link it with soul. I felt that to move on we had to change, get a new name. Calypso was dying a natural death. And to come up with a new name and a new form in calypsoul was what Sparrow was trying to do all along. Sparrow tried to add a lot of things to calypso and it didn't work. I felt it needed something brand new to hit everybody like a thunderbolt. I knew what I was doing was incorporating soul with calypso, but I didn't want to say soul calypso or calypsoul. So I came up with the name soca. I invented soca. And I never spelt it s-o-c-a. It was s-o-k-a-h to reflect the East Indian influence in the music (Boyke 1979).

Having grown up in Lengua, an Indian village, he felt that a new national music should include Indian rhythms, but the predominantly African community of calypsonians was not open to this notion at the time (Popplewell 2004). When he introduced the sound of soca on his *Love Man* LP (1974), he was criticized for 'playing Indian'. With his next album, *Endless Vibrations* (1975), soca began to catch on. By the 1980s, soca had become a major part of Carnival fêtes and black culture. Sexuality is also a focus of this art form, as critics and commentators have been obsessed with the image of the 'wining woman' in Carnival (Miller 1991). Gender relations as seen in the audience-performer relationship are similar to that of chutney, since the majority of popular artistes tend to be male, and the audience is perceived as being mostly female.

Historical context of chutney-soca

In the 1990s, Indians made a political breakthrough into the national consciousness with Basdeo Panday's successful campaign for Prime Minister. Ethnomusicologist Peter Manuel saw parallel cultural developments expressed in chutney and chutney soca as both "a concerted revival and assertion of Indian identity" and a "new spirit of creolization and syncreticism" (2000: 168). Panday commented on the fusion of chutney and soca in his opening speech at the first Chutney Soca Monarch (CSM), pointing out that the "cross-culturalization of music" was "a step in the direction of national unity" (*Trinidad Express*, February 1996). He specifically considered the creation of the competition as an "indication that people, despite our ethnic differences, are working together towards a common goal" (ibid).

Before I delve further into the components of the Chutney Soca Monarch competition, and its precursor, *Mastana Bahar*, it would be useful to discuss functions of the competition in Trinidad and what these might signify for art forms, organizers and contestants. Competitions seem to form a central part of the major art forms in Trinidad and Tobago, such as calypso and steel pan, and now chutney. There are several reasons why this might be the case: they validated indigenous aspects of culture that were seen as inferior to European art forms; encouraged creativity and the transition from imitation to innovation; provided important venues for budding artistes to gain experience and exposure; and in the late 20th century, became profitable endeavours. In addition, in post-colonial Trinidad, competitions took on yet another meaning. The government's decision to sponsor competitions like Panorama, and the National Calypso Monarch, and not

⁴ Georgia Popplewell described the song *Indrani* as a "chronicle of African/Indian romance which telegraphed the nation's racial anxieties" (1996).

support others like Chutney Soca Monarch, indicates how the nation is being defined and imagined, as well as what cultural forms are considered central to the development and definition of a national identity (Anderson, 1983).

For Indian art forms, small, local competitions came into being at the turn of the 20th century.

As villages grew and people became more stable, individual singing took a special place and group singing declined in popularity. ‘Tent singing’ along with many homes now hired singers for entertainment and this propelled the building of a classical repertoire. In such a case, a couple of singers would vie against each other in striving to be the best throughout the sitting. Even from this early development, the idea of competition began to grow, which added to the popularity of classical singing (Maharaj 1994).

This idea of competition has now developed to the point where almost every aspect of Indian culture, from food and music, to standards of beauty is subject to competition.

In the post-independence period, Indian cultural competitions, particularly *Mastana Bahar*, also became a means to emphasize ethnic identity and sharpen the borders of the Indian community, which many Indians felt were being threatened by social developments at the time. Patricia Mohammed writes that in the post-indentureship period:

Community is defined by how people think about themselves as well as how the state and political structures reinforce the notion of difference. The formation or definition of an Indian community in Trinidad was encouraged by factors that facilitated such a demarcation (2002, 8).

The factors at that time were Hindi and Hinduism. By the end of the 1960s, Hindi was no longer a strong marker of difference, because most Indians communicated with each other in English. Hinduism, in terms of rituals and institutions such as the Maha Sabha and schools, was also declining (Vertovec 1992, 124). There was a fear of cultural erosion that was heightened by the Black Power Movement in 1970.

Enter *Mastana Bahar*. Sham Mohammed, described as being “endowed with a strong sense of continuity and preservation of his cultural roots, a mark typical of the early Indian immigrants”, had just returned from studying in the United Kingdom (Mohammed, 1976). On his return, he observed that “the masses of people showed greater appreciation to things foreign: food, clothing, song, music and general lifestyle” and that local song and music, “dominated by Afro-Saxon and Afro-American cultural forces”, was “not receiving a fair share of radio and TV time” (Ibid). Fearing “cultural erosion”⁵ Mohammed “saw the need for cultural exposure and development of local

⁵ Shamoon Mohammed never mentions the Black Power movement and the impacts of the social and political conditions at the time on the creation of *Mastana Bahar* (1996). Perhaps cultural erosion is an indirect way of referring to the Black Power Movement. Ken Parmasad, Indian cultural activist and scholar, was also reluctant to identify the Black Power Movement as a major factor leading to revitalization of the Indian culture: “The tendency to view the increasingly viable expressions of Indian cultural practices from the 1970s as a reaction to the 1970 movement is to delay the deeply embedded historical cultural formation

talent on TV and radio”, which led to the first local competitive Indian television show (Ibid). Public response was impressive, leading to an increase from the original 13-week half-hour series, to a 39-week hour-long series.

Mastana Bahar can be considered a precursor to both the art of chutney-soca and the Chutney Soca Monarch competition in terms of scope of competition, language, musical fusion and the fostering of local compositions. Competitions before *Mastana Bahar* had been small and localized to private homes and village events. On the set of *Mastana Bahar* some contestants seemed to be lagging behind. Shamoan Mohammed complained that many of them are:

merely content to immerse themselves in the naked copying of the songs of famous Indian and Pakistani singers. Surely, imitation has its values, especially as a springboard for the development of budding artistes and for those who are learning and desirous of mastering various song types. But once artistes have attained some reasonable degree of maturity, one would expect them to utilize the skills gained through imitation to display their creative and imaginative propensities (Ibid).

This tendency highlighted the need for more local compositions of with a higher standard of quality and deeper degrees of innovation. Mohammed placed the onus on both artistes and promoters who “can experiment with ‘soca’ and other innovative music” (Ibid).

Language, equated with cultural identity, was a major concern of the producers. Encouraging artistes to produce local compositions had an unwanted side effect — not speaking Hindi, they composed primarily in English. Songs like Sundar Popo’s “Nana and Nani” revealed the audience’s ambiguous feelings towards the English language. They lauded producers for appealing to both Indian and non-Indian audiences and criticized them for the lack of Hindi words. Mohammed expressed the resulting anxieties for producers from purely English compositions: “In such compositions, it is difficult to discern the oriental flavour, and once the latter is lost in compositions of this category; then they have no claims to be promoted under the guise of Indian culture in Trinidad and Tobago” (ibid). The writing of English language compositions was an indication of the process of “Westernisation”. Fearing the demise of Hindi composition and by extension Indian culture, Mohammed warned prophetically:

Besides, a trend could develop where local Indian composers and musicians will seek to concentrate mainly in pure English compositions. This definitely seems to be a retrograde step, especially at a time in our history when every step should be made to encourage a greater knowledge of the oriental languages not only among local Indian artistes, but among Indians as a whole (Ibid).

At that time, it was not conceivable how Indian music, and the Indian community could retain its “Indianness” without an Indian language. Popo’s “Nana and Nani”, one of many English songs that can be considered a precursor to modern chutney-soca, offered a solution, though it was not recognized at the time. The use of familiar folk melodies, and Indian-style enunciation, beautifully exploited today by artistes such as Rakesh Yankaran and Devanand Gattoo, gave the songs an “Indian” sound while widening their appeal to non-Hindi speakers.

in Trinidad... The formation of Indian identity, while it was rooted in the socio-political realities of Trinidadian society, was fortified by an on-going process whereby symbolic continuity with the ancestral heritage sought to be maintained” (1989, 25).

Peter Manuel's commentary on the style, structure and content of chutney and chutney soca brings to the fore contradictions in the music. He notes that:

Chutney, like "jam and wine" soca, generally functions as dance music rather than listening music, and its lyrics tend to be light and insignificant. If soca song texts are generally unimportant because of their brevity and triviality, most "classical" chutney lyrics are semantically insignificant because of their conventionality and, more obviously, because of the fact that they are sung in a language (Bhojpuri Hindi) that is largely unintelligible to most Indo-Trinidadians and Guyanese (2000, 176-77).

In chutney-soca, English or mixed English and Hindi lyrics have come to replace the pure Hindi lyrics of chutney songs. Yet, while the "lyrics in dance music are generally of secondary importance" and the songs "adhere to stock Indian folk-song themes", they become emphasised due to "chutney's strophic, melodically repetitious song structure [which] tends to foreground the verses to some extent" (2000, 176-78). It is these very contradictions that not only make chutney-soca a powerful, socially relevant vehicle for the transmission of gender ideologies, but also reveals the process of negotiation by which they are challenged, changed or reinforced.

Constructions of gender and race produced in MB continue to impact and shape the Chutney Soca Monarch today. Women's dress became an index of their morality and devotion to their culture. Their preference for non-Indian dress was frowned upon:

Shalwars, Kurtas, Gararas, Saris, Lungis etc. portray humility, modesty and a high measure of morality. Oriental wear in its full repertoire should certainly be encouraged as it would expose citizens of this multi-cultural country to their richness and diversity. This point I have emphasized strongly because some contestants and audience members have appeared at times on the programme in apparel that is certainly disgraceful and morally unpalatable, as far as an Indian cultural show is concerned. It is unfortunate that TTT camera crew seem to highlight bare backs and chests (Mohammed, *ibid*).

The women's Western attire became a physical marker of their "failure" to play the role of cultural transmitters. The inclusion of the category of Miss Mastana Bahar Queen in the Indian Cultural Pageant can also be seen as a way to define and control Indian femininity. The attention paid to Indian dress is still present in the Chutney Soca Monarch Competition today. Media coverage of female contestants tends to focus on their bodies and dress, rather than their talent, unlike male contestants.

While Mastana Bahar set certain parameters for female participation, it also led to an increase in the number of female performers in the public sphere. Few women, especially dancers, performed in public in the first half of the 20th century. Those who flouted convention, such as Champa Devi, were labelled prostitutes and considered 'loose women' at the time. It is likely that Mastana Bahar contributed to the gradual destigmatisation of female performers in public spaces and lifted the status of local folk forms, many of which were in the women's domain.

Although it was difficult for non-Indians to make it to the Grand Finals, Mastana Bahar was successful in exposing non-Indians to Indian music and making possible its integration in Carnival several decades later with the Chutney Soca Monarch. It set in motion the growth in output of locally produced records and provided a training ground for many of the contestants who would later compete in the Chutney Soca Monarch and other competitions. George Singh relates how this competition was created:

In 1995, a friend and I went to a chutney show in Penal. It was a culture shock, and an experience I would not forget. I was impressed by the performances of the artistes who were really simple folks, some of them living in abject poverty and dependent on their talents to make a living. In that year Sonny Mann's 'Lotayla' became a big hit. So there was not only a change in traditional chutney music but there was an obvious crossover of music between the chutney and the soca artistes, and a new blend of music emerging out of a dynamic musical culture. But I thought chutney artistes were exploited by promoters who would pay them pennies for their talent (*Sunday Express*, 25 January 1998).

Combining his concern for artistes with experience from organising trade shows, he established the Chutney Soca Monarch in 1996, with the noble aim of creating a forum for chutney and soca artistes to interact, exchange musical ideas and mix the two art forms to create a new blend that held promise for the international market.

Within two years, Singh beamed the show live to Guyana and Suriname. To "make sure that the international community is aware of chutney soca and the fact that Trinidad and Tobago has a diverse cultural society", he also teamed up with popular record label JMC to compile outstanding selections from the show on a CD for distribution in New York and other locations with substantial Indo-Caribbean populations (*Sunday Punch*, 1996). Two years later, in 2000, Singh stepped up his efforts to make the Chutney Soca Monarch a truly international competition. He opened Chutney Soca Monarch to artistes outside of Trinidad and Tobago, and took the show to Toronto, New York and other locations with Indo-Caribbean communities.

Methodology

Patricia Mohammed's study of *Gender Negotiations Among Indians from 1917-47*, (2002) illustrates the centrality of gender in identity formation. She shows how gender arrangements were re-constituted in an effort to define the Indian community after the rupture in gender systems caused by the indentureship experience. What is striking is how persistent the ideologies guiding these arrangements are and how their mediums of transmission alter over generations to adapt to changing social and political contexts. Whereas before they would be transmitted through folk tales and wedding songs, today they are transmitted through mediums such as chutney soca.

Mohammed's study revolves around the concept of negotiation because "cooperation and negotiations between men and women in economic, social and sexual relations are the cornerstones on which ethnicity and culture are grounded" (2002, 9). Any discussion of cultural forms then is presupposed by the underlying gender relations. Using the negotiation of gender relations as a conceptual tool enables us to explore:

the ways in which masculinity and femininity are constructed by men and women themselves, how they interpret received gender ideology and either challenge or reinforce existing paradigms. Situating the time period allows one to investigate the specific conditions which frame the expected roles and lived practices of each sex (2002, 12).

These processes, or gender negotiations, in chutney-soca lyrics are essentially a form of public dialogue on what is and is not acceptable behaviour for women and men and how these standards of acceptability change over time. The song lyrics document attempts to pin down gender roles by offering prescriptive images of men and women and by denouncing behaviours that do not conform to normative ideas of gender. They also challenge existing gender norms by offering alternative perceptions of femininity and masculinity, or potential ways for women and men to behave. In addition, they offer audience members the chance to reflect upon gender customs and their relevance to the present day. It is the tension between 'acceptable' and 'not acceptable' that encourages the scores of 'lashback' songs in which a singer responds to the lyrics of a popular song by denouncing the ideas, insulting the singer, or do both, and then offers his or her own views.

To explore these gender negotiations in chutney-soca, I briefly look at the space in which they occur and then move on to the lyrics. Mohammed (2002) focused on negotiations in the domestic sphere because this was an area where women had some degree of influence. This paper looks at negotiations in the public sphere of chutney soca because historically, chutney was a private, exclusively female space. Although men have dominated chutney in the public sphere, women still use the forum to voice their concerns, especially those related to domestic situations. The imagery, relying on domestic metaphors and themes, reflects their lasting impact on the art form.

In the transition from wedding tent to competition stage, from private to public, the notion of public and private itself comes under negotiation. This process, initiated in *Mastana Bahar* with the emergence of female artistes, continues in Chutney Soca Monarch. Observations and recommendations on appropriate dress, dance and song for women indicate that bodily practices and behaviour were closely monitored and regulated by the male producers. They set the parameters for a public Indian femininity in the 1970s. In the 1980s, when the chutney 'explosion' occurred at weekend fetes, women re-set these parameters by bringing private traditions into public spaces and expressing their sexuality vibrantly through song and dance.

Drupatee Ramgoonai's 'Lick Down Me Nani' is one such instance of widening the parameters.⁶ Drupatee transgressed borders through the content of the song and the spaces she chose for performance. Drupatee plays on the double meaning of 'nani' (which means grandmother in Trinidad Hindi and 'vagina' in Trinidadian slang) and widened the scope of sexuality for Indian women. The double entendre enabled her to challenge the notion that grandmothers are asexual due to their age; raise the taboo topic of sexual violence against women under the guise of humour; and highlight her own sexuality by demanding oral sex. Perhaps even more disturbing to critics was the fact that Drupatee moved out of the Indian public sphere into the black male public sphere of calypso. Thus, she negotiated the concept of public for Indian women to include non-Indian spaces as well. The outrage expressed by both men and women at the song,

⁶ See Shalini Puri's 'Race, rape and representation' in *Matikor* for an insightful discussion of the narrative of rape and violence in this song. She also uses the song to show the figure of Indo-Trinidadian woman becomes a site of negotiation for discourses on racial and cultural nationalist politics.

indicates that she transgressed not just the boundaries of Indian femininity, but also the borders of the Indian community.

In the early 1990s, there was a lot of debate and even a conference organised by the Hindu Prachar Kendra about the scandalous behaviour at chutney shows. Images of middle-aged woman in skin-tight clothes wining amidst a circle of leering men abounded. Women were asserting their right to do in public what they had done in private all along. There was, however, one major difference. In private, women had been performers and audience members. In public they were primarily audience members. Yet, through dancing, they had managed to expand the role of the female audience member into one of spectacle and performance. Perhaps, the underlying anger directed by critics at women's 'immoral' behaviour was the notion that women had upset the gendered relationship between the active, male performer and the passive, female audience member by refusing to be passive in their role as audience members.

I discuss the songs that appear on the Chutney Soca Monarch Finals CD compilations from 1998. The finals usually have 15 to 20 contestants who perform two songs each. The CD includes what the organisers consider the highlights of the competition, so they do not necessarily include songs by the top 10 artistes. While there are songs on many topics ranging from racial unity and harmony, to food and fetes, for this paper I only focus on those songs pertaining to gender and gender relations. I devote more attention to those that transcended the Carnival season and continued to receive airplay, indicating their popularity and their ability to resonate ideas about gender and gender norms. Each CD also has some selections that are primarily in Hindi, but I do not discuss these songs. The majority of the Indo-Trinidadian population no longer speak Hindi and the gender messages in these songs, if any, are lost on the public, who enjoy it primarily for its sound and beat.

I take it as a given that sexist and patriarchal ideas structure the song lyrics. Rather than pointing out the obvious, I attempt to analyse how such ideas are simultaneously contested and reinforced by both men and women. Gender ideologies are negotiated from several different positions in popular music. Performers negotiate them through lyrics and stage performance, which are in turn mediated by audience members through various interpretations. By studying the lyrics, I automatically privilege the contestations of performers over those of the audience. Peter Manuel problematises the study of song lyrics in his article entitled "Gender Politics in Caribbean Popular Music", and highlights the gap between consumer perspectives and academic interpretation:

If the sexism in many such song lyrics may seem readily apparent, interpreting their social significance is actually far from simple. A conscientious analysis of such music must take care not to overgeneralize from unrepresentative samples, and to recognize the often contradictory relationships between expressive discourses like popular song and actual gender relations and attitudes. Most important is the need to contextualize lyrics in their broader cultural milieu, and to consider consumer interpretations and the social practices embedding reception. Basic to such an approach is the recognition that the social meaning of a song cannot be unproblematically "read off" the lyrics by an analyst, however well-versed in modern literary theory he or she may be (1998,13).

His study illustrates that the intended message of the performer is often misread and always filtered through the subject-position of the listener. Since I was unable to gather audience responses due to the large number of songs covered, I incorporate whenever possible viewpoints from newspaper articles and opinion pieces to balance my own interpretations. I also try to contextualise, as much as possible, the songs and themes in social circumstances by discussing aspects such as the motivation behind the song, performers' thoughts on the song, the performer's background, and so on.

Much of this contextual information was gathered from thirty-three personal interviews with musicians, singers, dancers, producers and promoters between January and September 2004. Nine of those interviews took place in homes or offices, and these are taped and transcribed. Of those for which I took handwritten notes, fourteen were conducted in spaces that were not conducive to taping due to high noise levels such as backstage, rum shops and restaurants, and ten were conducted over the phone. Supplementing these interviews are informal conversations with artistes, promoters and producers in different kinds of spaces and situations, such as in cars while driving to a show, at performances while a singer was waiting backstage, during spontaneous 'limes' with artistes after a show, at radio stations, at clubs while accompanying a promoter or DJ, or at a studio with a producer. I recorded these informal conversations in field notes, along with discussions I had with audience members at chutney shows that solicited opinions on chutney shows, artistes, songs, and experiences in other musical spaces.

Regarding gender negotiations in lyrics, it is possible to identify eight different areas pertaining to notions of masculinity and femininity. In the first, *Dem man and dem so lazy: Grievances* in love and marriage, women redefine the role of the male provider to include emotional needs, in addition to physical and material necessities. Men's response to women's grievances is rooted in insecurity. They attempt to justify their inability to fulfil women's needs by focusing on her infidelity, which implicitly signals that women are not worthy of their trust and love. Part of the problem is that men find they cannot adequately define women, which makes it difficult to control them. It becomes clear that in patriarchal societies, oppression of women negatively affects men as well: it limits their own range of acceptable behaviour by labelling men who shy away from controlling women as 'weak'.

The range of acceptable 'masculine' behaviours is then limited, and in many instances, men are required to somehow exhibit a show of power in order to be considered men by other men. In the second *'Ranis and Rajas of Chutney: Songs of Self-Affirmation'*, men sketch out what it means to be an Indian male — one who can control women's bodies and is sexually potent. The music and lyrics allow men to possess power on a symbolic level. Some singers, such as Heeralal Rampartap in 'Chutney Kilkatay', do it in a subtle manner. Others, such as Chris Garcia in 'Roti', and Devanand Gattoo in 'Bacchanal', are quite blatant. In a sense, because there are few songs of self-affirmation by women, it seems that this is an area in which men primarily negotiate with other men for authority and power.

This definition of male is central in the third *'Dance Reena Dance: The Performer-Audience Relationship and the Influence of Party Soca'*. Having established the

requirements for masculinity in relation to individual women, the men now concern themselves with the negotiation of gender roles in public spaces in relation to groups of women. In this area, the songs, primarily by men, privilege the male by making him an active performer. He is completely in control of his music and he is able to hold an audience's attention through his performance abilities. Men relegate women to the dance floor. They become passive, anonymous receivers of the music, with little control over their bodies as the male performer directs them by providing instructions – an element derived from 'party soca'. These songs can be considered a lyrical response to women's attempts to negotiate the notion of public and private as discussed above.

As men draw out the blueprint for masculinity, they inadvertently define femininity. In the fourth '*Underneath de Bamboo Tent: Dulahins, Dulahas, and Marriage*', men circumscribe the scope of femininity through the image of the ideal wife. Supporting the notion of the ideal wife is the gendered division of labour and the concept of *patideva*, or husband-worship. A sub-image of the ideal wife that emerges is that of the simple country girl, whose talents are primarily physical and most evident in the kitchen, bedroom or the dance floor. Not only do men outline the duties and qualities of 'good' women by providing numerous examples of unacceptable behaviours and physical characteristics, they also clarify the duties and responsibilities of husbands. On this point, there is some disagreement. Some men support the conventional role of the emotionally distant husband whose wife exists to serve them. Others have a more progressive view of a husband who is attentive to his wife's needs and considers the marriage a partnership. All, however, support a gendered division of labour.

In the fifth, '*She Eh Easy: Demanding Women*', women speak back to the notion of the ideal wife and remind men that fulfilling partnerships require mutual respect. They break away from the image of the docile country girl by stating the terms of the relationship in strong, clear voices. Women resist men's efforts to push them to the periphery, and place themselves firmly in the centre. In reflecting on these demands, men tend to portray women as impulsive, emotional and irrational. In addition, they trivialise women's demands by interpreting them in primarily physical or sexual terms.

Women's sexuality becomes a means to redefine masculinity in a sixth negotiation '*Men Customize Gender*'. The fluidity of gender roles, and their relationship to social contexts, becomes clear in this area. In this series of songs, men take on traditionally female duties, such as providing sexual education to young women, thus appropriating the women for themselves. In a way, this can be considered a means to lay claim on the historically female domain of chutney. They also ascribe typically male behaviours to women and these tend to be negative, such as domestic violence and aggressive sexual pursuit. In this role reversal, men expand the scope of masculinity by allowing themselves to play women's roles, distance themselves from stereotypically negative male behaviours and attempt to curtail the expression of women's sexuality by pathologising it.

In the seventh area, '*Violent Love: Men Sing About Domestic Violence*', men attempt to take on the grave topic of abuse. While this is laudable, the party-oriented context of chutney soca prevents it from being addressed in the serious manner that it deserves.

These songs may have been a response to demands by cultural critics to make chutney soca more ‘conscious’. Interestingly, when women sing about domestic violence it tends to be descriptive. When men sing about the topic, they tend to be critical of other men and assign themselves a moral superiority on behalf of female victims and distancing themselves from the abusive men.

The notion of abuse, though not identified as such, is also present in the image of the wicked mother-in-law, which forms the last area of negotiation. *‘Mothers-in-law: Static Images’* shows that gender ideologies, once entrenched, are difficult to dispense with. This may be because although they are no longer socially relevant, they guarantee a response because they are deeply ingrained in the collective memory of the crowd. Sometimes songs can fit into more than one category. For instance, the song ‘Lazy Man’ is a grievance song, but it also has a sub-text of violence.

“Dem man and dem so lazy”: Grievances

In North Indian folk songs, Manuel identifies genres like *rasiya* which centre on women’s complaints (2000, 170). In Trinidad, chutney in the public sphere becomes a forum for both women and men’s complaints. Women’s complaints are about relationships that are unfulfilling emotionally, financially and sexually. The songs, possessing a sense of urgency, are often performed in a pleading tone. Men tend to perceive the same situations entirely differently. They acknowledge no fault of their own and are always at a loss as to what they did wrong. The woman’s decision to leave or commit adultery is unfathomable and inexcusable. Often the woman is portrayed as being fickle in love, irrational and impulsive, deceptive or simply indifferent. This image is not new and it derives from the stereotyping of women bolstered by colonial attitudes towards Indians, which painted them as ‘immoral and weak’ in character, and Hindu philosophy, which endows women with a powerful libido, which, if not controlled, could lead to destruction. In the songs, the Indian woman bears the entire burden for the failure of the relationship and sometimes the men ask her to leave. More often than not, violence, whether inflicted on themselves or their wives, functions as a reaction or a solution to the troubled relationship. All the songs point to a lack of communication and dialogue between men and women, which seems to be the root of the problems; yet this would appear to be the most constructive solution.

“Winer Boy” (2001) by Phulmatie Ramjattan also highlights heartache. Phulmatie is one of the few women who still speaks Hindi and she composes her own songs. When asked about her sources of inspiration, she waved her hand around her house, indicating that her home life and its domestic imagery become the text of her songs. The song, using images of country life, like the *jupanie*, shows the impact of globalisation and capitalism on gender relations in rural Trinidad. The boy, stung by the money bug, leaves his poor lover for America and the material wealth it offers. Sentiments of loss and longing, patriotism and social commentary come together plaintively in the last verse:

*You ‘fraid to marry me boy, you ‘fraid to marry me
You gone America, boy, you gone America
the same thing you searching*

we have it down here

This song takes two stereotypes of women – the winer girl and the dollar-eyed woman who assesses men by the weight of their wallet – and superimposes them on the “boy.” She is a casualty of the man’s materialism and not being able to lure him back with riches, she uses the only resources she has: her song and an inherent wisdom drawn from her personal experience.

Songs of heartbreak are a traditional component of Indian folk songs. The men are portrayed as being insensitive to women’s emotional needs, due to ignorance, selfishness, or both. In Rasika Dindial’s song “*Lazy Man*” (1998), the husband is absent emotionally, financially and physically; he contributes neither labour nor money to the household and prefers to go down to the river to lime⁷ with friends. On top of all that, he is also abusive and controlling: “If ah step out ah have to reach back before six/ If ah only talk its plenty plenty licks.” When Dindial, first-time contender in the Chutney Soca Monarch finals, sang about this no-good man, it caught the national ear. It has been remixed and appears on several chutney, chutney soca and Carnival compilations. It is also the song that earned Dindial second place in the Chutney Soca Monarch the highest a woman has earned so far in this competition. Perhaps it is the way Dindial, known popularly as the ‘*Rani* (queen) of Chutney’ performs the song, reminding listeners of a “true imitation” of strong-voiced Indian singers like Abida Parveen, while at the same time being distinctly Trinidadian with her use of primarily English lyrics integrated with Indian folk melodies and laid over the soca beat. Maybe it is the image of the abusive, useless man, which resonated with her female audience. Perhaps it is both.

Like Dindial’s “*Lazy Man*”, Drupatee Ramgoonai’s spouse in “*Husband Only Want Meh To Cook* (2003)” is incapable of treating her well and refuses to take her anywhere. She complains that she:

*Wuk so in de house
I don't know what to do
Meh husband have meh cooking
whole year thru.*

His demands on her make her feel that “he actin as if I is a maid he hired.” Compounding the problem is his miserly nature which prevents him from buying the latest domestic technology, and forces her to do everything the old-fashioned way, requiring more time and effort:

*It would be easier if I had a four burner,
no console, nor even fire proper,
Is wood chookin all day,
he expect me to hack.*

⁷ Editor’s note: The word ‘lime’ is idiomatic to Trinidad and refers to a wide range of leisure time activities - from a well organized party to an informal time spent together.

His demands can also be seen as a way to limit her free time, thereby preventing her from meeting other men. What makes the songs in competition particularly interesting is the singer's interaction with the audience. Performers who do well in the competition often draw the audience into the song. Drupatee does this by relating the lyrics of the song to the anxieties and concerns of women's everyday lives, while at the same time affirming the fete as a space for the release of those anxieties. She comments in the middle of the song:

Ladies, this one is for you. Man is only pressure. All yuh sexy ladies, I want to see yuh hands up. All yuh sexy ladies, let me see yuh hands up. Ladies this one is for all yuh. Lemme give yuh a wine.

Her words achieve the effect of building up solidarity between herself and the women in the audience who have also felt the pressures of marriage. By giving them a wine, she is in effect making a gesture towards their ability to put up with the pressure and still have the capacity to have a good time.

Grievance songs by women address multiple issues and concerns about men, and underlying them is the notion that as wives and lovers, they deserve better treatment. Men's songs, in contrast, which tend to focus on the woman's deceptive nature or the fickleness of her love, are coloured by a deep sense of insecurity. Devanand Gattoo's "Koochoor Koochoor" (2000), literally "Confusion Confusion", is a simple song about a woman who behaves as if she is single, even though she is in a relationship with him:

*yuh does tell meh
hush mi mouth
but yuh dressin up everyday
and yuh goin all about.*

She is indifferent to his love which is "like diamonds so precious and rare," and tells him lies that cause worries and tears. The confusion stems from his bewilderment at her behaviour and also from his inability to make a decision about whether to go or to stay. At the end, he does neither, and turns to God instead: "the only thing to do now is to bow mi head and pray". Not having the strength to end the relationship, he escapes into religion.

Other songs, however, do not offer such an easy solution. Kenny J's "Baboolal" (2001) is also about a man coming to terms with a relationship gone sour. Baboolal feels that he is "getting horned"⁸ by his wife, but cannot understand why:

*I don't know what ah do
I don't know what ah say
Jus so she pick up sheself
and gone away.*

⁸ Colloquial term used in Trinidad and Tobago to refer to infidelity.

The song has two narrators – the mournful Baboolal and the singer reflecting on Baboolal’s actions. While Baboolal is unable to figure out why his wife has left him, the singer’s reiteration of Baboolal’s actions makes it quite clear why she would:

*Baboolal eh eating boy,
he eh goin to work.
Limin and drinkin and gettin on real bad
Beatin she in front of de family in de yard.*

Baboolal sees it in a much more innocuous light. He confesses that he came home a “little drunk” on Saturday evening, but does not understand why such a harmless action would cause his wife to leave. Disturbingly, violence never figures into Baboolal’s mind as a possible cause for his wife’s leaving him. He also jumps to conclusions, seeing his wife’s departure as a marker of her infidelity, rather than dissatisfaction with his behaviour. While it is not clear whether Baboolal beat his wife for leaving him or whether the beating caused her to leave, he sees violence as a solution and a means to control her behaviour. The song ends with a chilling conclusion that is open to interpretation. Kenny J informs us about Baboolal’s position; he has money and plenty land and he “don’t know what to do like fish outta water.” In the end he decides to use his wealth to find an *obeah* man from Guyana, but his purpose is not clear. He might use his powers to lure his wife back or to make her life without him miserable. Either way, it spells misery for the wife.

The spiteful tone in “Baboolal” is also present in Adesh Samaroo’s “Rum Till I Die” (2003). It is fair to say that this is now the unofficial anthem of Trinidad and Tobago, with lyrics that glorify rum drinking, infidelity and trickery in love. From chutney shows in muddy fields and wedding tents, to dancehall clubs and soca fetes, the minute the DJ plays this song, the entire crowd cheers and becomes energized. As a young reveller remarked on its cross-cultural appeal:

if you’re at a club where there is mostly hip-hop/ dancehall music playing, and all of a sudden de DJ play ‘Rum Till I Die’, the whole crowd turn Indian. Gyuls start doing Indian movements – all de time dey wasn’t Indian before. Even de Rasta men shaking dey dreads. Dey doh care, dey love it.

As the narrator tells it, his wife’s jealous nature leads her to jump to conclusions and accuse him of infidelity. He claims he was merely giving the other woman directions. His immediate reaction is, as the song title indicates, to drink himself to death.⁹ Yet as the song progresses we find this is just a flippant reaction. First his attitude changes, and then his entire story. He convinces himself that each day without her is better and better and even goes so far as to say, “I don’t know why you couldn’t leave a little sooner.” With this attitude shift comes a new confidence that leads to a double betrayal:

⁹ While Adesh Samaroo claims the song as his own creation, older singers I interviewed told me that the song has been in existence a long time with slightly different lyrics. Helen Myers, in her study of Hindu music in Trinidad, transcribes a strikingly similar song in which the narrator makes no attempt to regain self-esteem or hurt his wife (Myers 1998, 368). In comparison, Samaroo’s song takes on a tone of immaturity and reveals a need to save face before his peers.

*But when you leaving something
Always leave for better
That is why I leave she
And I take she sister.*

This last verse, in which the underlying notion is compensation for a wounded masculinity, is significant for two reasons. First, he reverses the roles so that now he is the one leaving. The reversal, along with the fact that he brings his wife's sister into the fray, points to how deeply his sense of manhood is affected and the vengeance this provokes. Not only does he fabricate a story, but he also shames her and her family. In an attempt to regain control over the situation, he portrays women as fickle and disloyal, not only to men but to each other as well by using violent language. Tikasingh, writing about Indian men in the indentureship period, observed that:

More than any other group, Indians were noted for an unmatched tendency to use violent language (that is, language connoting sexual intercourse)...almost without fail the phrases used connoted sexual intercourse with all the defendant's female relatives...the connotations were almost in terms of boasting, and of being the potential and aggressive actor of the imagined relationship" (cited in Mohammed 2002, 211).

Patricia Mohammed noted the effect of such language on both the person using it and the person being addressed:

The male language of address, whether of open abuse or that tainted with sexual brushstrokes, is an undeniable method of social control over women.... The conveyor of such messages must have felt powerless in many ways and speech was adopted as retaliation, shaming being as effective in some ways as physical abuse (2002, 212).

Also produced in 2003, "*Leggo Meh Hand Meena*" by Lall Bharat, is a simple ditty about a man who is certain that he is being horned, and is asking Meena to leave him. The entire song is a complaint about her manipulative behaviour. She is not only deceiving him but the entire community. Whenever they go out, she pretends to be jealous every time he talks to another woman. Her feigned jealousy is an intricate trap and a cover-up for her own infidelity. She makes it seem as if he is the one with the wandering eye, which makes it impossible for him to leave her without tarnishing his reputation as a dishonest man. She attempts to deceive him at home as well but he can see through her actions. At night she tosses and turns in the bed, making it seem as if she desires him, but he feels that she is actually lusting for the other man. His pathetic attempt at dialogue is to "bark" at her but this only makes the dog bark at him. Since angry words do not solve the problem, he decides that the only solution is for Meena to leave him. What is interesting and unusual is that the preservation of his integrity is much more important to him than being seen as a virile male capable of satisfying his lover. Most men in chutney soca songs opt for the latter.

Based on a real-life situation, Daddy Chinee offers up the same solution to his unfaithful girlfriend in "*Two Face Neemackharam*" (2002), but in a much more forceful and bitter manner since he has caught her red-handed:

After all that I've done for you

*You do meh bad
Ah feelin sad
Dahlin get out of de yard.*

As in Drupatee's "*Husband Only Want Meh to Cook*", the interaction with the audience adds another dimension to an otherwise simple song. About halfway through the song, he addresses both the audience and the "two face neemackaram":

I cyar understand what this girl doing meh eh? You think I could make back with you after all dem wrong things you do, eh? Wha what yuh really think yuh do Daddy Chineer gyul? What yuh think yuh do? Whe yuh trying to prove? What yuh trying to prove? Look look leh go meh hand, leave! Like yuh want meh call de cops or what? Call de police or what? I say take your things and go.

His request for her to leave becomes increasingly threatening. However, the fete becomes a space for him to shrug off the pain and regain his sense of self, with the audience as a witness. While he does admit to "feelin sad", he must prove that he is strong enough to survive the rigours of love. He does this by reclaiming his identity as a performer. In typical soca style, he urges the audience to scream and join him in the performance. Then, like Drupatee, he establishes a sense of solidarity with the men before he launches back into the song:

All yuh understand wha I sayin? It's pain I feeling. Every man does go through this thing in life. It's the norm.

By normalizing women's infidelity, he absolves himself of personal responsibility. Since every man experiences this, the fact that she went with another man says nothing about his ability to please women. What is more important is that he can overcome it, like Adesh Samaroo in "*Rum Till I Die*". In effect, he seems to be saying that it is a no-win situation for men, so why bother to reflect on personal behaviour?

Ranis and Rajas of Chutney: Songs of Self-Affirmation



Almost every year there are one or two songs, in which singers affirm their own sexuality and talents as chutney singers. Of the nine songs I identified here, only two were sung by women. Perhaps this points to the deeper insecurities of men. Chutney, in the wedding context, was a space where women could poke fun at men without having to answer for their bold statements, and also be validated by other women in their criticisms and jokes. Men, always in the public view, had to be more cautious in guarding their masculinity. Of course, this did not stop men from airing grievances about women. However, for all the grievance songs, there were others, raw in sound and emotion, which told of the man's undying love for or deep attraction to the woman.

Chutney Performer Photo courtesy Noor Kumar Mahabir

For all the songs that described women as deceitful, cold and indifferent, there were also others that described them as beautiful, loving and irresistible. The fact that men bemoan women's faults often reveals how deeply they are affected by what they perceive to be women's betrayals and cunning manoeuvres in love and marriage. It is perhaps to compensate for this lack of control that men must sing about their sexual prowess. Their ability to sing chutney therefore becomes a metaphor for sexual prowess itself

Women rarely sing songs of unadulterated praise about their husbands and lovers. More often than not, they are singing grievance songs about how their partners have failed them. Denise Belfon's 'Ah Looking for an Indian Man' and 'Ah Bounce Up Mih Dulaha' by Phulmatie Ramjattan are exceptions. The reaction to Belfon's song by some black men in the newspapers points to a growing insecurity, which is not so much about the ability of Indian men to capture black women's attention, but about being overlooked by black women. In an editorial entitled "African men hurting over Indian man calypso", one man wrote:

Denise Belfon has done her race a great disservice by attempting to project the Indian man as an object of sexual desire to African women. To boast that African women should get "ah Indian man to jam meh inside de session" because they "yearning", "hungry" and "thirsty" for an Indian man is disrespectful to the African male and damaging to his pride... It is insensitive and certainly does little to help with the low self-esteem that exists...Ms Belfon must realise that while every Trini enjoys calypso, it is an art form that is indigenous to African people. Wearing a sari and hurting "the black man who just feeling to party" by spurning him in favour of Indian men is unfortunate...I hope that this is an aberration that will peter out! (*Trinidad Guardian* 25 January 2004).

A Black woman, however, supported this 'aberration' and spoke out about the double standard for both Black women and Indian men:

It seems as though it's ok for them to fantasise and sing about Indian and other women, and this is no problem. But we African women must never look beyond black men. If Indian men complained about the constant focus on Indian women, these same brethren would have damned them as racists. From Sparrow's "Sexy Marajin" and Crazy's "Nanny Wine" to Machel's "Nothing wrong with wining on ah Indian gyul" and the ever-present desire to marry a "Dulahin," Indian women have always been targeted. African women never complained about the adverse impact of all of this on their self-esteem and pride (*Trinidad Guardian* 25 January 2004).

Anand Ramlogan, an Indian columnist with the *Guardian*, applauded the song for striking at stereotypes of Indian men and setting a new trend in the portrayal of Indian men as sex symbols:

This calypso will at least give the Indian man some prominence and exposure on the national Carnival stage. The stereotype that has confined Indian men to being portrayed merely as rural farmers, doubles vendors, shopkeepers, doctors and lawyers, but never ever as sex objects, will hopefully now change. The lyrics of calypsos over the years have never focused on the Indian man (except when Panday was in power and he was gleefully portrayed as corrupt) (*Guardian*, 18 January 2004).

On the whole, having little affirmation from Indian or black women and feeling threatened by the myth of black men's sexual prowess, it is no surprise that there is a series of self-affirming songs on the CDs. A sub-text that runs through these songs is "Since I can't control her emotions, I can at least control her body through my music and song." Songs of self-affirmation for men are also songs of compensation. Songs discussed in the next section of '*Dance Reena Dance*' can also be considered self-affirming, in that by singing about girls that find them attractive, the singer affirms his own desirability. Often such songs, using exaggeration, portray girls that are so out of control, that they will do anything, risk everything, to gain the man's attention and favour. Their jealousy makes them 'easy', somewhat undesirable, because they are so available.

In "*Chutney Kirkatay*" (1998), Heeralal Rampartap's declares at the beginning of the song that, "they call me de wonder boy in TnT, I say without a chutney song, there is no fete for we." In these three simple lines, Rampartap not only affirms his talent but also what is integral to having a fete. Chutney is now a necessary element in many Trinidadian fetes, because chutney, along with soca, calypso and steel pan, defines the national identity. In the rest of the song, he encourages the audience to dance:

*leh meh see you dance
leh meh see you prance
Come leh me see you til lay lay
and dance de killkatay.*

The killkatay, his new dance, he tells us is "The latest greatest dance craze take over Trinidad." He can move the audience: "Well, the action start, everybody gettin mad" and his music can cross ethnic boundaries so that everyone, regardless of race, is affected by the infectious rhythms. For Heeralal, this sense of self-assuredness is rooted in positive interactions with his fans, which translate into a sense of duty towards his audience. One of his most popular songs, "Basmatie", was inspired by a young woman who asked that he write a song for her because she loves to dance to his music.

Rooplal G's "*Rumal Mangay*" (1999), with its nonsensical lyrics in Hindi, is about a girl dancing on the stage, who is "movin up she body like she in a rage". Affirming Rooplal's effectiveness as a singer, she asks him to keep singing:

*De lurki say she want more,
she tell me sing again
Sing for me Rooplal G,
leh meh dance and make meh name.*

It is an audience-performer relationship with mutual benefits. He gets the pleasure of watching her dance, and she gets an opportunity to display her dancing skills using his songs.

"*Roti*" (1999), sung by Chris Garcia, involves much more than self-affirmation; it offers an opinion of what women find sexually desirable through the metaphor of *roti* and establishes his own sexuality as a virile, straight male. The song starts out with a self-

assured declaration: “I have number one *roti* shop in Trinidad,” followed by a triumphant laugh. It goes on to tell the story of a Mexican woman who lands in Trinidad and develops a taste for Garcia’s *roti*:

*A sexy Mexican-ah come down to mi island-ah
say she love de chutney, she want to eat some curry
then she come by my shop-ah, i gie she buss-up shot-ah
now everyday buyin, the pepper has she singin*

The nature and depth of her addiction is then specified:

*Roti boy, she like roti, goat and beef, chicken no shrimp,
roti in de mornin
roti in de evenin
roti in de night time
roti all de time.*

Using *roti* as a metaphor for the phallus, Garcia goes on to reinforce the stereotype that size does matter, especially to women. But it is not only size, it is the frequency as well. The Mexican woman, apparently addicted to Garcia’s *roti*, wants it non-stop. After each phrase, we hear her in the background shouting, “Give me”. Lacing his song with *double entendre*, he sings about how his success with the Mexican woman gives him ambition to expand his business. Soon he can claim, “you’ll come again! Come! Come! Come!” Then to clarify, he adds:

*If all yuh see trouble!
If all yuh see people!
Is only ladies
each love meh roti*

Having long hair, and being a self-described ‘pretty boy’, Garcia faced allegations of being gay.¹⁰ According to a producer who arranged a show for him in Guyana, Garcia

¹⁰ In an interview with Garcia, he also described himself as the first phallic symbol for the Indo-Caribbean male. Reading newspaper accounts of his hit ‘Chutney Bacchanal’ in 1996, it becomes apparent that he certainly was a sex symbol among women, and that perhaps he paved the way for other Indian performers to be seen as sexually desirable. His status, however, was undermined by what was perceived to be an ambiguous sexuality (Personal interview, 18 February 1996).

was performing on stage when he heard the crowd murmuring about his sexuality. Stopping mid-way into his song, he declared, ““You know plenty places Ah go, people say Chris Garcia gay. But hear it from Chris Garcia... I am just like ah Chinee man, ah like to eat cat too!”” (Personal communication, 6 August 2004) The song, in this case, then becomes a forum for Garcia to set the record straight about his sexuality.

“*Chutney-Soca Tabanca*” (1999) by Ramraji Prabhu is one of two songs of self-affirmation by a woman, with the other being “*Rool It*” by Asha Kamachee. It is also different from other songs in that Prabhu not only validates herself – “They call me the Chutney Queen”– but she also notes the efforts of fellow singers and pays tribute to others. In the first two verses, she celebrates the efforts of two male chutney singers, Boyie Basdeo and Sonny Mann. Of Boyie, she sings:

*Boyie do de chutney until he nearly die
Boyie do de chutney until he nearly cry
He showin all dem women
how to de butterfly.*

This calls attention to Boyie Basdeo’s victory as Chutney Monarch with his song ‘Butterfly’. Throughout the verse Boyie eggs on Prabhu from the background, and towards the end jumps in and they sing the chorus together. The next verse concerns Sonny Mann. She notes that “Sonny sing de chutney with a lot of tabanca” and Boyie continues to shout supporting words to both in the background. In the last verse, she acknowledges her role as *the* “Chutney Queen”, and gives tribute to Ras Shorty I and the sponsors, both of whom she considers responsible for the existence and growth of chutney-soca:

*They call me the Chutney Queen
Now I singin Soca
Thanks to Ras Shorty I, the Inaugurator
Chutney Soca becomin bigger and better
Thanks to DuMaurier
our first prize sponsor.*

Men who sing songs of self-affirmation tend to focus on themselves alone and their talent as performers. It seems that Ramraji is self-assured at a much deeper level. She can acknowledge the contributions of others, widen the scope to include those involved in the business besides performers, and also make space in her song to include the voice of another top singer. Her song, rather than pointing to her own insecurities and need for compensation, does the exact opposite.

“Dance Reena, dance Reena, dance all around”’: The performer-audience relationship and the influence of ‘party’ soca



19th Century post card , Trinidad, Courtesy Gerry Besson

In the *matikor* space, there was no divide between the performer and the audience as the women sang collectively for each other, with individual women leading in rotation. When chutney evolved into a public art form, it forced a gendered divide between the performer and the audience, with the performer coded as male and the audience as female.



Matikor performance Debe/Peñal Community
Photo: Patricia Mohammed

Soca has impacted on this divide. Lorraine Leu distinguishes ‘party’ soca from conventional soca. She emphasizes the former’s reliance on instructions and body imagery, and links party soca with the tradition of “smutty” calypsos, that “make use of an elliptical sexual language of *double entendres*, which are invariably humorous, as a kind of acceptable emotional response to the airing of such subjects in public.” (2000, 49)

Party soca departs from smutty calypsos in two important ways. First, singers dispense with the suggestive language in favour of “the language of explicit sexual desire and the raw, physical terms of male/female encounters.” (Leu, 2000: 49). Secondly, the singer “instructs the crowd to execute a particular action (“Jump and wave,” “Wave yuh hand in the air,” “Jump up on one foot”) in unison, so that the singer and the crowd together

become performers in a huge show, closing the traditional distance between the calypsonian on stage and the performer below” (Leu, 2000: 49).

Soca’s influence on chutney, then, aids in simultaneously closing the gap between audience and performer through the use of instruction, and deepening the gendered nature of this relationship by directing certain commands at women and relying on visceral images of women, like the ‘winer girl’.¹¹

Debates about the role of women in the public space, whether they are performers or audience members, extend to who has the right to be in the public eye, to be the

creator and the giver. The male performer, alone and therefore the centre of attention, plays the active role of the provider, while the female audience, in a group, are portrayed as passive receivers, whose bodies become registers for the man’s musical abilities. Nowhere is this relationship more explicit than in Rooplal G’s “*Tassa Man*” (2001):

*woman lose control
when he start to roll
and they start to dance around him
like maypole.*

Rooplal G’s ability to make women wine and rock their bodies enhances and reinforces his sexuality and his masculinity. The notion of the male entertainer and his power to move female dancers is mythologized in the figure of the Hindu god Krishna, who is often depicted with a flute playing to a dancing crowd of cowgirls. Rikki Jai, painted blue and dressed like Krishna, sang about this theme in a song titled “*Kanhaiya*” (2001).

In the *matikor* space, women alone were defining male and female sexuality; in the public sphere of chutney-soca, men can have a stab at it as well. This is not to say that there are no songs where women urge the audience to dance in soca style. When women do perform however, they often sing songs written by men directed at women. One such example is Asha Kamachee’s “*Rool It*” (1998), written by Kenneth Suratt, in which she urges the *beti* to roll it. A notable exception to this trend is Drupatee Ramgoonai’s “*Sweet Tassa Man*” (1996), in which the male performer becomes the subject. Drupatee commented on the song, “I wrote ‘*Sweet Tassa Man*’ myself, with a little help from my husband, Jay... So many artistes sing about *bhowji* and girlfriend wining up their waist and breaking down the place. I want to sing about the men who provide the rhythm for women to get on bad” (*Sunday Punch* 21 January 1996).

The gendered nature of the performer-audience relationship remains intact if one listens to the song outside of the context of the competition. In the actual stage performance,

¹¹ The influence of soca on chutney, in terms of giving the crowd instructions, has been met with disapproval by some judges and audience members who are interested in preserving a more ‘traditional’ sound. After the judging process in 1997, one judge suggested that artistes who did not place had over-emphasized soca characteristics and compromised the chutney sound: “They strayed away from the chutney flavor and urged the crowd to wave something, move to the left and right and things like that, which is not synonymous with chutney” (*Sunday Express* 2/9/97)

Drupatee subverted this notion by using a male dancer, dressed as a female, to represent the ‘sweet tassa man’. The crowd expressed its disapproval by booing the cross-dresser

“*Ala Bala Reena*” (2003) by Devanand Gattoo firmly establishes the gendered expectations of the performer-audience relationship. The singer, objectifying the woman, tells her how to move for his viewing pleasure:

*Jumble up yuh body
and chunkay all around
show me the slow wine
and go down to de ground.*

Then using flattery, “Of all the other dancers, yuh boomin it up yes”, he coaxes her to dance for the rest of the (male) audience:

*Everybody watchin with one thing in mind
Turn around baby and show dem from behind*

The singer almost takes on the role of the pimp, displaying the dancer for the pleasure of the crowd.

“*Guyanese Beti*” (1998) explores themes introduced in the previous songs in a more explicit manner, while at the same time touching on the subject of self-affirmation. The main character in the song, Sweet Teresa, who wines “like she don’t give a damn,” is similar to the *dulahin* in *Dance Doula* with her fervour for the chutney dance. She is also like the *beti* in “*Rool It*”, in that she drinks rum to get into the spirit of the show: “A bottle ah rum and ah glass in she hand/Teresa jump on de stage and say she in command”. So far we’ve already encountered a familiar figure – the rum-drinking, wining Indian girl who dances freely for her own pleasure rather than that of others. This song is also similar to “*Rool It*”, in that it brings in the extended family, and indicates that the chutney show is still a family affair as much as it is a party scene. Teresa can wine and drink, both previously taboos for Indian women, and is still on good terms with her family, as they also participate in the fete and ‘make bacchanal’:

*She introduce me to she aja and aji
fetin on de other side was mousa and mousie
Aja’s on the organ, aji’s by the dhantal
Mousie and meh mousa well they makin bacchanal*

The song ends with a self-affirmation, though it originates from the singer’s dancing girl, Teresa:

*Yuh does amaze people how yuh blind and yuh could sing
Gypsy take 25 years before he come a king (x3)
Take this little advice, take it from Teresa
one day you go become chutney king of de future*

The dancing, drinking girl is also a prophetess and a wise woman who can provide counsel on the singer’s future in his career.

Heeralal Rampartap in “Dularie Y2K Party” (2000) introduces the image of the simple, country girl whose talents, he assumes, are limited to household duties. Chutney is often seen as “coming from inside of, and appreciated by, the poor, rural and unselfconscious Indian community thirsty for entertainment” (*TnT Mirror* 19 January 1996). Places like Penal and Barrackpore in south Trinidad are considered chutney strongholds and most people would expect to find the show grounds filled with poor girls like Dularie. Curiously, we find that Rampartap’s Dularie is so removed that she has never been to a chutney show. Chutney becomes a modernizing force and Dularie’s ability to do her Y2K dance surprises the singer since he assumes that:

*Cookin in a chulha
Washin by de river
dat is all ah feel this girl could do.
She born in de country
come from a poor family
and never take de time out to go and party.*

Her ability to dance makes her “Y2K ready for the 21st century.” Chutney music also makes her bold and she jumps up on the stage to show off her new dance for the men, who reach out to touch her body and dance with her. Although Dularie is modernized, her talents are limited to her body, rather than her mind.

Rooplal G in “*Tassa Man*” (2001) (discussed above) also modernizes Indian art forms by including them in Carnival and brings them up to date, by stretching them from the sugar belt in central Trinidad to the urban centers in the north:

*Everybody sweatin under de soca
feelin happy dancin to de tassa.
Colours of Carnival
Caroni to Maraval
Mix up in de festival
A true Trini bacchanal.*

“Underneath de Bamboo Tent”: *Dulahins, Dulahas and Marriage*

The image of the ideal wife, as portrayed in the figure of the *dulahin*, has several functions. It provides comfort in a time of rapid change. The *dulahin* evokes images of a mythic past with women portrayed as domestic angels, existing solely to love and serve their husbands. In this nostalgic view of the past, gender roles were clearly defined: women did the housework, nurtured the children and passed on the culture; men earned the money and provided protection. Of course, in real life, women have never been simply domestic guardians nor has the division of labour always been so neatly defined. This reality is addressed in songs detailing the crisis of finding ‘decent’ wives in the modern world. In the songs, men find wives who seem to match the ideal, only to discover their faults soon after marriage. Other singers totally ignore the realities and continue to indulge in fantasies of chaste, modest wives. These *dulahin* songs become a

means to reconcile the messy realities of everyday life with the idealized notions of marriage present in folklore and religion. Regardless of whether they face the realities or ignore them, the division of labour between husband and wife remains intact. Mohammed writes about the process of challenging symbolic meanings and creating new ones, and the resulting tension between new understandings and old foundations:

While new symbolic understandings of masculinity and femininity emerge from the cumulated and collective challenges of individuals in the group, and from other forms of mythmaking, that begin to legitimize new behaviours deemed acceptable for men and women in any culture, the old foundations are perpetuated, allowing an arena for the continuous negotiations between men and women. (2002,174).

Songs like Rooplal G's "*Dulahin*" can be seen to perpetuate these old ideals derived from myths like Ram and Sita, while those such as Clint Thomas' "*Baje Basuriya*" indicate modifications of those ideals to suit present circumstances. So far, the perspective of women has been missing. It is striking that there are only two songs concerning *dulahas*. Rather than painting images of ideal husbands, one is a playful, nonsensical number by Phulmatie Ramjattan about 'bouncing up' her *dulaha*, and the other, "*Meh Dulaha*" by Marcia Miranda (discussed above), is a contract to ensure respect in the marriage.



In Rikki Jai's "*Dulahin*" (My mother only quarrelin') (1998), we find that his mother is pressuring him to get married because she is tired of cooking and washing and wants a replacement. The process of finding a *dulahin* is somewhat like Goldilocks and the Three Bears, with one being too fat, the other too thin, and the third one just right. Seeing that he is only "limin" and "fetin" the whole day, the mother goes to the country and finds him a *dulahin* herself. The first one she finds is fat, which is unacceptable to Rikki. He responds rather violently towards the *dulahin*: "I kick she in the kitchen and *bailay* she flat." Seeing that it won't work out, the mother goes back to the country and finds the opposite – a thin *dulahin*. The thin one also won't do because Rikki is doubtful whether she will be able to perform in the kitchen and in the bedroom.

Chutney Singer

Photo Courtesy Noor Kumar Mahabir

So he tests her: "I carry she in de house to see how she wukkin". At this point in the song there is a break and he starts talking to the audience. He advises the men in the audience to listen their mothers, to obey their every command. Not wanting to disappoint his mother, he specifies what he wants in a *dulahin*: "I say Mami, I want a *dulahin* lookin nice and neat". She finds him a "real sweet" *dulahin* and he responds by bowing on the

ground and touching his mother's feet. The *dulahin* takes over the household duties and Rikki stops his "limin and fetin". The chipper melody and Rikki Jai's lilting voice normalize the violence in the song and reinforce narrow standards of beauty. The fact that he won the crown in 1998 with this song validates its propriety. In the following years, Jai wrote two more songs on his *dulahin* to create a trilogy. His ideal *dulahin* turned out not to be so perfect. In 1999, he lamented that she couldn't cook and in 2000, she horned (cheated on) him.

Shammi Salickram faces a similar crisis of being unable to find the right girl in "Stress" (2000). His concern is not so much their looks – he finds all the girls pretty – but their behaviour:

*I went all over de world
check all dem different girls
they cyar cook and wash
dem girl and dem too posh*

At first, he wonders if there is something wrong with him and reflects on his assets. His mother tells him he is good-looking and he has passed all eight subjects in school, so physique and intelligence are not the issue. It must be the women then. He proceeds to tell us their shortcomings. The first is a Pakistani girl he meets in New York and brings back to Trinidad. She tells him she loves him for who he is but when she "see me bank book empty, the woman disappear!" The second is a "Chinee girl" that he finds in Chinatown. She has long hair, "does look real tough" and knows karate, but she can also be abusive: "But when she ketch she temper/she does put real licks on me!" Disappointed, he decides to give it one more try. This time, he travels far, to Africa, "deep in the jungle about 100 miles." He meets an "African gyul livin in a tribe," only to find that she has ten children. The women's shortcomings are all embedded with racial stereotypes: the Indian girl is money-hungry; the Chinese girl is exotic and does karate; the African girl is over-sexed, evident in her prolific reproduction. While the song plays with the idea of interracial dating, in the end it reinforces racial stereotypes and a gendered division of labour.

The years 2000 and 2001 yielded a crop of songs about *dulahins*, marriage and ideal women. Rooplal G's "Dulahin" (2000) combines self-affirmation with patriarchal notions of marriage. He starts out by telling us about "yay *sundar larki*" from "deep in de country", who wants to marry him and "all she want to do is to make meh real happy". She is willing to put his happiness and needs before hers. She has all the qualities of a "*larki* with good ways": she is modest because "she like to wear she *sari* and she *ohrni*/ she eh want no mini up above she knee", she "don't smoke and drink" and best of all, "meh parents say they like she." In the end, it is clear what is expected of her as a daughter-in-law and wife: "All dey want from she/ is to treat meh like a king." There is no mention of what he will do for her. Underlying "Dulahin" is the notion of *patideva*, the worship of one's husband. In addition, while the practice of wearing the *ohrni* has declined, Rooplal G revives it symbolically to outline particular notions of Indian femininity, such as modesty and respect for elders and men. By cultivating those qualities, he can ensure that no other man can win her attention and affection.

Clint Thomas' "*Baje Basuriya*" (2000) is equally explicit in setting up the division of labour in marriage and the household. He also starts out with a girl who desires him:

*Everytime ah see you in de parties gyul
yuh ask me to sing a chutney
so I compose this song with a sweet melody
so let meh see you jump up and chumkay yuh body.*

After declaring his intention to marry her, he gives her a snapshot of their married life: "you go make mi *roti* and *bodi kay dhal*/ I go buy you motor car and gie you house and land." He is, however, aware that he must do more than simply provide for her materially:

*I go buy a katiya for two ah we to sleep
I go hug you tight gyul under de sheet.
Two ah we go dream sundar sapana
While we huggin up and jammin de chutney soca.*

In a way, while he does support the gendered division of labour in the marriage, he is also willing to compensate for it by taking her out and trying to fulfil her emotional and sexual needs. This is a first step in becoming the thoughtful and caring man that Rasika Dindial yearns for in "Lazy Man". In contrast to Rooplal G's *dulaha*, he seems progressive in his outlook on marriage. This could be due to his self-identification as the "Chutney Dougla", and seeing himself in-between two cultures. He can let go of notions such as *patidevrata*, without losing a sense of masculinity.

'She eh easy': demanding Women

Indian women have excelled in education and made significant inroads into various professions, which, in many instances, have raised their status in the home. This has given them the confidence to demand better treatment from their spouses in terms of respect and fidelity. Gender roles within the family are organized around the notion of respect, which is deeply embedded in Indian thought, as observed by Mohammed:

All the rules regarding the expected behaviour of women to their husband were embodied in the word 'respect', an offshoot of the '*pativrata*' concept of obedience and subservience. The idea of maintaining various forms of respect is a crucial one in Indian philosophy and drummed into the Indian sensibility (2002, 250).

Historically, this notion of respect has been aimed more at women than men. In the first half of the 20th century, some women used to show this respect by walking five paces behind their husbands and never addressing him by name. This is precisely what makes songs by women demanding respect from Indian men somewhat bold. The men, in turn, have not been able to easily acquiesce to those demands, unless they are sexual ones. More than anything, as illustrated by the grievance songs, men seem to be perpetually confused and bewildered by women's behaviour, and ignorant of women's motivations and needs. No longer fitting into the mould of the passive, obedient wife who observes the rules of *pativrata*, women are much more unpredictable in their behaviour, which

appears somewhat mysterious. It is interesting that the songs by women demanding respect from Indian men come from non-Indian women. Indian men who voice demands by Indian women, make women seem somewhat ridiculous and over-emotional. When Indian women do make demands in song, they come off as complaints or advice to men.

Respect is the main theme in Denyse Plummer's "Carnival Ki Rani" (1998). A white Trinidadian, Plummer had a long history of breaking boundaries in calypso. In this chutney soca song, she demands fidelity from her lover, and provides a practical reason for it:

*For de Jouvay, Las lap Tuesday
I'm your baby, I'm your baby
There's no other, I'm your lover
I'm your lady, sexy lady
Well I'm not sharing with nobody
not me, doh want de confusion baby*

Throughout the song she warns her lover to keep his distance from other women and refrain from dancing with anybody else. She asserts control over his body and behaviour, and places herself at the centre of his attention. Plummer commented on the content of the song, which was written by Calypso Rose:

I am not saying that I want to be Carnival Queen in this song... I am telling men to be faithful to their one partner; and to make that one partner the Carnival Queen at every Carnival event they attend. I am telling men that their girlfriend/wife/woman should be their only Carnival Queen (Sunday Guardian, February 1998).

This song is more than one woman's statement against promiscuity. It strikes at the deeply entrenched tradition of 'horning', which is widespread in Trinidad, and by extension the institution of the 'deputy', or the mistress.

Four years later, Anil Bissambhar would echo these sentiments from a male perspective in "Eh Taking Horn" (2002). Bissambhar laments how women have changed and are tolerating less misbehaviour from their men. He describes three different situations in which men horning their wives are discovered and subsequently beaten for their infidelity. For the wives, violence is the immediate response and the only solution to their anger and frustration at their husband's behaviour. Women have no voice in the song and Bissambhar portrays them as impulsive beings at the mercy of their raging emotions. The song is an observation of new attitudes in women and also a warning to men: either to stop their horning or devise better methods of covering their tracks. While the song is humorous in its portrayal of women beating up men, it takes the situation of domestic violence and turns it on its head. The only response granted to men is to "hold yuh head and bawl", much like in Devanand Gattoo's "Koochoor Koochoor."

The woman is not much more vocal in Videsh Sookhoo's "Dhal Belly" (2003), which is about a man who thinks he knows what the woman wants:

*She don't want no skinny man
who cyar take the heat*

*Is a dhal belly man
she want with plenty plenty meat.*

Even though he thinks he knows what the woman wants, in the end the woman confounds him:

*She say my belly too big
and I cannot wine
But she leave me for a man
Who belly bigger than min.e*

She is either lying or confused, or both. Sookhoo responds with violence to this independent-thinking woman who can articulate her desires. The violence is masked and trivialized, however, by a sense of playfulness:

*She from Barrackpore, boy
And I from Princes Town [interjects 'Proud to be from Princes Town']
I hit she with my belly
And she fall down on de ground.*

The song attempts to bring rural Trinidad and dhal belly men, both considered outside the parameters of 'cool', into the mainstream. Sookhoo commented on what led him to write the song:

I have been seeing men recoil in shame when their belly get bigger. I recall hearing a man hailing out to his friend as Dhal Belly Indian and I thought that was a good tag line for a song...Big Belly Men are humans and have feelings too (2003).

It signals the slow transition that is occurring for Indian men from undesirable to desirable. Articulating the desires of Indian women become a means to undermine the stereotype of Indian men as incompetent lovers when compared with 'virile' black men.

When women sing about demands, they do so in a very rational manner. They state their reasons and delineate the situation clearly. In the male psyche, these demands are overwhelming and make the woman seem neurotic or pushy, as in Ravi Bissambhar's "Leggo Meh Hand" (2002). In the song, the man's wish to "be a lover boy to run down woman" does not match up with the *pagal larki's* (crazy girl) yearning to be his *dulahin*. She is crazy because she:

*followin me anywhere I singin chutney
And if I talk to ah woman
This girl want to beat me.*

This jealous stalker is especially a nuisance because they are not even in a relationship. She goes as far as to quarrel with any girl who dances with him, thereby embarrassing him in front of his friends and preventing him from being a 'player'. The player in the boy's mind is the ultimate male – he has plenty women with no strings attached. Singers like Ravi are bringing a youthful male energy and mentality to chutney. In the 1980s and early 1990s, chutney was dominated by older men, who often sang about marriage, and

professed their love to fictitious women with ideal qualities. With new, up and coming singers like the Ramnarine brothers, the Salickrams and the Bissambhars, we are hearing the voices of young Indian men trying to establish their masculinity, which must be defined as they encounter black male sexuality in the arena of chutney-soca. To avoid being labelled 'soft', they would rather denigrate women than acquiesce to their demands. Ironically, they depend on the attention of these very same women to enhance their masculine image. It seems, however, that men do fulfil women's demands when it is convenient and if they have something, such as sexual pleasure, to gain by it. In Rikki Jai's "Hammock" (2002), his wife is insatiable to a fault and aggressive in her demands. Being the dutiful husband, he does everything in his power to oblige her.

Men customize gender

In the Chutney Soca Monarch crop of songs, a noticeable trend is the fluidity of gender roles evident in the songs where men and women exhibit behaviour that is traditional for the opposite sex. In the private space of the *matikor*, role reversal was the norm. Women assumed male personas and enacted sexual scenes to entertain other women, diffuse tension surrounding the marriage, and provide education for the young bride. By simply singing chutney, men are already entering women's domain. In the songs that follow, however, men also take on other roles, such as providing sexual education. This is not surprising, considering that the public face of chutney is male. Men also take stereotypically male roles and behaviours and impose them on women. When chutney becomes public, it provides men with the opportunity to widen the scope of masculinity. One negative consequence of this is that women's sexuality comes under male control more, and in some cases, even pathologised.



Sung by Edward Ramdass, who calls himself the "Chutney Soca Boss", the song "D Bailna" (1999) reverses the situation of domestic violence. The stereotype of the wife-beating, controlling Indian male is still alive today and this is what Ramdass imposes on wives. The *bailna*, often invoked as a phallic symbol, now becomes "the husband tamer", a weapon for the woman to brandish on her husband and keep him in check. He advises women how to rein in their

Enactment of a Matikor night, Photo: Patricia Mohammed

husbands who are "playing bad and want to go and lime": "take out de *bailna* and he bound to change his mind." The threat of the *bailna* keeps husbands in constant fear, impinging on their good time:

*All we husband want to do
is have a good time
But when we drinkin daru
is bailna on we mind.*

In the rest of the song, Ramdass mischievously tells women to *bailay* their husbands flat and thereby take control. The accompanying stage performance sent out mixed messages, however. To illustrate his wife's power over him, he came out on stage with his wife sitting on his shoulders. That same year, Rikki Jai also had a song about the *bailna* and the two performers tried to outdo each other with gigantic balloon replicas of *bailnas*. Thus Ramdass assigned the *bailna* contradictory symbolic meanings – it was a symbol of women's power and of the male phallus. A woman could not have sung this song with the same effect because despite its humour, it would have been seen as a symbolic assault on men. It might have provoked a series of 'lashback songs' and perhaps started a disturbing trend of songs with subtexts of male-on-female violence.

Unlike Edward Ramdass, Madain Ramdass directs most of his advice to men in "Pukhanie" (2000). In the song he assumes women's traditional role of providing sexual advice. His suggestive lyrics and kitchen-based metaphors are hallmarks of traditional chutney. Using *pukhanie* as a euphemism for the phallus, he advises men on what is good for the sexual palate:

*Food from de chulha
does taste very good
But cook with hard wood
soft wood nah good.*

He then tells men what to do to get the fire going: "*Chook de chaila in de chulha and blow de pukhanie.*" His next concern is hygiene and he addresses women for the first and only time in the song:

*Take care of your chulha, that is a must
always keep it clean and lepay
always keep it clean and lepay
don't let it gather dust.¹²*

For the men, Ramdass advises:

*Make sure de hole in de pukhanie eh block
if dat should happen
if dat should happen
de pukhanie wouldn't wuk.*

His advice is simple and direct. After these crucial words of wisdom, he goes on to address possible problems during a speaking interlude in the song:

¹² I was startled when a female chutney singer gave me the same advice after an interview, when she began advising me on how to keep a man happy and maintain a stable relationship. She said, "I'm telling you this as a daughter. This is what I told my own daughter."

Now there is a right way and there is a wrong way to *chook chaila*. I go show yuh the right way, okay? Watch meh good now: chook one dis side, chook one dat side, chook one in de centre. Chook one dis side, chook one dat side, chook one in de centre and if the fire still eh want to light, move it around!

Claiming to know the “right way” gives him an air of authority, which serves to establish his masculinity in the midst of playing a traditionally female role. This interlude also becomes an opportunity to add a soca flavour to his traditional chutney sound.

In the same year as “Pukhanie”, Lall Bharat also appropriated the role of sexual educator with “Rosie Gyul” and restored the *bailna* as a metaphor for the phallus. In the song, his partner Rikki Jai invites him to sing “hot hot chutney” for his girlfriend, Rosie. Apparently, Rosie is in need of sexual education: “He pull meh in de kitchen/and he make meh sing for she.” We find that the education, which centres on pleasuring the male, begins promptly and is quite direct:

*Oh Rosie tell meh what yuh
cookin for dinner
Leh meh show yuh
how to hold de bailna.*

If we read into the double meaning, it is clear that in the first two lines he is quizzing Rosie about her sexual knowledge, and in the last two he is showing her how to handle the man. Apparently, Rosie, in her innocence, wants the entire family to be witness to this lesson, but Bharat makes it clear that he “want she to learn to cook for Rikki” alone. In the end, he can assure Rikki that he has done his job well:

*I tell meh partner Rikki Jai not to worry
When we in the kitchen she does bailna good roti
Rosie no more lazy but she hard hard wukin.*

The song reinforces two qualities for women that are also stressed in Hindu mythology – fidelity and a potent sexuality that can be expressed robustly, yet managed within the confines of marriage. She must be faithful and focus her attention on one man alone, like Sita did for Ram, which endowed her with virtue. Within the union, she must put aside all notions of sexual modesty and use her reservoir of sexual desire to please her husband. Mohammed writes about this duality in Hindu philosophy:

The female consists of *shakti* (energy/power, the energizing principle of the universe) and *prakti* (nature, the undifferentiated matter of the universe). The latter is uncultured and therefore dangerous, sustaining the idea that women are impure, easily polluting, and themselves polluted. In metaphorical terms, this has meant that the female, as uncultured nature, must be controlled by the male (2002: 147).

Rennie Ramnarine of the ‘Revolution Squad’ put this principle into song and gave it a name with “Shanti” (2000). Playing on the religious chant “Om Shanti Om”, he chants “No Shanti No, Shanti Shanti No” to tell her that her behaviour is inappropriate, especially since he is married. Shanti’s libido is out of control and her aggressive pursuit

of Rennie threatens the sanctity of his marriage. She first assaults him at a cooking night, and then begins stalking him:

*Shanti very harden, she cyar leave meh alone
Anytime ah go to work, she calling on the phone
After work one day, man she jump inside meh van
Shanti start to squeeze meh boy, so ah push away she hand.*

Of course it is not the attention he minds so much, but the fact that his wife might find out and lose her temper, which makes him reluctant to act on any desires he has for Shanti. The second half of the chorus goes:

*Doh squeeze meh dey Shanti,
doh squeeze meh dey.
If meh wife find out,
well then is thunder for meh.*

Shanti is oblivious to his fear and her pursuit continues, until Rennie decides to put a stop to it once and for all. He takes her to the beach and gives her exactly what she wants:

When ah start to squeeze she,
the gyul get *bazodee*.
Shanti drop down on de sand
and start to beg for mercy.

In the next verse, we discover that Shanti is also married and she fears the consequences if her husband were to discover her illicit liaison. In the end, she cannot handle what she pursued so earnestly. Rennie overpowers her, and makes her remember her moral obligations to her husband. This act functions somewhat as a purification rite for her polluted and polluting nature. The seaside is a sacred place for Hindus in Trinidad to offer sacrifices and enact rituals. At this site he purges Shanti of her dangerous desire. He also stops her from defiling both their marriages, thereby holding it up as a sacred institution.

By making Rennie the one that is acted upon by Shanti, Ramnarine touches on another aspect of the male-female relationship described by Mohammed: “At the same time, the alliance between male and female is presented through mythology as a complementary one. The male godhead is passive, abstract and powerless unless activated by the power of the goddess” (2002, 147). Anil Bheem’s “Honeymoon” (1999) portrays a clueless bachelor whose sexual awakening occurs due to the efforts of his mother and bride. His parents (his mother in particular) force him to get married despite his protests. They send him on the honeymoon and he has no idea what to do. He laments that all he knows how to do is play his music and sing his song, but “about this honeymoon really I eh know a ting.” Beseeking his father for help is useless as his mother informs him: “ay *beta*, what yuh askin your *papoo*/ is 30 years he married and still he eh know.” Her advice is simple – to drink some seamoss with egg. Now that he has done his part, his knowledgeable bride takes care of the rest:

*My dulahin say baby I know this thing is new
just hold on to my hand I go show you what to do
My dulahin say baby I know this thing is new
just come inside de bedroom I go show you what to do
I didn't want to married, but now I glad I do
she carry meh in the bedroom and she show meh what to do*

Roy Rampersad also comes off as being passive in “Cock a Doodle Doo” (2001), but his lusty Lynette is portrayed as being somewhat neurotic, which is in keeping with the dual nature of women. Although men may seem helpless and bewildered when confronted with women’s sexuality, especially when they acquiesce to her demands, they are able to regain control by overpowering women with their sexual prowess (see “Shanti” above). Rampersad outlines the situation in the first verse:

*Every mornin when the cock start to crow
She would come over and beg meh fuh so
And she shout and she shout ‘Cock cock cock cock a doodle doo
Doh worry Roy, I want de murga from you.*

The only thing keeping him from fulfilling those demands is her mother, who would raise hell if she discovers that Roy has touched her daughter. Lynette’s persistent demands eventually lands him in trouble with her mother:

*Well I want to tell yuh why I move away
Everytime the cock crow this gyul go bother meh
So I give she what she wanted yuh see
Thats why she mami come lookin fuh me.*

Eventually, Roy comes back to Trinidad, thinking that he has dispensed with Lynette. But her obsession takes a more sinister turn – she becomes a stalker. At a party, he finds her in a corner looking at him. Women’s sexuality is pathologized in this last verse. The implicit message is that if their sexuality is not controlled, either by marriage or by a man, then it provokes them to go over the edge and lose all sense and reason.

Violent Love: Men sing about domestic violence

The issue of domestic violence has an uneasy place in chutney-soca, since it is a fête and dance genre. The dissonance between the genre and the topic leads to trivialization, which occurs in two ways. If the song has a subtext of violence, it is masked by humour, usually of the slapstick kind, as in the case with Rikki Jai’s “Dulahin”, Videsh Sookhoo’s “Dhal Belly” or Edward Ramdass’ “Bailna”. If violence is the main theme, then the juxtaposition of abuse with cheery melodies and lilting rhythms serves to undermine the gravity of the issue, as we shall see below. Sometimes, both these elements are present simultaneously. Drupatee Ramgoonai, recognizing this tendency in chutney-soca, sang “Doh Beat Yuh Wife” (2002) in a slower tempo to avoid losing the power of the lyrics. She commented:

I didn't want it to be like a real Chutney Soca because it has a message I wanted to bring across, so it has a slower tempo. If I didn't do the song this year, it would have had to

wait till next year. But with the amount of violence in the country, I felt I had to do it
(*Trinidad Express* 29 January 2002).

Her song was not included on the CD containing finalists, but Ramgoonai was aware of its potential in a large well-attended forum like the Chutney Soca Monarch finals and enacted a visually captivating scenario on stage. A background skit portrayed the brutal reality of domestic violence and to symbolize peace between men and women, she released a white dove towards the end. She noted that the finals were a “perfect place” for her message due to the size of the crowd and the consequent publicity. Yet, perhaps anticipating a backlash from men, she felt the need to explain her position: “It’s not that I think all men are batterers, but I’m a woman and if I’m going to sing I will sing for women” (*Trinidad Express* 29 January 2002). Ramgoonai’s songs have often focussed on oppressive marriages and she usually takes on the persona of the victimized wife complaining to her husband. Songs by men tend to address the husband, telling him to curb his behaviour and treat his wife more humanely. With the exception of Ramgoonai’s song in 2001, which advised women to leave abusive relationship, few songs are directed at women. Most songs about domestic violence are sung by men for men. Even Drupatee’s song, written by the versatile songwriter Kenneth Supersad, is for a male audience. Men’s opinions on the topic embody the entire spectrum from normalizing domestic violence by conveying a humorous situation or speaking out against it by condemning abusive men.

While in 1998 we found Rikki Jai beating his fat wife flat, in 1999 we find Prakash Jaglalsingh advising men to respect their wives in “Praises to Dulahin”. In a sense, he seems to be admonishing Rikki:

*We bailnaa we dulahin, well but that is not de norm
[Yuh stupid, yuh really stupid. Hear dis]
We bailnaa we dulahin, well but that is not de norm
If yuh have a fat dulahin she can keep yuh nice and warm.*

In the verse, he pathologizes violence against women, condemns perpetrators as ‘stupid’ and decries weight as an accurate measure of attractiveness. As the song progresses, he admits that men can’t survive without women:

*We say dem girls too bothersome but we can’t do without them
The way we does hang on is like mango on a stem.*

The men come off as being somewhat pathetic in their dependence. The melody suddenly changes to a nursery rhyme. He sings joyfully:

*we must respect our dulahin anywhere we go
we must respect our dulahin anywhere we go
respect our dulahin anywhere we go
To domestic violence leh we say no.*

The song ends with Jaglalsingh reminding men that marriage is not a licence for abuse.

In the same year, Nirmal “Massive” Gosein also issued a statement on domestic violence with “Respect Women” (1999). Perhaps it was fashionable to sing about spousal violence

as people reflected on the coming millennium. Maybe Rasika Dindial's hit "Lazy Man" galvanized men into turning their gaze inward at their own behaviour. Gosein prides himself on singing 'conscious chutney', yet his CD cover that year had him posed in the centre with two blonde women leaning on him on either side, dressed in bikinis and pumps. Gosein's message is not only undermined for the reasons mentioned above, but also because he has a reputation for singing 'smutty' songs that objectify women, making it difficult to take his message seriously. In fact, in the middle of "Respect Women", Gosein breaks away, starts rapping with nonsensical syllables meant to sound like Hindi, and instructs girls "to wine and go down". Despite the immense flaws of his repertoire, Gosein brings to attention how marriage changes men. Whereas before tying the knot they behave like perfect gentleman, after the wedding bells have rung, their true nature emerges and they become abusive and mean. The stepfather in Gosein's song is abusive to both the narrator's sister and mother. He criticizes the sister, telling her she "cyar wash a pot" and cheats on the mother. The stepson reminds him throughout the song how he used to behave before:

*When she was my mami she cookin for we
I hear yuh tellin she she does make de best roti.*

After marriage, the stepfather's calculating nature emerges:

*When yuh get in trouble,
you leanin by she.
When they throw yuh in jail,
is she to take yuh bail.*

In the end, it's the mother who gets the short end of the stick. Not only does she not have the pleasure and comfort of a good husband, but she is also penniless: "Now she poor, she is a *chamar!*"

While it is heartening to hear some men singing on this topic in an effort to encourage better behaviour from their brothers, it does not necessarily equate to a growing consciousness among men in general about domestic violence. Often in chutney and chutney-soca, if a song on a particular topic becomes popular, it inspires a spate in the same vein. For example, in 1999 and 2001, there was a cluster of songs about domestic violence. Singer Asha Kamachee commented:

But I really believe that people would work harder long ago to write a chutney song. Because you find now that one person would sing on one topic and three or four of them want to follow that same topic... Like for example the year I sang about rum, *daru*, we had nobody really sing about it as such, but now everybody want to sing. If somebody want to sing a song, they want to find a fault you know, they want to find a fault or something. (Personal interview, April 2004).

Kamachee believes that artistes sing about certain topics in an effort to outdo each other. Kumar Mahabir, a representative of the Indo-Caribbean Cultural Council, is also cynical about the domestic violence issue. Unlike Kamachee, he does not question so much the motive and consciousness of the artistes, but the actual prevalence of violence in the community.

The chutney items portrayed Indian men in these kinds of disputes as rum drinkers, wife beaters and Gramoxone ingesters. The portrayal begs the question: is domestic violence and murder-suicides prevalent in the Indian community? If this is so, then it is certainly not reflected in the location of counselling/referral/support services in these communities, and the ethnicity of the officers hired in the Domestic Violence Unit under former UNC Minister Daphne Phillips (*Trinidad Guardian*, 14 February 2001).

By focusing on ethnicity and geographical location, Mahabir attempts to shift the attention away from the actual problem of domestic violence to the purportedly racist agenda of the government. However, this argument, while revealing his own biases, also suggests a sense of uneasiness and denial when dealing with difficult issues that require impartial scrutiny of one's own community. Kenny J, author of the song "Baboolal" (discussed above), seems to disagree with Mahabir. He claimed that the song was based on the real-life situation of his friend and is representative of many families in the Barrackpore area. Describing the situation, he said when "Baboolal comes home from work in a drunken state, he does believe he getting horn and he behave bad. Reports were made to the Community Police against 'Baboolal' about domestic violence and we are desperately trying to assist him" (*Trinidad Express*, February 2001).

Mothers: Static images

Songs about mothers, and mothers-in-law especially, are most telling of the persistence of gender ideologies and the difficulties in changing them. Few married couples live with their in-laws today so there is less daily interaction. The power that mothers wield over their daughters-in-law. Yet mothers-in-law, who are stereotypically possessive and mean-spirited, continue to surface in chutney soca. It is somewhat ironic that male songwriters, adopting the voice of a distressed daughter-in-law, wrote both the mother-in-law songs that appear in the Chutney Soca Monarch collection. There seems to be some disagreement, however, about how salient this issue really is today. Indian cultural activist, Kumar Mahabir, seems to think that insidious mothers-in-law are relics of the past. (Personal communication, 4 April 2004). Carlene Wells, however, who performed *Mother-in-Law Pressure* in 2003 reported that after every performance, women would crowd the backstage, confess their problems with their mothers-in-law and state that the "song was a representation of the truth to them" (2003).

The first song concerning mothers to appear on the CDs is Rikki Jai's "Dulahin", discussed above. While his mother was demanding, her efforts landed him a 'real sweet *dulahin*'. In Nigel Salickram's *Aloo Pie* (2000), the mother comes off not only as demanding but also irrational and monstrous. On writing the song, he said:

The lyrics carry a positive message. When I decided to compose a song for the CSM, I wanted a distinct change from traditional chutney songs; in particular the stereotyped songs now flooding the airwaves. I wanted to get away from raunchy lyrics, the focus of women as sex objects, the wine and jam, jump and wave fever that is now propagated as chutney soca (*Trinidad Guardian*. 12 February 2000).

Unfortunately, *Aloo Pie* in the images of his mother and the vendor Suzy, reinforces many of the same stereotypes Salickram sought to avoid. The mother has a sudden

craving for Indian delicacies and sends her son down to Debe to get some. The vendor, Suzy, sells him everything except the *aloo* pie. When he realizes that, he decides he might as well stay in Debe because his mother “will surely kill” him. He goes back to Suzy and begs her to make him some *aloo* pie, but she asks for a chutney song first. Lost in the music, she forgets to make the pie. In the background we hear Nigel’s mother calling angrily and hear him wailing in fear. Salickram admits that he did the song just to have something original. The originality is evident more in the music itself rather than the themes or images. Salickram fused elements of hip hop and pop with chutney melodies and soca rhythms.

Asha Kamachee’s *Mother-in-Law* (1999), written by Kenneth Suratt, portrays a woman who is not only controlling but a nuisance. Her sole purpose is to make the daughter-in-law’s life miserable. In the song the mother-in-law finds fault with her ability to do basic housework, and interferes with the entire pregnancy, including the naming of the child. She ‘bad talks’ her daughter-in-law and denies her all power in the marriage. On top of that, her husband is a *mamaguy*, who will not protest against his mother’s treatment of his wife and allows her to have full control of the couple’s finances. For her part, the daughter-in-law also finds multiple faults with the mother-in-law’s behaviour: she is totally self-absorbed and indulgent. When she is not giving the new wife a hard time, she is watching soap operas, reading tabloids or doing her nails.

Carlene Wells offered up a similar song some years later with *Mother-in-Law Pressure* (2003), written by Ramdeen Falko Maharaj. The punch line is the same, with a mother-in-law who deliberately makes the daughter-in-law’s life difficult and finds fault with everything she does. She makes her cook on a wood stove and wash the laundry by hand, even though she has a gas cooker and washing machine. This mother-in-law also has nothing better to do than to spread rumours about her daughter-in-law. She tells the neighbours that she can’t make *roti*, comes from a *chamar* family, and is unable to have children. Throughout the song Wells appeals to the elder women in her family for advice, confessing her fears of losing her husband. In the end, her fears come close to being realized when she discovers the mother-in-law telling her son “how it have a real good girl down by Gopeesingh”. In addition, the mother-in-law has kept herself close to her son’s heart by cooking for him every day.

Conclusion

A number of changes occurred as chutney spilled over from the wedding tent onto the stage of the chutney fete. English became the primary language, artistes began incorporating soca beats and other elements, and male artistes came to dominate the scene. In the private space of the Hindu wedding, chutney enabled women to express their ideas on a range of topics from sexuality, to husbands, to marriage. In the public sphere of chutney, the participation of men made it an important area in which Indian men and women could renegotiate gendered identities. As chutney evolved into chutney-soca, this process of negotiation was influenced by Black and North American sex/gender belief systems. In this paper, I have chosen to focus on gender negotiations in lyrics because these are the most accessible, and they lend themselves to the kind of scrutiny

required for this discussion. However, it is important to recognize that negotiations occur both on and off the stage in every performance. They occur in song and dance, and through physical, verbal and spatial interactions between individuals, whether it is one audience member with another, artiste with producer, or DJ with dancer. As I identified the different areas and levels of negotiation, it became clear that in chutney-soca, at least within the framework of the competition, the clamour of male voices often drown out female ones.¹³ The focus on lyrics may also be the reason why the voices of women are not as prominent as men's. A closer look at the dance floor and audience members or the home and working lives of chutney artistes might very well bring the perspectives of women to the fore.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983.
- Boyke, Roy. 1979. "Shorty, Man of the Mantra" in *Trinidad Carnival*.
- Johnson, Kim N. 1984. "Considerations of Indian Sexuality." Paper presented at the Third Conference on East Indians in the Caribbean, St Augustine, Trinidad, University of the West Indies.
- Leu, Lorraine. 2000. "'Raise yuh Hand, Jump up and Get on Bad!': New Developments in Soca Music in Trinidad" in *Latin American Music Review* 21, no. 1: 45-58.
- Maharaj, Shivannand. 1994. "The Development of Indian Classical Music in Trinidad and Tobago in the Twentieth Century". BA thesis. University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.
- Manuel, Peter. 1998. "Gender Politics in Caribbean Popular Music: Consumer Perspectives and Academic Interpretation" in *Popular Music and Society* 22, No.2: 11-30.
- Manuel, Peter. 2000. *East Indian Music in the West Indies: Tān-singing, Chutney, and the Making of Indo-Caribbean Culture*. Philadelphia : Temple University Press.
- Meighoo, Kirk. 2003. *Politics in a Half-Made Society: Trinidad and Tobago 1925-2001*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Miller, Daniel. 1991. "Absolute Freedom in Trinidad" in *Man: New Series* 26, no. 2: 323-341.
- Mohammed, Shamoon. 1976. *Mastana Bahar and Indian Culture in Trinidad and Tobago: A Study on the East Indians of Trinidad and Tobago*. San Juan, Trinidad : Mastana Bahar Thesis Publication Committee.
- Mohammed, Patricia. 2002. *Gender Negotiations Among Indians in Trinidad: 1917 - 1947*. United Kingdom: Palgrave.
- Myers, Helen. 1998. *Music of Hindu Trinidad: Songs from the Indian Diaspora*. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press.
- Niranjana, Tejaswini. 1997. "'Left to the Imagination': Indian Nationalisms and Female Sexuality in Trinidad" in *Small Axe* 2: 1-18. Small Axe Collective.

¹³ I explore the reasons for low rates of female participation in another paper titled 'Gender in Competition'.

- Parmasad, Kenneth. 1989. "Searching for Continuity: The Ancestral Impulse and Community Identity Formation in Trinidad" in *Caribbean Quarterly*, 40 no. 3 & 4: 22-29.
- Patasar, Mungal. 1995. "Modern Trends in Indo-Trinidad Music". In *In Celebration of 150 Years of the Indian Contribution to Trinidad and Tobago*, vol. 2, ed. Brinsley Samaroo et al., 75-85. Port of Spain: Historical Publications.
- Popplewell, Georgia. 1996. "The Chutney Phenomenon" in *Caribbean Beat* Nov- Dec.
- Ramnarine, Tina K. 2001. *Creating Their Own Space: The Development of an Indian Caribbean Musical Tradition*. Jamaica: The Press, University of the West Indies
- Ribeiro, Indra. 1992. "The Phenomenon of Chutney Singing in Trinidad and Tobago: The Functional Value of a Social Phenomenon". BA thesis. University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.
- Vertovec, Steven. 1992. *Hindu Trinidad: Religion, Ethnicity and Socio-Economic Change*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Glossary

- Aji/Aja – paternal grandmother/grandfather
- Aloo Pie – potato pie
- Bacchanal – confusion
- Bailay – to roll roti with a bailna
- Bailna – rolling pin used to make roti
- Barahi – ritual celebration on the 12th day after a baby's birth
- Bazodee – giddy or light-headed. Totally confused
- Beti/beta – terms of endearment for daughter/son
- Bhowji – older brother's wife
- Bodi – string beans
- Chailaa – firewood
- Chamar – person of low-caste
- Chinee – Chinese
- Chook – to sick or puncture something
- Chulha – heat
- Chunkay – to pour boiling oil in which garlic has been browned
- Chutney – a preparation of green mangoes and various spices
- Cyar – can't
- Daru – rum
- 'Deputy' – the other woman or man in a ménage-a-trois
- Dhal – dish made with lentils or split peas
- Dhal belly – a stomach made large by overeating dhal
- Dhantal – East Indian percussion instrument consisting of a length of iron rod and a U-shaped metal striker
- Divali – Hindu festival of lights
- Dulahin/Dulaha – bride/groom
- Getting horned – being cheated on
- Gie – give

Jam and wine – big, noisy party with local dance movements
 Jammin' – big , noisy party
 Jupanie – rough house built with mud and straw
 Larka/Larki – girl/boy
 Leepay – to apply a mud plastering made with cow's dung onto the floor or wall
 Mama man – a man who exhibits 'female' qualities; is controlled by his wife
 Mami – older brother's wife
 Mastana Bahar – joyous spring
 Matikor – ritual celebration held on the Friday night before a wedding
 Mehendi – Henna
 Mousie/Mousa – maternal aunt/uncle
 Murga – male hen.
 Nani/Nana – maternal grandmother/grandfather
 Neemackharam – ungrateful
 Ohrni – veil worn by women to convey respect and modesty
 Pagal – crazy; imbecile
 Papoo –
 Patideva – guru
 Pativrata – period of time where devotion is done
 Pelau – Creole dish with rice, peas and chicken.
 Pukhanie/pukani – hollow tube for blowing fire.
 Rani – queen
 Roti – flat bread usually accompanied by curried meats and vegetables.
 Soca – a musica blend of soul/calypso indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago.
 Sundar larki – pretty girl
 Sundar sapana – pretty dream
 Steel pan – musical instrument indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago. Tempered oil drum cut to a certain length with grooved sections that are cut to play notes according to scale.
 Tabanca – feeling of sadness caused by the end of a love affair
 Talkarie – cooked vegetables
 Wuk - work
 Wukkin' - working



Volume 1. No. 1. April 2007

GENDERING THE CARIBBEAN PICTURESQUE

Patricia Mohammed

Abstract

Reading the past through images, either paintings, sketches or photographs, provide another prism through which we may decipher and understand the intricate processes by which perception and identity are continuously being managed. The paper is preoccupied first conceptually with how the picturesque gets conflated with the Caribbean female body in particular, either the sexualized body or the labouring body. Second, it examines how a visual code took root placing lighter skin colour over darker skin, marrying beauty with race, and positioning hierarchies of class with skin colour. The paper works at a third and reflexive level. If by examining the visual text we are engaged in the process of decoding the meanings either inherent or unintended by the image-makers themselves, the paper questions the project of visibility itself. The invention of the gendered picturesque clearly created hierarchies of visibility and invisibility among women and men, or froze them into specific work and family roles. How may the contemporary visual interpretations unfold hidden passages and textures of the past that have not come to light, and equally how may we, the scholars in gender and visibility, guard against reinforcing the selfsame stereotypes in the present by encoding other devalued meanings?

Deprivation is made lyrical and twilight, with the patience of alchemy, almost transmutes despair into virtue. In the tropics,

*nothing is lovelier than the allotments of the poor, no theatre as vivid, voluble, and cheap. (Derek Walcott, **What the Twilight Says: Essays**, 1998: 3-4)*

Invention of the picturesque

The taste we loosely call “picturesque” is tied up in the validation of art itself, that scenery, buildings or human figures on the landscape, become valued by and through their first appearance on paintings, sculptured forms, and latterly, in photographs. The term “picturesque” writes David Brett “was originally derived from the Italian *pintoresco*, which had no specific reference to the landscape, but was addressed to any subject thought paintable. Objects, individuals or settings came to be considered paintable”¹. The paintable in the Caribbean, or later the sight captured through the photograph was both related and unrelated to the theories of beauty in culture which had preoccupied European philosophers and artists before the fifteenth century. The discovery of “novel, curious and disturbing information about the New World”² forced European intellectuals to a re-scaling of the world itself, and enabled new material exchanges, if largely exploitative relations, between distant places and people. Mimi Scheller’s analysis of how the Caribbean was consumed reinforces J.H. Elliot’s arguments in *The Old World and the New 1492-1650* that in traditional Europe, assumptions about the nature of man, geography, theology and history, were profoundly challenged by this remarkable encounter with new lands and peoples.³

The picturesque as a concept might be considered through a theory of the aesthetic since what was picturesque came to be synonymous with the concept of beauty and with having aesthetic value. The picturesque in the new world had to accommodate a consideration of the ‘beautiful’ with what was perceived as different, unusual, quaint even, as a way of aesthetically reconciling difference. As Derek Walcott observes above, poverty is transmuted into aesthetic value through the voyeuristic eye. The painter, or visitor did not have to live in the ramshackle houses cobbled together with discarded or unmatched materials that came to symbolize the “charm” of the poor. This was the onlooker’s perception and glossy interpretation of virtue in the face of adversity and scarcity. Theories of beauty have long been a subject of unresolved discussion in art. By the nineteenth century, George Dickie notes, the concepts of beauty and taste had both been exhausted in western discourses, to open the way to a concept of the aesthetic⁴. Rudolf Arnheim explains that there was a movement “from *aisthesis* to aesthetics, from sensory experience in general to the arts in particular”⁵, the latter requiring analysis of formal qualities of colour, composition, balance, harmony, order (and disorder) and so on rather than reliance only on the nebulous concept of taste. The determination of what is beautiful or unbeautiful is never value free as much as this is presented as an objective truth. That objectivity is itself neutral is also an unresolved issue in epistemological thinking. As pointed out by Emory Elliot, “The aesthetic is always in danger of being

exploited in the service of individual prejudice or of nationalism, racism, sexism and classism”⁶.

Visual definition was a key way in which the Empire was “fashioned, maintained and extended ...imperialism involved not only territorial acquisition, political ambition and economic interests, but also cultural formations, attitudes, beliefs and practices” as James Ryan comments in *Picturing Empire*⁷. Visual interpretations of the past allow us another window on deciphering and understanding the complexity of these intricate processes by which perception and identity are continuously being managed. They offer new ways of seeing how gender might be understood by processing the overexposed axes of identities of class, race, colour and sexuality through images created of the Caribbean. At the same time, one has to guard against over-writing gender and identity as representative of nation or regional identity whether in the past or the present. Lucy Curzon’s explanation is valuable here. “Visual culture...is understood not as a mirror that reflects national identity, but rather as a complex venue for its interpretation – a site through which populations come into consciousness as members of a particular community”⁸. Visuality works, as it should, as another prism from which we can view reality, thus providing other insights and perhaps comprehension about ourselves and others.

Works of art create fictions (or may be adapted from fiction) from which visual metaphors are fashioned. In reading pictures of the Caribbean in the absence of a coherent literature on visual iconography or visual semantics, the methods I apply in this paper are varied in as much as the genre of images I draw from are also selected from different chronologies or media. Visual perception which amounts to visual thinking requires connecting dots between sight data and textual references, employing a set of correspondences that the images bring to mind, as I attempt to locate an insider eye while deconstructing the outsider gaze. While admittedly the significance of Caribbean new world culture is its complete interlocution with philosophies, fictions, religions, languages and other art objects of the old worlds of Europe, Africa and Asia from which populations of the Caribbean were drawn, the epistemic project of imperialism is still not fully comprehended from the point of view of visual deconstruction. Thus, the reader will find that the images drawn on here are largely those made by the visitor to the islands and secondly, that the semiotic points of references, both textual and visual, are primarily with the ‘old world’.

How then did the picturesque come to be defined for the Caribbean? How was the construct of the picturesque shaped from the fifteenth century onwards as it related new world culture to the classical notions of what was beautiful and therefore what was prized? How have Caribbean born peoples created a concept of beauty in tandem with or in antithesis to Eurocentric perceptions? Such issues remain relatively unexplored in the history of art and studies in the visual in the Caribbean, although they are raised in many other ways, for instance in the anti-western stances of postcolonial historiography and literature and in art practices themselves. This paper limits itself to the gendering of the

Caribbean picturesque or to the way in which the gendered body in the Caribbean attained picturesque form in the eyes of the image-maker⁹. The purpose of the paper can be further broken down into two related concerns: first, a theoretical preoccupation with how the picturesque gets conflated with the Caribbean female body in particular, either the sexualized body or the laboring body, and the second, how a visual code took root, placing lighter skin colour over darker skin, marrying beauty with race, and positioning hierarchies of class with skin colour. It does not in doing this limit the picturesque subject to the beautiful or the desirable. The problematic discussion of aesthetic value and taste continues to remain largely unexplored from Caribbean perspectives. Rather I attempt to move the picturesque away from the dominance of such discourses to examine the creation of stereotypes that in turn become representative of the region, thus creating an idea of what becomes aesthetically appealing and for whom.

As a good point of entry then is what was once accepted as the ideal of beauty in the West. Amelia Jones argues that:

In the history of Western art and the most dominant kinds of aesthetic judgement, the naked white female body has long been staged as the most consistent (if contentious and highly charged) trope of aesthetic beauty as exemplified by Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* ... (and in) bestsellers such as Kenneth Clark's book *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* ... the female nude is understood to articulate fully "the alchemic powers of art" to transform through beauty.¹⁰

The region's picturesqueness if you like begins with this opposition, and presentation of the female and counter-positioned male body. The comparative beauty found in the nakedness of the white and black female is a running theme, although underplayed in the polite painting that is introduced in Figure 1. Dancing bodies, opposing black and white couples, form one of the earliest constructs of the picturesque gendered images in the Caribbean. Figure 1, a painting by Agostino Brunias entitled "A Negro festival in the Island of St. Vincent" was executed between 1773-1796. Brunias was an Italian born and both Italian and British trained painter who was retained as a "court artist" by Sir William Young, on his appointment as first Governor of Dominica. Brunias is also the first European painter in the region that we know of to have painted in front of the subject, in the islands. The majority of the previous works we have of the period of early colonization from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, including maps and sketches, suggest imaginary or reported scenes executed by sailors, explorers, artists, tradesmen, planters, and government officials from Europe.

In this painting, the viewer stands as if in the foreground, looking in, as do the spectators all around. Two dancing couples dominate the scene. We barely observe the two men, although the contrast between them is immediate, as is that between the two foregrounded women. There is a comparison being made between the white and black women who are placed centre stage as it were on this dance floor. Their head and shoulder positions are replicated, possibly derived from the working method of the artist

who sketched from one model and then varied the composition by juxtaposing bodies in changed settings, adjusting minor features such as height and skin colour, costumes and activity. In this painting the lighter skinned woman is taller, more elegantly dressed. To her left, the darker skinned is shorter and wears brighter colours as contrasted against the white of the other, and most likely barefooted like her partner, although her feet are not visible in the image. The bare footedness of the black dancers compared to the shod male and no doubt female is a primary marker of difference in status, wealth and assumed level of 'civilization' according to the hierarchical codes of culture. All the other characters are reduced proportionately in size so that ultimately, the fair-skinned couple is the tallest, and their facial features most developed in this composition.



Figure 1: Agostino Brunias: A negro festival in the island of St. Vincent Lithograph of original oil on canvas, (painted between 1773-1796)
From a Print Courtesy National Library of Jamaica

The opposition of black and white, of high brow and low culture (are the white couple the planter and his wife who through *noblesse oblige* join in this festival, is this the first image of the white tourists slumming with the natives?), of bright colours of the workers as opposed to pastels of the European, of carefree dancing under warm tropical skies, where dancers are refreshed by exotic sugary fruit coming from sugary plantations. All of these had already by the eighteenth century come to signify the pleasures available in the Caribbean. Brunias's paintings were being exhibited in London and sold to planters of the region and other collectors in Europe who were captured by the difference they represented from temperate vegetation and scenes. Here the dance setting, though consistent with the folksy fairground or outdoor maypole dancers of European images, are nonetheless geographically placed with the prominent palm or coconut tree that signified these climes: the adjacent fields and outdoor setting is tropical and admits to the warmth of the day or the night, for the painter is neither specific about the 'festival' or the time, except that the shadows cast by the dancer suggest an overhead source of light. The female fruit-seller to the right of the dancers with her array of pineapple and other tropical fruit, the shirtless onlooker on the left whose gaze can be followed to the white couple, all lead to a set of metaphors that Brunias's paintings (as will be developed later in this paper) sets up as the picturesque. We do not have a glimpse of slave huts, and the 'natives' here are obviously well fed and enjoying themselves. The unproblematic power dynamics and configurations of race, class and gender are a constant set of references that we have come to read from paintings by Brunias. That the artist selected such compositions and subject matter may be derived from his classical training in Italy coupled with his idiosyncratic preoccupation and interest in the new lands leading to a depiction of a romanticized narrative of what he encountered. It may be that he was commissioned to depict such romantic interpretations of the colonies by his patrons who needed to demonstrate the harmonies of race relations in the Caribbean despite the bad press of slavery. By this time abolitionist propaganda had already begun to sound the knell that would eventually bring the slave trade to an end. We can only surmise. Brunias was himself obviously captured by the space and, not unlike the twentieth century cliché of the anthropologist who goes 'native' he elected to return to the region after he and Sir William Young were repatriated to Britain, continuing to live for the rest of life in the island of Dominica¹¹ where he is said to be buried.

The Sublime and the Scenic

Since the traffic across the seas in one direction in fact shaped the early discourse, one needs to go back to the moment signified as birth. At the time of the Renaissance, when it was important for Italy to recapture the former glory of Rome, the classical myths became popular among the educated. Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (Figure 2), was painted for the villa of Lorenzo de Pierfrancesco de Medici in Castello. He was one of the educated classes, a member of the rich and powerful Medici family. The story of the birth of Venus rising from the sea was a classical symbol of the way in which the

divine message of beauty came into the world. Botticelli's Venus is depicted as emerging from the sea on a shell driven by the wind gods on the left, a shower of roses blowing around her in the winds which drive the shell to the shore, where she is received by a character said to be one of the Horae shown on the right of the painting. The wooded shore on the right is verdant, heralding the spring and rebirth of Italian glory. The Horae or Hours were Greek goddesses of the seasons, this one possibly the Nymph of spring as she wears a garland of myrtle around her neck, the myrtle associated with Venus and love, and a sash of pink roses, the latter associated with rebirth. According to Greek mythology, the rose was created by the goddess of flowers, Chloris who found the lifeless body of a nymph in the woods and turned her into a flower. To this flower Aphrodite added beauty, Dionysus added fragrance and with the help of the Zephyrus, god of the West Wind who blows away the clouds so that Apollo the sun god may come out, the flower opens and blooms. *The Birth of Venus* is suffused the iconography of Greek mythology and allegories of rebirth and beauty

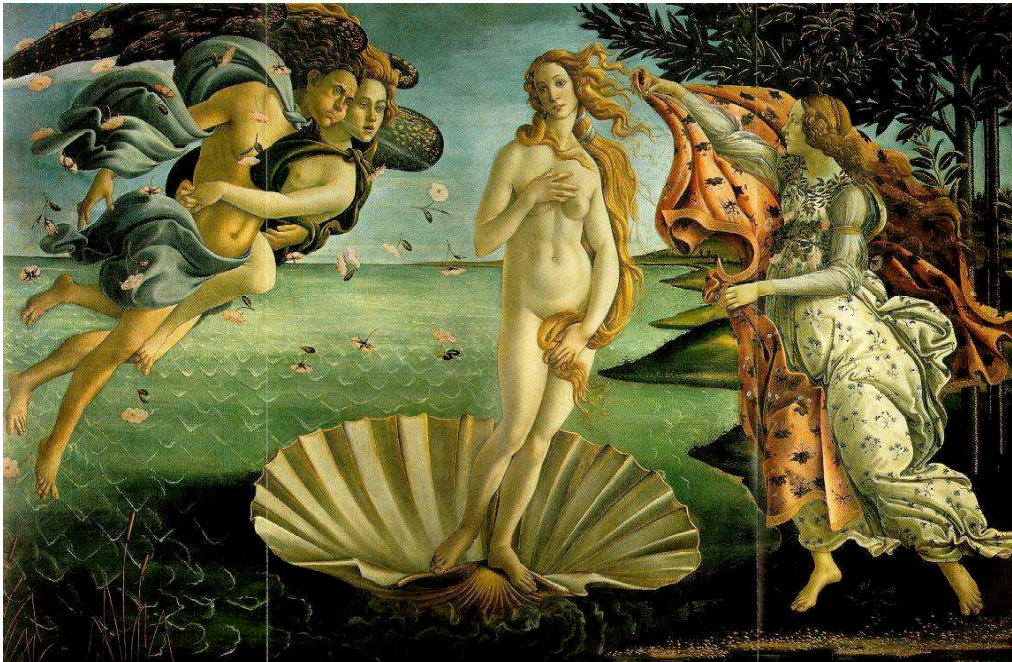


Figure 2: Sandro Botticelli The Birth of Venus, c 1485 - 86

In the *Caribbean: Sea of the New World*, author Germán Arciniegas connects the Italian High Renaissance and the encounter with the Caribbean. He suggests that Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* represented not just the return of the Greek Venus or glory to the coasts of Italy, but coincides with the discovery of America or, "...to be more exact, of the Caribbean sea....[I]n the very year of the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent, 1492, Columbus reached Guanahani. What did the men see from the bridges of the three caravels? Copper-coloured Indian girls who peered fearfully out through the tangled jungle. The Caribbean Venus walked naked, as god had sent her into the world". A depiction of this latter event, illustrated here in Figure 3, and produced after the event and possibly after the invention of photography, largely dispenses with classical allegory.

Nonetheless, the stylized flora, the naked natives demurely hidden against the bushes, the variously clothed intruders, the cross borne by the priestly figure, the swaths of cloth flags also reminiscent of the drapery borne by the nymph in Botticelli's Birth of Venus provide another set of symbols to be decoded. The sailors arrive from the sea, and enter the land, the wood nymphs are now unclothed, (read ignorant and primitive) and must be brought knowledge by those who have arrived from other shores. While Botticelli turns back to the pre-Christian Greek past, the icons of enlightenment, conquest and Christian conversion are dominant features of this image. Columbus is the central figure kneeling on the ground. There is already a conflation of land and church and an assumption of rightful power at the first port of entry.



Figure 3: Interpretation of The Landing of Columbus on the Island of Guanahane, October 12th, 1492 Painting by Dioscore Puebla, Courtesy Ramsay Antiques, Nassau, Bahamas

Unlike Botticelli's allegorical Venus, this painting represents the conception of the new world, barren of mythologies or cosmologies as far as the European mind was concerned. Modernity begins as the new narrative and perspectives takes off. There is little recession and depth in this painting or illustration. The figures lie on a flat plain, placed across the canvas from right to left. Instead of allegory, there is the reporting of an event, one gleaned from travelers tales and drawing on the countless other artistic interpretations which have imagined this moment. While the event occurred in history, it is the imagination of the painter and sketchers of the time which filtered this through to court and wider society. The painter views the scene from the new land, not the sea. It is

ironically, on the one hand and in one sense an aboriginal point of view¹². But like the family photographer, he is still outside of the scene, positioning his lens in the foreground and oblivious to the relations between and among the sitters.

If the narrative of discovery was the dominant discourse of the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, from the eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries there was an “exponential growth of the system of slavery in which Europeans consumed enslaved human bodies in the coerced production of both plantation commodities (for overseas consumption) and domestic and sexual services (for local consumption)...”¹³. It is no coincidence then that an early iconic reference to Botticelli’s Venus is transferred to the Slave trade and its carriage by the eighteenth century in Thomas Stothard’s *The Voyage of the Sable Venus from Angola to the West Indies* (1793) (Figure 4). Some of the symbols from Botticelli’s painting are repeated here, particularly that of the shell as the vessel of transportation. By 1793, the source of winds and currents are more comprehended by geographers of the time. The iconography of cartography, the latter having become a key player in navigation and conquest, is evident in the cherubs or putti like figures who represent the wind gods and who also appear to be placed as protective of the sable Venus on her journey. A similar stance is evident in the Tritons in the lower right and left who guide the vessel. There is an attempt here to transform the image of the African slave trade from terror and abject abuse to a harmless and leisurely voyage across the Atlantic.



Figure 4: Thomas Stothard: 1793, *The Voyage of the Sable Venus from Angola to the West Indies*

In a reading of this image in *Blind Memory* (2000) Marcus Wood notes: “Here, the black slave woman’s experience of the middle passage is presented as a version of the Birth of Venus. The rape of slave women is reconstructed in terms of a triumph of the slave Venus over the slave owners and traders who are ironically portrayed as her powerless victims ... the slave ship is transformed into a beautiful scallop shell pulled by frolicking dolphins” the latter in antithesis in the sea world to the flesh eating sharks who followed the slave traders’ ships¹⁴.

Barbara Bush points out that in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, images of Black women were lauded in poetry such as Isaac Teale’s “Sable Queen”, in such flowery depictions as “*O Sable Queen! Thy mild domain,/ I seek, and court thy gentle reign/So soothing, soft and sweet/Where meeting love, sincere delight, Fond pleasure, ready joys invite, And unbrought raptures meet*”¹⁵. This poem she writes was “one of the more pleasant contemporary images of the black woman” and “despite the unflattering picture painted by white men, in practice the physical appearances of black women failed to

repel them sexually”¹⁶. Carolyn Cooper develops the understatement in Bush’s analysis by proposing that black women consciously made use of their sexuality: “Is she simply a helpless victim in a racist/sexist society, or does she exercise some complex measure of control over her own sexuality and that of the black man and of the Massa”¹⁷. Such varied readings are valuable in a contemporary re-presentation of the iconic Sable Venus towards redefining the discourses of co-erced migration away from victimhood to agency.

Bryan Edwards, in *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1793), had nonetheless depicted the African Atlantic Slave Trade if it were a lyrical interlude in the region by drawing on Stothard’s *Voyage of the Sable Venus* and Isaac Teale’s poem, “The Sable Venus” to provide support for the slave trade. It is useful to revisit Bryan Edwards’s employment of Stothard’s *Sable Venus* in light of German Arciniegas’s reading of the parallel relationship between Renaissance Europe and the Caribbean encounter. Edwards, a British born planter with civil and commercial interests in Jamaica and unapologetic of slavery and colonization, is uncritical of this image which is intended, like Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, to convey the glorious rebirth of western civilization on the shores of the Caribbean. Although Edwards has himself lived in Jamaica, he seems unaware of the ravages of the encounter on the aboriginal population and enslavement on African women in the Caribbean and instead is persuaded by, or uses arguments drawing on neo-classical¹⁸ ideas in European art and literature to convince us that the outcome was benign if not valuable to the colonies.

If you were to look again closely at both Venuses, although the Sable Venus holds the strings to the sea horses, it is not a free flowing lock of golden hair which decorates her neck like that of her Botticellian counterpart, but a decorously placed slave band. Compare this rendition of the slave band to that depicted by Richard Bridgens (1821-1825) (Figure 5) which demonstrates controlling devices on the African male and female body in Trinidad, metallic impositions designed to constrain.



Figure 5. Richard Bridgens, Trinidad, 1821
Plate 20: Negro heads with Punishments
Courtesy J Chin Aleong, Trinidad



Figure 6: Agostino Brunias (1773-96) The West India washerwoman,
From print courtesy The National Library of Jamaica

Let us take these iconographic readings of the colonized female body one step further. By doing so I do not mean to imply that these images are reducible one to the other; rather that we can also interpret them as texts of a narrative we shall continue to decode. David Brett admits that “while the visual can and does often ‘trivialise’ certain social experiences” particularly from the stance of the text-based historian, such social experiences are in fact inscribed and integrated into the habits of visualization and may also be decoded¹⁹. Consider again the work of Agostino Brunias, in his own right a pioneer on new soil, his *West India Washerwoman* (Figure 6) is evocative of the two previous depictions of Venus. Pastiche and abstraction are molded seamlessly into the new composition, signaling ideas of modernity which the Caribbean then offered the old world. She is central in the image, her stance is very similar to the two Venuses above. Modesty forbids her nakedness to be completely exposed, but, in the new sexual freedoms which the European scripts of primitivism have already in many textual and some imaginary visual interpretations deemed fitting of this region, she stands, in the midst of similarly bare breasted women folk. The movement of winds and nymphs, or Triton and dolphins, are replaced by white head wraps of the black washerwomen and the whitened washed clothes placed on the river stones which protectively encircle the brown woman. In doing so Brunias recreates the shell shaped motif of both the Botticelli and Sable Venuses. It is also a painterly device to ensure that the eye is led to and remains riveted on the central object. Like the Sable Venus, her neck is encased, this time in decorative fashion. The slave band becomes an ornament rather than a controlling device. This Venus is no longer white or black. She is olive skinned, mulatto, the hybridity of the painting itself, neoclassical and romanticism combined colluding with hybridity of the mulatto Venus and in this painter’s eyes signally the hybridity of the region which his paintings had in my view begun to illustrate²⁰.

Unintentionally, or perhaps deliberately, such paintings would have further exercised the European imagination, particularly on the subject of hybridization, prefiguring debates on racial purity and confronting the unspoken subject of inter-racial desire²¹. In *The Kingdom of This World* Alejo Carpentier suggests how the New World had been imagined by Utopian thinkers meeting in Paris in the Café de La Regence. Absinthe made the heart grow fonder. “How easy it is to dream of the equality of men of all races...from the views of the harbors of America decorated with compass cards and Tritons with wind-puffed cheeks, from pictures of indolent mulatto girls and naked washer women, of siestas under banana trees engraved by Abraham Brunias and exhibited in Paris.²²” With Brunias’s painting, the new Caribbean Venus is born, but she is placed in a setting virtually barren of allegorical references, while defining the aesthetics of gender, race, class and colour which have begun to shape the region’s ontologies.

In Figure 7 *The Barbados Mulatto Girl*, the hybrid female body attains centre stage, effacing the “Sable Venus”. Consistent with painting traditions at the time, the less important characters are diminished on the flat plane either by their lowered position on the canvas, placed sideways or viewed from the back rather than face front. At the same

time the oppositions of race and class are kept intact in the narrative of the painting. The black slave is partially nude, her top torso un-displayed for the viewer. She is both de-sexualised and primitivised serving nonetheless as a central character in this transaction between women. The clothed black woman (possibly freed) is in a role that would become clichéd of the black and later East Indian female as market seller. The great house and coconut palm in the distant right again create the landscape for pleasure and privilege, another cliché (or truth) of colonized relations, the lady of the manor who takes her slave with her to the market to select and carry the purchases of the day, but this time, such privileges are already attained by the mulatto figure.



Figure 7: *The Barbados Mulatto Girl*, Agostino Brunias
From a Print Courtesy The National Library of Jamaica

I am further convinced that Brunias was deliberate in creating a hybrid Venus in the Washerwoman (Figure 6) because of a more subtle yet clever set of devices. The symbol of water recurs, Botticelli's Venus returns from over the seas, the Sable Venus is being transported, the West India Washerwoman is both in and on the water. The voyeuristic gaze pries into a women's domain of washing and child minding. While the other (black women) are busy with the activity of clothes washing, the mulatto is laying claim to her desirability. Her head is thrown back in a narcissistic pose which assumes that the gaze of the onlooker is directed only to her, drawing the viewer to see her as *she* sees herself. As aptly described by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing*. "She is painted as being, before anything else, a takeable and desirable woman."²³ She holds a clothes paddle²⁴ in her right hand. That held up by the black woman on the right might well be interpreted as the stance of the maidservant holding a mirror up to her mistress. The line of her face and eyes suggest that she may also look downwards into a mirror to see herself reflected. Between the teachings of Christianity and Greek mythology, the mirror symbolized a warning against the sin of vanity – particularly when it is placed in a woman's hand in paintings. An early Roman mosaic shows Venus at her toilet, a conception of woman as embodying vanity²⁵. If the naked Amerindian Venus of Figure 3 was hidden behind the shrubbery, and the Sable Venus is at first lyrically disguised then de-feminized into a primarily labouring role, the mulatto Venus, or the new female sexuality of the region is confident and unselfconscious, proclaiming, like Botticelli's Venus, another rebirth of land, peoples and another 'civilization'. The subtlety of these iconic references get taken up differently but nonetheless representative of a truth in the region for instance in A.J. Forrest's illustration of "A colored lady at the races" for a travel book on Jamaica, dated 1900 (See Figure 8). Coloured here refers to the mixed race or mulatto population. The pose becomes more direct, the eyes of the woman meets that of the painter. She is very aware of the scrutiny of the two black gentlemen to the back of the painting as well as that of the painter and perhaps equally confident of the desires in their stare²⁶.



Figure 8: A. J. Forrest *A Coloured lady at the races*, 1900
Courtesy University of the West Indies Library, West Indiana Division, Jamaica

A pecking order of gender and sexuality



Figure 9: *The West India Serving Woman* Agostino Brunias,
From a print courtesy The National Library of Jamaica

In many of the earlier paintings and illustrations of peoples of the Caribbean physical features, unless defined in relation to Caucasian ones, have been to a large extent indistinct. Early Amerindian populations were in fact depicted as having similar features to Europeans. In many of Brunias's paintings, black bodies are configured in poses of serving or deference as again seen in Figure 9 *The West India Serving Girl*, with facial features or character relatively undefined compared to the paler skinned peoples. In Figure 9 Brunias has placed the black woman as a servant to the mulatto and white. Although she is the subject of this painting and positioned centrally on the canvas, the lightest skinned woman imperceptibly invites the first enquiring gaze. The flattened features of the serving girl do not allow us to examine her feelings or emotions in this narrative other than as the present yet invisible character, not unlike the roles held by many blacks in early North American films. Our eyes turn to the right of the painting, to

the woman who thus represents the top of the hierarchy. She occupies the most illuminated space of the canvas where her expression and posture are most clearly discernible.

Slightly lower and to the left of the canvas's plane, the mulatto woman represents the second tier, her head tie is shorter, less elaborate, her seated position is as if arrested in a moment of readiness to uproot herself, not that of a relaxed space with an equal counterpart. She does not need the accoutrement of a fan to deal with the weather as she is supposed to have been acclimatized through birth. Her face is in profile, again a device of painting tradition to identify the secondary importance of the character in the narrative of the painting. The black skin colour of the serving woman by contrast appears to absorb physical form. Perhaps it is a problem of both paint and painter at the time. While the introduction of oil paints allowed the luminosity and texture of skin, the challenges of painting darker skin had not been commonly addressed in painting. This shapeless and featureless representation, however, one can argue, also serves to diminish the multiple roles which black women performed as workers, mothers, wives and as equally desired sexual partners. The majority of Brunias's paintings are poetic/romantic/expressive and unproblematic of effects of social differentiation on the West Indian population, encouraging the popular lure and allure which the Caribbean held, as a space of innocence, simplicity, fertility and abundance.

These constructions of gender and sexuality continued to unfold. The subtext of the images which are configured in both the written word and the visual has been well treated in the feminist literature in Robert Young's *Colonial Desire* and Ann McClintock's *Imperial Leather*. The latter identifies the social ambiguity and discourse on race implicit in the different representations of women which 'face each other in profile...the symbolic lexicon of Victorian sexuality, the lady is a picture of exaggerated femininity. Her profile is delicate and fine, her hair (Victorian symbol of sexuality and evolutionary achievement) fashionably restrained and coiffured, her skirts elegant and clean'. The working class woman on the other hand "is a picture of maleness" as depicted in her clothes, torso, hands and other trappings which bespeak her occupation²⁷. As one examines the images constantly being produced for the region as for example Adolphe Duperly's 1840 daguerrotype for Jamaica, *Overlooking Montego Bay* (Figure 10), The Illustrated London News photograph of *A Group at Government House, Trinidad* (1892) (Figure 11) and William Forrest's *Garden terrace, 1904, Jamaica* (Figure 12), the pecking order is kept intact. The white woman is never displayed toiling in the garden or hot sun, and if she is in charge of any work, as Mrs. Carmichael and Lady Nugent's *Diary*²⁸ both indicate, then she is generally well clothed, hatted and shod for the occasion. In many settings she is displayed not as a dislocated unattached single female but always under the watchful eyes of her family, her beauty must be maintained and nurtured for her role in life, wife and motherhood. Literary and historical tracts and contemporary media have defused the rather tidy picture of the white female in the tropics now, but these ideas of beauty and unattainability which were maintained under a

more strict colonial regime, persisted for many decades, creating stereotypes which were at times unrepresentative of these women²⁹ but which nonetheless have prevailed in visual perception.



Figure 10 Montego Bay from Residence (detail) from *Daguerian Excursions In Jamaica* A Duperly, Kingston, Jamaica 1840. Courtesy University of the West Indies Library, Jamaica



Figure 11: A Group at Government House, Trinidad, *The Illustrated London News*, April 17, 1892, p. 537

Courtesy J. Chin Aleong, Trinidad



Figure 12: William Forrest *A Garden Terrace*, Book Illustration, *Jamaica* 1906
Courtesy University of the West Indies Library, West Indiana Division, Jamaica

Into this colour schema of black, brown and white would then enter the Asian woman of Chinese, Javanese and East Indian descent, the last the most dominant of the three in both Guyana and Trinidad and less so in the other territories. The traffic in new peoples into the colonies was, again accompanied by stereotypes and metaphors which were quickly absorbed into the region, the suggestion of an exotic difference tainted with paganism (See Figure 13). “The colonies” writes McClintock, “became a theater for exhibiting, amongst other things, the cult of domesticity and the reinvention of patriarchy”³⁰ and if this applied to the colonies in Africa, it applied itself with full vigour and force to the East Indian population of the Caribbean (See Figure 14 and 15)



Figure 13: Hand colored post card Trinidad, East Indian women, circa 1890,
Courtesy J Chin Aleong, Trinidad

If Asian women of Chinese and Indonesian descent have remained virtually absent in the images produced for the region, then this gap was more than balanced in the literature and set of parallel images that began to appear on East Indian femininity from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. By the later nineteenth and early twentieth century, the improvements in travel, postal services and photography had allowed new and cheaper ways in which the picturesque could be defined in post cards and in illustrated travel books. The bejeweled East Indian female was concocted as an 'exotic' other, the woman overburdened by the family and the family jewels. In the midst of this decorative array in Figure 13, a young child crawls in the forefront near the feet of the woman to the far left, barely visible but serving as a reminder of the substantive roles that these women occupied. There is again a fairly extensive literature which both inscribes as well as deconstructs the stereotyping of East Indian women, particularly that which positions East Indian femininity as the victim of a strident and violent masculinity³¹. One must admit that the well posed stances of the three Figures 13, 14 and 15 reinforce as well as challenge these stereotypes, the first suggesting a freedom and care-freeness, if not overt sexual allure, the latter two suggesting a guarded, perhaps benevolent space inhabited by women within the family. But as we know, pictures have their internal narratives that may be true for some individuals or situations and for making correspondences. Rarely do they approximate universal truths.

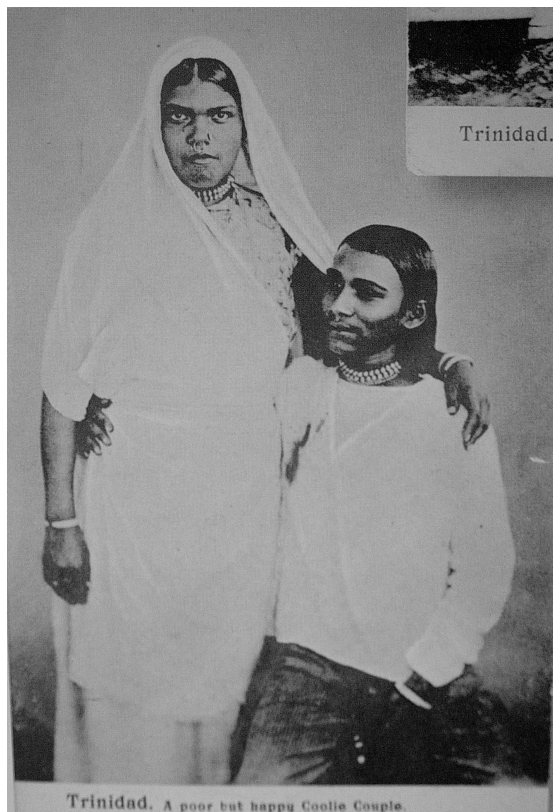


Figure 14: Post Card Trinidad, Circa 1910
Caption "Poor but happy Coolie Couple" Author owned



Figure 15: Michel Jean Cazabon East Indian Family, Trinidad
Geoffrey MacLean, *An Illustrated Biography of Trinidad's Nineteenth Century*
Painter Michel Jean Cazabon, Aquarela Galleries, Trinidad and Tobago, 1986

The Matrifocal Lens

Deborah Willis and Carla Williams argue that the body of the black female in the nineteenth century symbolized three themes, colonialism, scientific evolution, and sexuality, and her representation in art (as well as photography) followed along these prescribed lines. “Almost exclusively, black women were depicted in two ways, as nudes, generally of an ethnographic nature, or (usually) clothed in the company of a nude of sexually suggestive white female. The black woman occupied, like a prop or piece of drapery, through her real status as servant/slave/colonized subject, the lowest rung of the socio-economic hierarchy, serving the ends of private pleasure or economic/imperial domination”³². In setting out a gendered visual semiotics for the Caribbean, the images I have selected have to some extent followed this schema but they have not emphasized nor portrayed the hyper-sexualized black male and female favoured by some schools of thought. I am less concerned with reifying the stereotypes of sexuality that have dogged migrant men and women’s histories, not willing to replace one myth with another. The idea that all black women served or were the unwitting victims of sexual advances of all white males is as preposterous as the idea that all white women were weak, possessed low libidos in the tropics and perpetually jealous of black females in their service. It sets up another unfortunate objectification of black women themselves, not unlike the flattening of the face on the canvas as Brunias has done. The creation of a general vision in favour of a deconstruction of the unique or the particular has led to hyperbolic metaphors of femininity in the region, one among these being the idea of the matrifocality (referring to the mother-centeredness through a mother-centred household) of the black working class woman. Michelle Rowley has dubbed this, the creation of a “matrifolk”³³, a discourse that directly premises blackness in opposition to the delicateness of the white femininity. The legacies of these metaphors in the construction of knowledge are far reaching. Mohammed and Perkins have shown in *Caribbean Women at the Crossroads* that policies that affected the daily lives and economic security of black women continued well into the late twentieth century to be grounded on this grand narrative³⁴.

Nonetheless, the images that project the Caribbean gendered body in the early twentieth century were admittedly those of black labouring bodies, black incorporating any group that was not European or mulatto. Stark’s *Guide to Barbados and the Caribbee Islands*, pub, 1893 is an unflattering depiction of working women. The illustrations are exaggerated, tongue in cheek as in the case of “A Negro Beauty” (Figure 16) and apart from a brief attempt in the illustration “Taking pottery to Bridgetown” (Figure 17) to invest the women with the stylized stance and well proportioned physical shape which actually comes from having to balance this weight evenly on the head, there is no attempt to depict the black women in these images as desirable females, but rather as beasts of burdens. The notion of working women, was not unique to the Caribbean but the fascination with the African enslaved woman now turns to the freed women who appear to have control over the production and marketing of agricultural goods. They begin to

emerge as a subject for both the painter and the photographer in the early twentieth century. Why these images were so popular with the travel writers and photographers might be explained in the ways in which the colonies as McClintock noted, became a theatre, not for exhibiting the cult of domesticity in this case, but for depicting a well trained and disciplined agricultural and industrious workforce. Unlike the Brunias, depictions where black women are shown in semi nude states, there is now a well covered respectability to the women, when carrying out their many tasks.



Figure 16: James Stark 1893 – A Negro Beauty



Figure 17: James Stark 1893– Taking pottery to Bridgetown
James Henry Stark, *History and Guide to Barbados and the Caribbee Islands*, Britain, Photo-Electrotype Co, 1893.
University of the West Indies Library, Barbados

A. Duperly's son produced in 1905 a book of sixty-three photographs entitled *Picturesque Jamaica*³⁵. The photographs grouped as Figure 18 are obviously carefully posed, although it is most likely that the women are actually what the photographs depicted, ie sugar cane workers, banana carriers and women off to the market. Why does the Jamaica born Duperly select these compositions as picturesque? They obviously represented work roles undertaken by black women in Jamaica, but for whom are these constituted as picturesque, surely not the women and men in the photos? We have no names of the women, no clue as to their identities, they are in fact largely silent in the historical and anthropological text, a point also observed by Michelle Rowley in her attempts to delineate the agency of such women who are lost in another's voice. The last two photographs, Figures 18 c and d, give a clue about visual manipulations and the notion of how the picturesque was equally a construction of artifice. In the last photo, Figure 18d (Off to Jail) if one looks closely at the faces of the women, they are the same two women depicted on their way home from the market in Figure 18c. Like the paintings of black women by Agostino Brunias, the darkened faces merge one into the other, as if no distinguishing features might establish a hint charm, or a sense of mischief and collusion with the photographer who has possibly (and hopefully) paid them to pose for these pictures.



Figure 18a — Sugar Cane cutters



Figure 18b - Banana Carriers



Figure 18c - On the way home from the market



Figure 18d – Off to Jail,

Source: *Picturesque Jamaica with descriptive text of the island* by A. Duperly and Sons. Pub 1905. Kingston, Jamaica
 Courtesy University of the West Indies Library, Jamaica

None of these photographs give us a clue as to what constitutes the picturesque for the insider. Yet they proliferated as a genre, creating another trope in visualizing gender in the region. This is evident in a series of water-colour sketches by William Forrest which prettifies the scene of the market women in Jamaica in 1904 in the illustrations grouped severally under Figure 19. The darkened patches that represent faces, again reveal nothing. While the illustrations distance us from the harsh reality of sweat and fatigue, calloused hands and sore muscles, to shades and textures of sunlight and brightly coloured cottons dresses and bandanas, the writer acknowledges a reality behind the prettiness of the scene. “The ride up to Constant Spring is a charming one, and the crowds of negresses in spotless white bearing burdens on their heads, with an easy, swinging gait, are an interesting study, but they lead to a deepening impression that in these islands the women do most of the heavy labour”³⁶.



Figure 19 a - Forrest: On the road to the market



Figure 19 b - Forrest: Resting by the way



Figure 19 c - Forrest: The Tobacco Market Figure 19 d - Stalls outside the market in Mandeville Jamaica (1900) painted by A. S. Forrest, described by John Henderson London, Adam Charles and Black, 1906, Courtesy University of the West Indies Library of Jamaica



Figure 20: Haitian market scene. Haitian postcard 2002



Figure 21: Market Falmouth, A. Duperly, Daguerrotype Excursions, Jamaica, 1840,
Courtesy University of the West Indies Library, Jamaica

Markets everywhere have had their picturesque appeal, especially in the context of twentieth century increases in economy tourist travel. The marketplace affords a glimpse of the domestic and authentic, rather than the contrived hotel or touristic playground settings. There is a tactile feel to goods in markets, earth and sweat, colours of green or ripe fruits and vegetables, a quick lesson in flora and fauna, in smells and tastes of a society. It is not unusual that markets and market women have emerged as iconic of the Caribbean picturesque as is found in the post cards and popularized sketches of many “developing” societies. Figure 20 illustrates one of the popular postcards sold in Haiti, that of the market scene. The photograph shows a slice of reality, the hustle and bustle of Haitians in everyday life. They are not polite renderings of staged portraiture, but an attempt to enter into understandings of a culture, what people eat, who does the selling, and how these transactions are mediated³⁷. Reference this photograph back to the early daguerrotype print of the first Duperly in Jamaica in 1840, Market Day at Falmouth (Figure 21) and to the ordered photographs of the later Duperly in 1905 (Figure 18). Why did Adolphe Duperly (1840) elicit this view among others as one to be captured for posterity. His was in fact the “insider” view as he was, to my knowledge a resident of Jamaica. In doing so, he continued to shape the iconography of the region around the image of agricultural plantation and production, as this remained the major industry of its peoples. Over a century and a half later a similar yet more intense energy continues in the post card of Market day in Haiti, a sense of the frantic pace of trading and if not camaraderie, a hint of what it must involve to work both in competition with each other in the same small space. Markets, like food buying, selling, preparing and eating have always been valued spaces in “cultural” representations, with diminishing value in a

contemporary world of what production and distribution of these goods have meant to the people who continue to carry out these work roles. If visual images serve to empower, perhaps such images will one day confer to this group amorphously captured, a value beyond that of the lip service often paid to cultural icons³⁸. In the last section of this paper, I contemplate my own contradictions in re-presenting this particular gendered image of the Caribbean.

The Re-Searching lens



Figure 21a The Vincentian Fruit and Vegetable Seller 1



Figure 21a The Vincentian Fruit and Vegetable Seller 2



Figure 21 c: The Vincentian Fruit and Vegetable Seller 3
Author photos of Kingstown, St Vincent 2004

The above pictorial narrative of a facial and bodily response is deliberately placed here, juxtaposed against the older renditions of dark faces where no hint of emotion can be

read. It also demonstrates the antagonism with which the photographer has come to be treated in the Caribbean. The subject appropriated, the soul of the photographed thought to be captured, the image would be used in a book or magazine and it was assumed that the photographer would financially benefit from this theft. How did the photographed subject benefit from this uneven exchange. In the last three images I have attempted to unobtrusively capture a street seller of fruit and vegetables in St. Vincent (Figure 21 a, b & c). I had not set out to photograph her but the scene caught my eye as I positioned my camera against another object (a statue in the centre of the main street). Yet I took these three rapid shots, only aware that she had noticed me and grown angry by the last one when I transferred them to my computer screen. Why had the scene appealed to me? Aesthetically, it was composed as if for a painterly eye - the straight edges of the road markings below, the pavement line, the white wooden angles of the goods shelf, the neat row of breeze blocks providing depth above, the horizontal lines broken by the figure of the woman in a diagonal striped pink, blue and white dress, contrasted with the texture, colours, shapes and shadows of the fruit and vegetables and balanced by the two lumpy sacks on the right. I liked her dress, the pink diagonals above the red fringe, finished by serviceable heavy white trainers. There was a symmetry in this asymmetry, an order and aesthetic which she had created of her allotted space. In retrospect, I am even more drawn to this set of stolen images, not with the prurience of the development worker searching for victims of want, nor as the middle class academic roving with a camera to objectify the 'native'. I am glad that I captured both the picturesqueness as I perceive it and her rejection of being its subject. Challenging subjects such as these would generally not have been published by the itinerant photographer. The image was meant to invite the visitor, not repress travel. Nor perhaps would he or she have met with such resistance in the earlier decades of the twentieth century.

I am always drawn to, but hesitant to focus my camera onto the activities which have constituted the conventional picturesque in the region, contradictorily searching to defy such stereotypes while seduced by the selfsame images which littered our past constructions. I nonetheless continue to capture such stills, not because they make good photographs for postcards, or quaint copy for travel magazines, but because I am interested in recording the textures of the events, places and people I have encountered to position them in the present historical record. I am interested in how the insider taste emerges and how the familiar takes on the mantle of the "beautiful" on its own terms, even while, it toys with and negotiates tastes with a global environment. Like the legacy which some of the painters of the past have left us, perhaps set in different these photographs may capture passages belonging to contemporary peoples and their activities, but this time, to define form more studiously, to flesh out the features of those who are represented, and to begin to compose the insider stories they must also tell.

Endnotes

- ¹ David Brett, *The Construction of Heritage*, Cork University Press, Ireland, 1996, p 40
- ² Mimi Scheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003 p 25
- ³ J. H. Elliot, *The Old World and the New 1492-1650*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970
- ⁴ George Dickie, *Introduction to Aesthetics: An Analytical Approach*, See Ch.1 p. 25, Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York, 1997
- ⁵ Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, University of California Press: Berkeley, London and Los Angeles, 1969, p. v
- ⁶ Emory Elliot, "Cultural Diversity and the Problem of Aesthetics" Introduction, *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*, edited by Emory Elliot, Louis Freitas Caton and Jeffrey Rhyne, Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York, 2002, p. 3
- ⁷ James Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1997
- ⁸ Lucy Curzon, *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture*, Introduction: Visual Culture and Identity, Issue 5, 2003
- ⁹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Conference on Gender and Visuality held at the University of Western Cape, South Africa, in September 2004.
- ¹⁰ Amelia Jones, "Every man knows where and how beauty gives him pleasure: Beauty discourse and the logic of Aesthetics" in *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*, edited by Emory Elliot, Louis Freitas Caton and Jeffrey Rhyne, Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York, 2002, p. 218
- ¹¹ Much of the information on Brunias's life is owed to the research by scholar and historian from Dominica, Lennox Honeychurch.
- ¹² My acknowledgement to Rex Dixon, British born and trained painter who has lived in the region for two decades now and has an insider outsider view of the images I employ here. His comments have been very helpful in writing this essay.
- ¹³ Mimi Scheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, p 22
- ¹⁴ Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865*, Routledge, London, 2000, p 21 Emory
- ¹⁵ Verse cited from Carolyn Cooper *Noises in the Blood, Orality, Gender and the Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*, Warwick University Caribbean Studies: London: Macmillan Education Limited, p. 23. Cooper's endnote 15 discusses the full provenance of the poem, attributed to one Rev Teale.
- ¹⁶ Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650-1838*, James Currey, London, p. 11
- ¹⁷ Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood, Orality, Gender and the Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*, Warwick University Caribbean Studies: London: Macmillan Education Limited, 1994, p. 29
- ¹⁸ Neoclassicism was a widespread and influential movement in painting and the other visual arts that began in the 1760s, reached its height in the 1780s and '90s, and lasted until the 1840s and '50s. In painting it generally took the form of an emphasis on austere linear design in the depiction of classical themes and subject matter, using archaeologically correct settings and costumes. Neoclassicism coexisted throughout much of its later development with the seemingly obverse and opposite tendency of Romanticism. But far from being distinct and separate, these two styles intermingled with each other in complex ways; many ostensibly Neoclassical paintings show Romantic tendencies, and vice versa.
- ¹⁹ David Brett, *The Construction of Heritage*, Cork University Press, University College, Ireland, p. 11

- ²⁰ In fact there are two different versions of the West India washerwoman engravings after Brunias.
- ²¹ See for instance Patricia Mohammed “But most of all mi love mi browning: The emergence of the mulatto woman as the desired in 18th and 19th Century Jamaica”, *Feminist Review*, No 65.
- ²² Alejo Carpenter, *The Kingdom of this World*, 1949, translated 1957, New York: Knopf, 1957, p. 51
- ²³ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin, England, 1972, p 92
- ²⁴ The clothes paddle was a wooden device shaped like a table tennis raked used to beat clothes clean in the rivers which were used for washing.
- ²⁵ It is useful to recall, nevertheless, that mirrors have a double sided interpretation, offering also a moment of reflection. Thus was the minimal outline of a handheld mirror representing the symbol of Venus and womanhood adopted as the emblem of the second wave feminist movement.
- ²⁶ There is an extensive treatment of the desirability of the mulatto in Caribbean scholarly and popular writing so I have deliberately selected not to enter into this discussion. Readers who are interested might want to examine these in respect of historical sources, literary sources and songs from the region.
- ²⁷ Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, See her discussion in section on Social ambiguity and the discourse on race, pp 104 - 118
- ²⁸ Lady Nugent’s Diary, 1800-1805, and Domestic Manners : Carmichael
- ²⁹ See for example work by Lucille Mathurin Mair, Linda Sturtz, Rosemary Brana Shute on the work roles performed by white women in the tropics, the migration of poor Irish women into Jamaica to meet the quote of wives for white settlers, the white women who were themselves plantation and slave owners and so on.
- ³⁰ Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 17
- ³¹ See for instance work in this volume by Shaheeda Hosein and Aisha Mohammed.
- ³² Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, “The Black female body in Photographs from World Fairs and Expositions” in “Race, Photography and American Culture” exposure, Volume 33. ½, Daytona Beach, Florida, Society for Photographic education, 2000
- ³³ See Michelle Rowley, “Reconceptualizing voice: The role of Matrifocality in Shaping Theories and Caribbean Voices” in *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*, edited by Patricia Mohammed, UWI Press, Kingston, 2002
- ³⁴ Patricia Mohammed and Althea Perkins, *Caribbean Women at the Crossroads: The Paradox of Mothering among Women of Dominica, Barbados and St. Lucia*, Canoe Press, (An imprint of UWI Press) Kingston, Jamaica, 1999
- ³⁵ The Duperly who was responsible for this production were possibly grandsons of the founder Adolphe Duperly, whose firm was first established in 1839. Despite the importance of the Duperly’s as recorders of the Jamaica scene in photographs, it is remarkable that so little is known of the family and the work of the individual sons who continued to carry on this tradition in Jamaica up until the 1930s.
- ³⁶ Frank Bullen, *Across the Sunny Seas*, p. 53
- ³⁷ I think here of the Travel Channel on American Cable networks where Anthony Bourdain’s *No Reservations* attempts and succeeds in inviting the viewer past the tourist traps to the markets, local cuisine, tastes and domestic life of some places he visits.

³⁸ My maternal grandmother sold fabric in the market place when I was a child and some of my vivid memories of her was seeing her frank enjoyment of the *sororite* of women who were similarly engaged, the shifting from one country market to another where different relationships are forged with customers or fellow market sellers. I thought then it was exciting and 'picturesque' because it was different already to the world of 'education' and 'schooling' that occupied us already.



ISSUE 1 • April 2007

Subverting the Lesbian-Gay Agenda: A Re-examination of Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*

Crista Mohammed

Abstract

In Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* Mala Ramchandani has been driven to insanity by a series of cataclysmic events – her mother's abandonment of the family and the marital home, the fleeing of her beloved sister, a protracted period of sexual and physical abuse at the hands of her father, the loss of her lover and their inevitable corollary of acute psychic trauma. Working against an assumed heterosexual normativity of gender relations, Mootoo explores dichotomies, inner compulsions and outer markers of sexuality and gender and so establishes a continuum of sexual identities and sexual behaviours in antithesis to the male-female, masculine-feminine polarities. There are instances, however, where the novel contradicts its own agenda. The central argument of this paper is that while Mootoo makes good on undermining heterosexual privilege and subverting entrenched binary constructions of gender and sexual identity, this is limited as far as the novel, at times, rather than challenging hegemonic modes of belonging, ossifies them. Inadvertently, Mootoo thus contravenes what I construe as her trust placed in "the power of the printed word to reach many people" (Mootoo, 1998: 4).

Introduction

If Queer theory has social and political aims, in particular an “oppositional design upon society, for it is informed by resistance to homophobia, heterosexism and the ideological and institutional practices of heterosexual privilege”, then Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1998) may best be located in the canon of Queer Literature (Peter Barry, 2002: 140). Indeed, Heather Smyth argues that *Cereus Blooms at Night* “examines the withholding of belonging and citizenship from lesbians and gay men in Caribbean cultural and national space” and shows the crucial links amongst “place, culture and belonging, in relation to sexuality” (Smyth, 1999: 143).

Describing the medical management of intersexed infants, Kessler points out that there is an “incurable belief and insistence upon male and female as the only natural options...compelling a culture of two genders” (Kessler, 1994: 218). The existence of labels such as “male”, “female”, “feminine” and “masculine” are social constructions, which imply the non-existence of anything in between. In direct contestation to this, Mootoo presents characters that “fit” neither side of the gender/sexuality binary, but rather must be located along a continuum of gender/sexual roles and behaviours. *Cereus Blooms at Night* depicts sexuality as “a fluid form of identity and parallels sexual indeterminacy or outlaw sexuality with other forms of boarder-crossing identities” (Smyth, 1999: 147). Tyler, the narrator, is biologically male, has a sexual affinity for men and engages in cross-dressing. Indeed, he felt that “there was something delicious about the confinement of his hairy legs in stockings” (Mootoo, 83). Mootoo renegotiates gendered roles and the sexual division of labour through Tyler’s natural inclinations and vocation, respectively. Nursing is a vocation dominated by women. As a nurse, Tyler demonstrates a palpable concern for his charges. In this regard, Tyler is a natural caregiver and so subverts the view that care giving is the exclusive preserve of women.

Tyler is a postcolonial sexual hybrid. Native to Lantanacamara he sought foreign education where his “perversions” were either “invisible or of no consequence to people whom [his] foreignness was what would be strange” (Mootoo, 51). It is, thus, on two accounts that Tyler is dislocated: he is a postcolonial subject – the exotic other and in a “suspended nameless” limbic state, neither man nor woman, between “existence and non-existence” (Mootoo, 83). Tyler sees himself as a woman trapped in a man’s body. He feels ashamed that his “mammary glands were flat” and that his “man’s member mocked” him (Mootoo, 82).

This “in betweenness” is reflected in the complex narrative structure that employs two different narrative voices – a third-person, omnipotent persona who reveals the inner workings of characters, primarily those of the protagonist, Mala Ramchandani, and a first-person narrator, Tyler. Epistolary narratives may also be discerned in letters written by Asha. While the shifts between perspectives are seamless, almost undetectable, they point to a transgression of literary norms. This hybrid narrative strategy thus disrupts the long-held literary tradition of canonical writing that demands employment either of a first person or a third person narrator. Mootoo thus implicitly proposes a narrative

continuum—a new literary, decolonised space that allows for the examination of the dislocated, the unaccommodated.

Then there is the character of Otoh. Otoh is a short hand version of Otohoto, an acronym for “on the one hand but on the other”, a name earned from his “vexing inability to make up his mind” (Mootoo, 118). Otoh’s name is emblematic of his sexual identity for, on the one hand he is anatomically female, but on the other, he possesses the outer markers of masculinity. Otoh is pivotal to the destabilisation of visual markers as tangible evidence of the essence of signifieds. Otoh is perceived to be male because of outward gendered indices that point to this conclusion – his gait, his strapping build, his clothes. Mootoo therefore undermines the way society privileges the visual realm. She challenges reductionist tendencies that model identities based on cultural markers.

Mootoo’s transgression of syntactical conventions asserts the Saussurean view that the connection between signified and signifier is arbitrary. Language, as a cultural product, is exposed as inherently deficient – language is informed by the cultural mores of society and so not only defines reality, but also limits it. She problematises the ability of language to adequately reflect reality, particularly the diversity of sexual identities and gender, by interchanging or presenting both male and female pronouns. This is best demonstrated in the tracing of Ambrosia’s evolution from Ambrosia to Otoh – here there is a series of he/she or him/her insertions that point to a duality that resides in the person and body of Ambrosia/Otoh – that is, a female body with masculine inclinations. The use of both pronouns demonstrates an inherent, defective rigidity in language – “a word is not the substance itself” (Mootoo, 229).

The characters of Otoh and Tyler are not the only ones who defy gender/sexual binary pairs. To demonstrate the extent to which society exists on gender and sexuality continua, other ostensibly homosexual characters are found in the text – Sarah Ramchandani (Mala’s mother) and Sarah’s lover, Lavina Thoroughly, Randolph John Hector (brother to the gardener, Mr. Hector) and a married man who propositions Otoh.

Mootoo explodes many binary pairs. Obvious enough are the polarities of gender and sexual identity. But the proffering of gender and human sexuality continua is anchored in a geographical continuum of sorts. The novel is set in the town of Paradise, in the island of Lantanacamera. The extent to which the setting is fictional is tenuous, given very close resemblances to the physical and socio-cultural landscapes of Trinidad – rolling sugarcane plantations, the presence of several ethnic groups, the use of Trinidad Creole in dialogue and the presence of imperial forces (particularly early on in the novel). In fact, the setting of the novel is neither entirely fictional nor imaginary. Condé promulgates the view that the novel’s semi-fictional island setting and indeterminate time aim to erode fixed certainties which have tended to shape reality and human experience (quoted in May, 2002). This “deliberate haziness” intends not just to subvert categories of belonging but also to replace dichotomies with continua – continua that so pervade the novel as to become normative (Condé quoted in May, 2002).

Mootoo extends her tinkering with geographies to include a microscopic examination of the protagonist's immediate world – bugs and snails and all. Living within the confines of her garden, Mala is neither outside nor inside; that is, she rejects life within the home and outside in the village. She occupies the interstices of two geographies; geographies that reject pain and dislocate her. A denizen of her wild, untamed, verdant garden she lives in an Edenic space that is plunged in the middle of a Postlapsarian world. Here order, as epitomised by the gardens of the colonisers, is rejected in favour of disorder. Disorder becomes a space to reconstitute self; it is imbued with healing properties as it becomes Mala's location of escape from extreme psychological trauma. In her garden, she is able to return to a state of innocence, as embodied in her alter ego Popoh (a childhood nickname). It permits a psychic journey back to a simpler, unsullied period – a time that predates her mother's desertion, the escape of her sister and the loss of her virginity to the incestuous proddings of a drunken, cuckolded father.

Mala's garden is not the only unfettered space; so too is her mindscape. For all her seeming insanity, Mala exercises no harsh moral judgements that seek to alienate others. This acceptance of people may be best explained by the following, as discussed by Leo-Rhynie and Pencle:

Bem (1981) proposed the development in children of gender schemata which respond to the bipolar gender distinctions in society and which guide the development of other schema, as well as the extent to which children, as they grow, function socially in gender-appropriate ways. These schemata provide children with a framework for interpreting their own behaviour...the sex role concepts are initially imperfect because of the child's level of cognitive development, but they are gradually refined as age advances and intellectual development improves. Sex role behaviour, therefore, is not just made up of acts of imitation, but is based on generalised, organised concepts, which develop as the child's, experience increase and behaviour is matched to such experience (2002: 203).

Having in her formative years been exposed to the love and sexual bonds between her mother and Aunt Sarah, Mala's gender schema does not constrain her to view alternative sexual relations as society would. She does not regard such constructions of sexuality and gender as illicit or aberrant. Mala, thus, was not one "to manacle nature" and permits others their own freedoms (Mootoo, 83). Moreover, Mootoo does not depict the mother-daughter relationship as troubled – a theme that O'Callaghan identifies as recurrent in the works of West Indian women writers (1998: 304). Unlike the stereotypical mother, who socialises "girl children into a life of renunciation, denial, repression and guilt at their own sexual needs, with terrible psychic results – including failed heterosexual partnerships", Sarah does not leave Mala apologetic about her own sexuality. In fact, her trysts with her childhood sweetheart, Boyie, were not only initiated by her but were clearly liberating. Sarah's lesbianism perhaps provides a new ontology for Caribbean mothers, as much of their daughters' sexual repression "is tied up with compulsory heterosexuality" (O'Callaghan, 1998: 304).

While Tyler and Otoh are the signal characters used to bend gender and demonstrate sexual hybridity, Tyler critically undermines Mootoo's gay/lesbian agenda on two counts. Firstly, Tyler is a self-acclaimed "pansy":

I was once assigned – only once thankfully – to assist Toby with fixing a leak on the roof. (I will refrain from dwelling on the verbal rocks he tossed in my direction and say only that he made no effort to hide his disdain for my ways. At the end of the ordeal, he told me plainly that he was going to leave the job if he ever was put to work with this pansy again.) Another time I helped Mr. Hector move heavy furniture from one bungalow to another. I saw him watch curiously, as I struggled with the weight of some items and the awkwardness of others (Mootoo, 11).

Tyler is thus “feminized”, that is, he is imbued with qualities conventionally associated with womanhood; he is the stereotypical homosexual. The characterisation of Tyler, the homosexual, is treated in concordance with entrenched homophobic notions of the homosexual as subnormal, abnormal and incomplete. He poses no challenge to long-held homophobic views of the homosexual as someone less than a man, someone more akin to a woman – a man who could never live up to the rigorous demands of masculinity. Tyler’s dubious masculinity is best echoed in a question posed by Otoh’s father, Ambrose Mohanty, a supposedly tolerant Lantanacamarian - “He is a Mr., isn’t he?” (Mootoo, 135).

Secondly, Tyler’s inner ruminations concretise the pervasive view of homosexuals as overly libidinous and lascivious. In no more than two pages and on no less than three occasions within these pages, Tyler’s strong sexual attractions to other men (police officers) are revealed (Mootoo, 9-10). His subsequent sexual fascinations with other men include the doctor who attends to Mala on her second day at the nursing home, Mr. Hector, the gardener, and later on, Otoh. This is not to say that heterosexuals are less psychologically occupied with sex – but the frequency of Tyler’s preoccupations, especially in two consecutive pages, does little to undermine homophobic ideologies that construct the homosexual as morally debased and sex-starved.

More significantly perhaps, Mootoo does not depict the homosexual sex act. This is incongruent with any intention to challenge the normativity of heterosexuality. We assume that, in their ramblings in the cane fields, Tyler and Otoh have consummated their relationship (132). Indeed, perhaps constrained by ‘good taste’, Mootoo only explores in explicit detail the consensual heterosexual sex act via the consummation of Mala’s and Ambrose’s relationship (235-6). More troubling though is her detailing of incestuous rape scenes between Chandin and Mala. The depiction of these violent and disturbing rapes asserts the view that heterosexual acts are normative to the extent that they alone make palatable reading; even when such encounters are forcible, and worse, transgress the entrenched taboo of consanguine sex! The exclusion of the homosexual sex act thus relegates homosexuality to the periphery – it is not acceptable enough to be depicted. Tyler and Otoh are allowed their ‘strange’ proclivities – but there is no literary space for the articulation and demonstration of their sexualities.

Mootoo explores lesbianism via the relationship of Sarah Ramchandani and Lavina Thoroughly. Sarah is more comfortable with Lavina, she uses the Creole freely in her lover’s presence and is not given to code switching to meet the demands of an exacting husband. Through Lavina there is the possibility of friendship and companionship borne out of genuine affection. This contrasts with Sarah’s and Chandin’s relationship where Sarah was emotionally alienated at the start – she was, after all, a mere ego-prop for a

rejected, lovelorn Chandin. Lavina's natural affection for the children proposes same-sex couples as viable parenting models; indeed both girls were attached to "Aunt Lavina" and looked forward to her visits, her stories and their excursions. Lavina's influence has an indelible influence on Mala as Lavina has inculcated in the protagonist an abiding love for the natural world.

Based on the evidence gleaned from the text, the relationship between Sarah and Lavina has deleterious effects on Sarah's children only in so far as it was an adulterous one that led to the estrangement of Sarah from her children and their father. But to the homophobic reader Sarah's abandonment of the children is a confirmation of their expectations of the licentious lesbian, who cares more for her lover and so abdicates her familial responsibilities. While I do not suggest that a woman's primary and essential goal is to care for her children, normative femininity has been constructed in such a way as to insist that it is the children who come first and all else after. To the unconvinced reader, Sarah, who has not made a second attempt to retrieve her children, is the reckless libertine who cares more for her libidinous freedoms than the well-being of her children. In addition to not attempting to reunite with her children, Sarah ostensibly has not even written home. The intervention of Judge Walter Bissey unearths a box of undelivered letters from Asha, but to Sarah's discredit, there is none from her.

While Rich calls for the rejection of the "bias of compulsory heterosexuality, through which lesbian experience is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent or simply rendered invisible", the lesbians of *Cereus Blooms at Night* are only partly visible. They make a hasty, unceremonious exit from the novel. Little has been done to demystify lesbian sex acts, for like the Tyler/Otoh union, Sarah's and Lavina's liaisons are merely hinted at – lesbian sex in *Cereus Blooms* is thus rendered invisible. Moreover, to the homophobic readership, Sarah's desertion of her children constructs the lesbian as "abhorrent".

In an egalitarian world Chandin would have equal responsibilities as father and as the abuser more blame to shoulder, but then, fathers are not construed as central to caregiving. While the typical audience will view Chandin with great loathing, he may strike a more empathetic note than Sarah, for he is, after all, a man – a cuckolded one to boot. May points out that the fact that the community looks on Asha and Mala with pity suggests that their suffering is widely known. In addition May identifies a series of euphemisms or linguistic strategies of avoidance when broaching the topic of Chandin's incestuous relations with his children. According to May (2002):

Mala's suffering is always described as being caused by the fact that Chandin "mistook Pohpoh for Sarah" (Mootoo, 65). This phrasing implies that Chandin's raping of his daughters nightly for decades was accidental, without intent, such that he cannot and should not be held accountable for his actions. The gossip continues into Mala's adulthood, resurfacing once she and Ambrose become an item after he returns from his foreign education: "It seemed a waste to the townspeople that such a catch would be so preoccupied with a woman whose father had obviously mistaken her for his wife, and whose mother had obviously mistaken another woman for her husband" (Mootoo, 109).

Furthermore, residents of Lantanacamera excuse Chandin because:

...he was once the much-respected teacher of the Gospel, and such a man would take to the bottle and to his own child, they reasoned, only if he suffered some madness. And, they further reasoned, what man would not suffer a rage akin to insanity if his own wife, with a devilish mind of her own, left her husband and children (Mootoo, 211).

The moral duplicity and sanctimony of Lantanacamarians is best exposed in the actions of the “righteous postman, [who deemed] the Ramchandani house a place of sin and moral corruption” (Mootoo, 263). His non-delivery of the mail therefore works to sever ties between Mala and her sister, Asha.

Another troubling point in the novel is Otoh’s transformation from Ambrosia to Otoh. This “transformation was flawless” – depicted as being so seamless and so naturalised as to appear highly contrived and implausible (Mootoo, 118). Such a facile changeover in sex/gender identity minimises the attendant anxieties and trauma experienced by both the inter-sexed person and his/her family¹. In a utopian world that is free of impinging hegemonies, perhaps such fluid transformations may be possible, but this is Paradise, a semi-imaginary geography, which Mootoo has carefully crafted as intolerant of “aberrations”.

The union of Tyler and Otoh, while crafted by Mootoo to point to a useless rigidity of the homosexual and heterosexual dichotomy, inadvertently asserts heterosexual privilege. Tyler is feminised only as far as his behaviour and inner compulsions are concerned; he is in fact biologically male. Similarly, Otoh is outwardly constructed and conceives of himself as male, anatomically, however, he is female. What is particularly undermining of the novel’s agenda to destabilise hegemonic gender/sexual polarities is that in an attempt to present such gender/sexual hybrids, Mootoo has in fact reconstituted the normative binary – Tyler and Otoh are biologically man and woman respectively. But what is one to make of the match at the psychological level? Tyler perceives himself as a woman, and Otoh as a man. To the homophobic readership, the Otoh-Tyler union is a veritable coup-de-grace that restores the heterosexual binary as normative for indeed, it may have procreative potential.²

May suggests that in linking various forms of exile, Mootoo “connects histories, narratives, and identities that are often conceptually separated.” Further, Mootoo undertakes the ambitious project of questioning issues of “representation, knowledge, and power not only to clarify the violence at the heart of practices of knowledge, faith, and love but also to claim queer space within the Caribbean and South Asian diasporas” (May, 2002). This radicalism and literary innovations (semi-imaginary setting, hybrid narrative perspectives and indeterminate time frame) may be identified in what Sarah Hoagland describes as “intellectual inventions” occasioned by Mootoo’s own outsider/insider status – a lesbian and post-colonial subject commenting on the ‘Third-world’ condition from the vantage point of a metropolis (Tong et al, 1995: 162). In

¹ See Kessler (1994) who investigates gender/sex assignation in inter-sexed infants.

² Kessler proposes that intersexed infants are designated as belonging to either sex based on anatomical, hormonal and chromosomal investigations. The ability to procreate is dependent on the reproductive capacity afforded by all three.

quoting Hoagland, Marilyn Frye makes the critical point, that non-belonging is a privileged epistemological place as far as it affords freedom from impinging, restrictive ontologies (Tong et al, 1995: 162). Exploring the politics of lesbian existence, Hoagland posits that:

...in the conceptual scheme of phallogocrities there is no category of woman identified woman, woman-loving woman or woman-centred-woman; that there is no such a thing as lesbian. This puts the lesbian in the interesting and peculiar position of being something that does not exist, and this position is a singular vantage point with respect to the reality which does not include her. It affords her a certain freedom from constraints of the conceptual system; it gives her access to knowledge which is inaccessible to those whose existence is countenanced by the system. Lesbians can therefore undertake kinds of criticism and description, and kinds of intellectual invention, hitherto unimagined (Tong et al 162).

“Migration and exile are fundamental to human experience... each movement demands another definition and redefinition of one’s identity” (Davies in May, 2002). A key locus of redefinition in *Cereus Blooms at Night* is “that of citizenship in a way that can account for multiple identities and hybrid histories” but “attention to multiple histories and identities is not easy when the educational, political, and legal categories used to describe reality deny the existence of a whole group of people” (May, 2002).

By exploding dichotomies of gender, sexual binaries and exploring incest and rape, which in turn are linked and likened to the foisting of imperial hegemonies on the colonial’s modes of being, in the interstices of the real and the imaginary, utilising crossbred narrative perspectives and suspended in an indeterminate time-frame, Mootoo is able to explore multiple identities, but not in an entirely unfettered way. Epistemologist Susan Babbitt, in exploring what she terms “adequate understanding”, argues that thinking objectively must be redefined to mean being “biased in an appropriate way” (quoted in May, 2002). This necessary bias, however, is difficult in contexts of inequity even if, legally speaking, there is “freedom” of expression and no undue constraint on one’s person” (Babbitt in May, 2002). Indeed freedom from restrictions, and the ability to organise and express oneself as one pleases, is not real freedom for everyone. For some views, under systemically unjust social conditions, are much more difficult to make plausible. And some possibilities for human development are not imaginable (Babbitt in May, 2002).

Thus, while Mala’s garden provides a utopia where there is no intervention “in nature’s business” as they were “left to their own devices”, Mootoo nonetheless succumbs to working within the realms of society’s ways of knowing (Mootoo, 136-7). Her principal characters and their relations, while providing strong challenges to entrenched, accepted modes of being, nonetheless bow under the weight of pervasive stereotypes and hegemonic ideologies and thus work to reassert gender polarities and heterosexual privilege. By playing to a largely heterosexual audience, Mootoo is circumscribed by predominant cultural schemata that work to regulate the extent of her exploration of alternative gender identities and subordinate sexualities. While she is trusting in “the power of the printed word to reach many people”, her text is more convincing to the choir and less so to the unbelievers (Mootoo, 4).

Bibliography

- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: MU Press, 2002.
- Frye, Marilyn. "To Be and Be Seen: The Politics of Reality." In Nancy Tuana and Rosemary Tong eds. *Feminism & Philosophy: Essential Readings in Theory, Reinterpretation and Application*. Boulder: West View Press, 1995.
- Kessler, Suzanne J. "The Medical Construction of Gender: Case Management of Intersexed Infants." In Anne Herrman and Abigail Stewart eds. *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*. Boulder: West View Press, 1994.
- Leo-Rhynie, Elsa and Carmen Pencle. "Gender Stereotypes: Perceptions and Awareness of a Sample of Jamaican Adolescents." In Patricia Mohammed ed. *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*. Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2002.
- May, Vivian. "Dislocation and Desire in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*." In *Studies in the Literary Imagination*. 2004.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3822/is_200410/ai_n14681778
 (accessed February 2006).
- Mootoo, Shani. *Cereus Blooms at Night*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1998
- O'Callaghan, Evelyn. "Compulsory Heterosexuality' and Textual/Sexual Alternatives in Selected Texts by West Indian Women Writers." In Christine Barrow ed. *Caribbean Portraits: Essays on Gender Ideologies and Identities*. Kingston: Ian Randle, 1998.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Experience." In *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5.4: 631-690, 1980.
- Smyth, Heather. *Sexual Citizenship and Caribbean-Canadian Fiction: Dionne Brand's, "In Another Place, Not Here" and Shani Mootoo's Cereus Blooms at Night* in *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 30.2: 143-60, 1999.



<http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/index.asp>



ISSUE 1 • April 2007

30 Years Towards Equality: How Many More? The Mandate of the Bureau of Gender Affairs in Promoting Gender Justice in the Barbadian State

Violet Eudine Barriteau

Abstract

The Barbados Bureau is the second oldest in the Commonwealth Caribbean (Table 1). In my regional travel, I learnt that the Bureau has developed a solid reputation for monitoring women and gender and development issues and reporting to international agencies in a timely manner. I commend successive governments for recognizing that there is the need for agovernment machinery dedicated to working to eradicate gender inequities in our society. Except for some high profile criticisms here and there, such as “the Bureau is not living up to the government’s and public’s expectations” (Barriteau 1999), usually around the “testy” time of the annual estimates, governments have maintained the Bureau of Women\then Gender Affairs. We who are committed to the ideals of social justice, with gender justice being an integral component of that commitment, are grateful.

Conceptual background to the coming into being of the Bureau

The year 1976 represented a very significant point of departure in the policy formation orientation of the Barbadian state. Thirty years ago when the state established the National Commission on Women, and created the Bureau of Women's Affairs to function initially as the Secretariat to the Commission, whether state planners recognised it or not, they were introducing a fundamental break in the existing policies of the State. For the first time in its colonial and post colonial history, the Barbadian state was publicly acknowledging that one group of citizens had organically different sets of experiences of everyday life. They were also conceding, that these differences coalesced around the *sex* of these persons.

In that necessary act of institutionalizing a governmental body, "to monitor and advise government on the situation related to women" (Gillings: 1987:2), the State created a mechanism "to grapple with the intersection of gender issues and development concerns" (Barriteau 2006: 176). In the process, the Barbadian State admitted to and identified three sets of societal conditions it wanted to reshape. *First*, that there were\are conditions of gender inequalities existing in Barbadian society, and women and girls were severely disadvantaged by these inequalities. *Second*, because of its commitment to the goals of people centred development, (and all post independence Barbadian governments plans pledge allegiance to this) it meant that the State accepted a civic obligation to introduce measures and mechanisms to end, or work towards ending these multiple and intersecting conditions of inequalities, and *third*, government's development goals, plans and policies should from now on reflect a commitment to promoting gender equality.

Still, when the Bureau was established, there were overlapping areas of uncertainty about its mandate and functioning. The understanding of gender inequalities, the Bureau's role and responsibilities in dealing with those inequalities, and the functioning of the Bureau in relation to the State's overall development goals were relatively undeveloped. The records reveal that the policy makers were not clear exactly how the Bureau, its mandate and the goals of development were interconnected. Additionally, the conceptualisation of the need for a government mechanism to track conditions that maintained inequalities for women, how these inequalities were reflected and reified in social and economic conditions, and the profile of the Barbadian State, were all substantially different to what they are today.

1. From gender equality to gender justice

In 1976, as an independent country, Barbados was ten years old. In 2006 the country celebrated 40 years of independence. Many of the two hundred and twelve (212) measures the National Commission on the Status of Women recommended to improve the social, economic, cultural and political situation of women have been attained; several remain unresolved, while new challenges are presented daily. More significantly, both the mission of the Bureau and the profile and concerns of the Barbadian State have changed. Because of this I have structured my lecture around the theme, "Thirty years

towards Equality: How Many More?, to include, “The Mandate of the Bureau of Gender Affairs in Promoting Gender Justice in the Barbadian State.” The lecture is organized around three main sections. In the first, I explain and illustrate what should be the bureau’s focus. In the second I advise the bureau to rethink its methodologies for guiding its work, and in the third, I underscore the importance of a new approach while pointing to the way forward.

The focus of the Barbados Women’s Bureau

Thirty years represents the full maturing of a generation, an excellent time for stock taking. I want to advise the Bureau it should no longer work towards promoting gender equality, a concept I have long held as posing particular difficulties. The promotion of gender equality has increasingly become a sterile and problematic concept. The emphasis is placed on achieving or meeting indicators and measurements. Important as these are, the concept is incapable of indicating when a condition of inequality will cease and instead suggest equality has been attained when certain structural indicators are met (Barriteau 2003a: 32).. “The concept of equality implies sameness, homogeneity, and linear measurement. Even more problematic is that working for gender equality often means making women “equal to men” within the public domain of the state. This position reveals that masculine criteria of citizenship have already defined the norms of citizenship. I argue that the pursuit of equality under these conditions guarantees permanent inequality” (Barriteau 2003a: 32).

My central argument is that after 30 years, the Bureau needs to rethink its focus, especially because of the socio-economic, political and cultural climate in which it now operates. What is this new environment in which the Bureau must operate? Here are some features. Barbadian society and economy is in transition. The Barbadian State has significantly altered its development strategies. Social and economic relations have changed considerably. Unequal relations of gender continue to be pernicious even though their manifestations are different to a generation ago. I am not saying that the goal of gender equality is irrelevant, but that it defines the beginning of a process rather than the end. The state and its implementing arm, the Bureau of Gender Affairs needs to be guided by a mandate that reflects a commitment to, and an operationalizing of *gender justice*, if it is to have any impact on the lives of girls and boys, men and women and ongoing development strategies.

I define *gender justice* as, “a societal condition in which there are no asymmetries of access to, or allocation of, status, power and material resources in a society, ‘or in the control over and capacity to benefit from these resources’ [Barriteau 2003c: 327]. In a gender system characterised by gender justice there will be no hierarchies of gender identities or of the meanings society gives to masculinity and femininity” (Barriteau 2004: 439; Barriteau 1998: 192). Conversely in an unjust gender system there is unequal distribution of and access to material resources and power. There are hierarchies and rankings in the gender identities of men and women. As Sydney Mintz has shown men’s work, what men do is still seen as more important and valuable than what women do

(Mintz 1971: 267), and when society determines that a woman's job is more prestigious than a man's, then automatically that is a relationship fraught with challenges.

A commitment to removing both the ideological and material conditions that sustain gender inequalities and promote injustices would move the analysis and subsequent policies away from notions of more or less equality. It would avoid such conclusions that one sex enjoys more gender equality than the other in access to a given resource, because the other is not benefiting from that resource to the same degree (Barriteau 2006: 193-4). Instead of working to promote gender equality, I advise that the Bureau's mandate and mission should be the promotion of gender justice.

Why is the concept of gender justice more useful? The concept includes working towards gender equality and equity but it moves beyond the measures of achievement to evaluating qualitative conditions. Working towards gender justice provides the Bureau with a conceptual framework and methodologies to address certain questions such as, "What about the Boys?", and "Are Caribbean Men Marginalized?" Why do women continue to experience discrimination in the labour market? Why do women continue to experience domestic violence? Why is there such resistance to women's political leadership? At the same time it enables the Bureau to continue the necessary focus on women to ensure that the corrections that have already been made of women's exclusion are not eroded. Let me illustrate how and why a focus on gender justice should replace the focus on gender equality.

All societies have gender systems just as they have economic and political systems. I define a gender system as a complex network of power relations with two principal dimensions, one ideological and the other material (Barriteau 2003a: 30). The material dimension reveals how men and women gain access to or are allocated status, power and material resources in a given community or society (Barriteau 2003a: 30). The ideological dimension indicates the ways in which a society constructs what it accepts or (contests) as the appropriate expressions of masculinity and femininity, in other words what it means to be a man or woman in that society. The social expectations interacting with the personal constructions of gender identities form the core of gender ideologies within a society. These ideologies establish the sexually differentiated, socially constructed boundaries for "males" and "females" (Barriteau 2003a, 31).

Using the concept of gender justice requires us to consider both the material and ideological dimensions to determine whether we are working to remove all inequalities. Although I isolate the two dimensions of gender systems for investigation and analysis, in reality they operate simultaneously, and elsewhere I have shown these mutually reinforcing interactions. Changes in one dimension produces alterations in the other or at the very least, threaten the status quo.

When the State alters conditions for gaining equal access to its resources by members of the society, it is intervening in material relations of gender. However, creating conditions for equal access to the resources of the state through altering material gender relations

will not automatically eliminate or reduce inequalities in the private sphere of society or gender ideologies that rank women as inferior or secondary to men (Barriteau 1998, 455). When we examine gender ideologies and the unbalanced distribution of resources of power, status and material means, we see that the Barbadian state continues to function with an unjust gender system (Barriteau 1998). We can achieve conditions of “equality” and still have an unjust outcome. That is so because measures and indicators are used to indicate that gender equality exists as reflected in statements, “what more do women want? They can now do everything?” You have for example, women or men having the right to participate in a given societal activity, have that participation reflected or captured in a measurement, and yet that measurement cannot and will not indicate the gender prejudices that affect or influence that participation.

The latter point underscores that both men and women are affected by gender ideologies operating within our societies. When we examine the ideological dimensions of gender, we discover that some men are positioned in hierarchical, disadvantageous relations to other men. We also discover that women remain with secondary, inferior ranked gender identities in relation to both elite and subordinate men (Barriteau 2003c, 327).

The thesis of the marginalization of the black male implies that Caribbean gender systems are unjust for men and we will explore this later. Male marginalization theorists and feminists, will agree that Barbadian or Caribbean gender systems are unjust, but we will differ on which sex is disadvantaged or perhaps the extent of the harms they suffer because of their sex (Barriteau 2003a: 31). What state planners interested in eradicating injustices arising in relations of gender should note, is that it is entirely possible for gender systems to contain evidence of injustices for both sexes. Whichever sex is disadvantaged, working towards gender justice provides a framework and methodological tools to seek to prevent or eradicate conditions of injustices.

I have been accused of conflating gender justice with justice for women when I state Caribbean gender systems are unjust for women. This conveniently misconstrues my argument. This is simply that the historical and contemporary evidence exposes injustices for women. The 212 recommendations made by the National Commission on Women exposes injustices for women. The statistics on rape and domestic violence expose injustices for women (I condemn the fact there are women who beat men. This is totally unacceptable and unjust. Any form of domestic abuse by any perpetrator is wrong and unacceptable). “To the extent that these injustices exist, then the system as a whole is unjust. For the sceptics, imagining this requires making an ideological transition that is extremely difficult for women and men steeped in the seeming naturalness of patriarchal practices that they do not wish to see disturbed” (Barriteau 2003a, 32).

Why is working with the concept of gender equality so problematic and of limited use? What is not stated is that the State positions the goal of promoting gender equality in the arena of the public and in reforming access to resources. Society is conceptually divided into two spheres, the private and the public, as part of government, the Bureau operates in the public sphere. The public sphere embraces the formal and informal economy, civil

society, and the state. The public sphere is where we locate public discourse, civic responsibilities, freedom and equality, rights and citizenship (Barriteau 1998, 443).

The private sphere is the realm of domesticity, the family, conjugal and sexual relations. Historically the private domain has been a complex, contested location for women. It was accepted that women were subordinate to men conceptually and practically. They were not regarded as household heads despite the real dynamics of household decision making. Policy makers have come to accept that the private sphere and domestic relations have been largely problematic for women. What they have yet to acknowledge is that gender ideologies that support women's subordinate position in the private, have not changed, and also reoccur in public sites such as the economy and political participation. The Barbadian state and the Bureau have been committed to removing the structural conditions of inequality built into the fabric of social life for women. The state has done this primarily by removing structural barriers impeding women's participation in the public arena, it altered women's access to resources such as education, and participation in the economy and politics. For example, between 1976 - 1985, on the advice of the National Commission on Women, the State reformed 11 pieces of legislation to correct biases against women (Bureau of Gender Affairs n. d. [1985].; Barriteau 2004: 147).

Even though it is accepted that women may be subordinate to men in the private, it is around women's participation as equals in the public that the State creates access. However the hierarchies and inequalities embedded in the organisation of domestic life follow women into public spaces. That is why generally speaking, the public is more interested in the marital and parental status of female politicians that they are of men. Women in politics are more likely to have their marital and relationship status discussed rather than whether or not they are good ministers, parliamentarians or political leaders. This is why in the 2003 general elections a newspaper featured article on all the women contesting the elections for the two main parties focussed on how many of them were mothers and the number of children they had collectively, by party. The public was informed that women in one political party had eleven children among them, compared to the childless status of women in the other political party. We did not receive that rich analysis of the fatherhood or marital status of male politicians (Hoyte 2003, 9).

I invite the Bureau to work with the Centre for Gender and Development Studies to use the concept of gender justice as an analytical tool to interrogate developments within society to reveal the differential implications and impacts for men or women. There is gender injustice when these adverse conditions affect any sex group. For example, "there is no gender justice if women face ongoing overt or covert attempts to maintain their subordination, deny them the right to go to the beach unmolested at 5.30 am or pm. Similarly there is no gender justice if men face sustained efforts to deprive them of access to resources or to treat them as inferior to women or are systematically denied access to their children¹ (Barriteau 2003c, 32).

¹ The question male marginalisation theorists must answer is, where is the historical and contemporary evidence that men have been systematically denied access to status, power and material resources on the

Gender justice for men and boys

Let me illustrate the concept of gender justice as it applies to boys and men. When commentators ask the question, “What about the boys?” we can ask, what are the ideologies of masculinity that may prove destructive, punitive or crippling for the potential of many young men to lead a fuller life? What are the ideologies of masculinity that can be enabling and assist young men in the transition to manhood? What are the factors that affect access to and distribution of resources that affect young men negatively? How do the gender identities young men subscribe to, the gender ideologies they hold, affect or influence their access to resources, how are the resources distributed to them and how do they benefit from these resources? Any structural inequalities that are built into material relations of gender would mean gender systems are unjust for men.

For example, the argument that coeducation is damaging to boys is simultaneously an argument about gender ideologies and material relations of gender. It is about resource access, allocation and distribution. Those who propose single sex schools for boys advocate altering the material dimension to produce gender justice without making explicit the ideological dimensions of their arguments. Is there a belief in our society that being masculine equates with entitlement rather than merit? Does it imply that men and boys automatically or should have first choice at the state’s resources? Is it an ideology of masculinity that informs young men to study and apply themselves is to be a ‘nerd’? Does being male mean or have to mean being physically dominant and violent with other men and women? Unless we seek to understand and change some of the gender ideologies underpinning the call for the reallocation of educational resources, a return to single sex schools will not solve the problem of male underachievement and could possibly exacerbate it.

Using this model and seeking to ensure there is gender justice for men we have developed a framework for assessing the Male Marginalization thesis. This thesis implies that gender systems are unjust for men. If institutions and practices are marginalizing men, that is they are unjust for them, then the Bureau can apply the following framework to determine the existence or extent of this marginalization.

What are the policies, legislation, prejudices, practices that penalize or reward men?

What are the deeply entrenched, policies of the state and its institutions

basis of their sex and perverse relations of gender? Men have been and continue to be denied access on the basis of racism and class exploitation. Black feminist theorists have long ago critiqued the idea of “a monolithic understanding of man” (Wiegman 2001, 360). However, they demonstrate for black women these discriminations become exponential since they are embedded with asymmetric, gendered relations. See, Davis 1983; hooks 1984; and Lorde 1987.

that marginalize men?

What are the contents and effects of the gender identities men subscribe to?

What part do these play in expressions of masculinity that are viewed as problematic?

What are the recommendations in the literature for dealing with marginalization if it exists?

How do these address concerns for gender justice and equality? (Barriteau 2000, 7-8; Barriteau 2003c, 328).

2. Through the gender main-streaming maze

The second area the Bureau may seriously reconsider, is the assumption that gender main-streaming will remove or reduce conditions of inequality. The Bureau might explore new strategies for undertaking the vital work that has to be done. While gender main-streaming is a set of methodologies for delivering a gender policy, its discussion usually focuses on developing the methodologies and structures as an end in itself. In 2005 the Bureau states its mission is, *“To ensure the integration of gender and development into all areas of national development, plans and policies so that women and men can benefit equally from existing opportunities”* (Bureau of Gender Affairs 2005:2). The Bureau goes on to list seven main functions of which I have selected numbers one, two and six as key. These functions are:

1. Facilitating gender mainstreaming of national development policies and programmes so that equality and equity between men and women can be achieved.
2. Advising government agencies and non-governmental organizations on matters of concern to, and affecting women and men.
3. Monitoring and evaluating gender awareness in Government policies, plans and programmes in all sectors (Bureau of Gender Affairs 2005: 2-3).

The Bureau sums up the discussion of its mission and functions by stating, “The programmes of the Bureau of Gender affairs are therefore designed to change the existing ideological and structural processes which militate against the achievement of equality between women and men by ensuring that all government policies include a gender based perspective” (Bureau of Gender Affairs 2005: 3). These are serious responsibilities and the pursuit of gender main-streaming will not result in “challenging existing ideological and structural processes which militate against the achievement of equality between women and men”. So far the draft National Strategic Plan of Barbados 2005 - 2025 does not reflect that the Bureau has had an opportunity to make its contribution to the integration of gender and development issues. However the Bureau’s interpretation of its mandate sounds more purposeful and focussed than the tentative statements made twenty three years ago when the State outlined its policy on how the Bureau would function under a subhead entitled, Women’s Affairs, in the 1983 - 1988 development plan.

Gender main-streaming has to be combined with other methodologies to ensure that the State pursues gender justice. Gender main-streaming first gained international attention when it emerged in the Platform for Action and Beijing Declaration of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 (United Nations 1996). The Platform advocated twelve strategic objectives and corresponding plans of action to achieve them. A common theme running throughout the strategic objectives and the proposed actions is the recommendation that gender analysis and gender planning be incorporated into all aspects of government, private sector and NGO policies and programmes (United Nations 1996; Sen 1999, 9; Andaiye 2003). The 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action “gave the Commonwealth Secretariat a mandate to advise and assist governments in mainstreaming gender in all their policies, programmes and activities” (Sen 1999, 11). The Commonwealth Secretariat at first defines gender main-streaming as, “the central strategy of the Plan of Action for advancing gender equality and equity, then refers to the consistent use of a gender perspective at all stages of the development and implementation of policies, plans, programmes, and projects” (Commonwealth Secretariat 1999, 6).

The discussion migrates from gender main-streaming being the central strategy to promote gender equality and equity to gender main-streaming being a consistent use of a gender perspective. The Plan, however, defines a gender perspective without however, challenging unequal power relations in gender. A gendered perspective looks not at women alone but at the relationship between women and men and how societies are structured along gendered lines. In practice, the development and incorporation of a gender perspective have been approached through rounds of workshops on gender training, gender sensitization, and gender analysis, with many of these discussing gender as divorced from feminist inquiries into women’s persistent experiences of adverse power relations and conditions of subordination.

The Commonwealth Secretariat produced elaborate, well-written manuals to guide the process of gender main-streaming and in 1999 introduced the first national level gender main-streaming and gender management system exercise in the Commonwealth Caribbean. The focus is on inputs, in this case the structures, processes and mechanisms necessary to facilitate the introduction of gender main-streaming. However there is an over emphasis on what goes into creating an enabling environment for gender main-streaming without a corresponding focus on what emerges from the process. It could be that because the planners were creating a new and “comprehensive network of structures, mechanisms and processes for bringing a gender perspective to bear in the mainstream of all government policies,” (Commonwealth Secretariat 1999a: 5) that they concentrated on the inputs of this new structure. The process, however, could prove disastrous if new layers of bureaucracies are imposed without a clear emphasis on what should be achieved or on the mechanisms for gauging these achievements. Gender main-streaming strategies by themselves will produce very few meaningful reforms to challenge institutionalized unequal relations of gender.

Both the conceptualization of gender main-streaming strategies and the experiences with

its introduction in the Caribbean indicate that gender main-streaming results in a shift away from dealing with inequalities affecting women and men and instead produce a concentration on methodologies. The residual effect is that gender relations that maintain and reinforce hierarchies and inequalities are left intact.

Unless the weaknesses in these strategies are identified and corrected, gender main-streaming and gender management systems will pose even greater problems for the Bureau in its attempts to address existing inequalities. The core of any program or strategy to achieve gender equality, but more importantly, gender justice, should address relations and practices that actively seek to maintain women or men as subordinate, second-class citizens. The Bureau of Gender Affairs has an excellent opportunity to get it right in the development of a national policy on Gender.

3. Creating a national gender policy

So far I have advised a shift from the pursuit of gender equality to gender justice, to rethink the faith in gender main-streaming as the main methodology for achieving its objectives. Now I want to dispute the suggestion of the framers of the Draft National Strategic Plan, June 2006, that Barbados has in fact achieved gender equality.

The plan identifies six broad strategic goals and states these six goals are in pursuit of the national vision which is defined as becoming a society that is prosperous, socially just and globally competitive by 2025 (Barbados 2005: 8). None of the goals mentions anything about gender equity, equality, nor makes any explicit or even vague references to the idea that there might be differing conditions of access to or distribution of resources of the state for the women and men. The planners make no attempt to admit to lingering ideologies of gender which shape views of masculinities and femininities and rank these constructions and the practices they inform to the disadvantage of women and men.

Issues of race and class are examined in the plan but the Plan does not engage with gender. Race is examined in the context of critiquing as bankrupt what the planners called, “the old paradigm whereby the state was perceived as ‘belonging’ to the black community while the white community and other minorities functioned exclusively in the private economy” (Barbados 2005: 31). Incredibly the plan goes on to state, “now is the time for forging a cohesive, self-reliant society that goes beyond the constraints of *race, class and generation*”(Barbados 2005: 31). This is the point at which gender appears. Gender is usually tacked onto that list in an inclusion which is merely cosmetic. In the Draft National Plan it has been replaced by *generation* as if discrimination on the basis of age is equal or similar to discrimination based the power relations of gender. The statement thus also ignores that men and women have dissimilar experiences of ageing.

Throughout the plan, the language used carefully avoids addressing sexually differentiated citizens. The terminology used throughout are people, individuals, youth, members of the society, family, community and mankind. There is no mention of women

nor men, boys nor girls. Even when the plan calls for equity and social justice, it is very careful to avoid any mention of gender (Barbados 2005, 32).

In providing a social and economic overview, the plan mentions that the Barbadian economy has benefited from considerable investment in key areas such as social capital formation, physical infrastructural development and innovative social legislation. It includes the elimination of discrimination based on gender as one of the contributions of the social legislation introduced (Barbados 2005:11). *So the first time the concept of gender appears in the plan is to state that innovative social legislation has resulted in the elimination of discrimination based on gender in Barbados.* This is an incredulous, incredible statement. Not even Scandinavian and other countries which rank in the first ten of the UNDP's Gender Development Index and Gender Empowerment measure claimed that they have eradicated gender based discrimination.

Ironically, this statement would also be challenged by the Mens's Rights Association which insists that gender discrimination against men exists in the country's judicial system. In a statement released for Father's Day 2006, Ralph Boyce President of the Men's Educational Support Association (MESA) stated, "The judicial system is skewed in favour of women. There is a real need for gender equity, right now it is nominal"(Price 2006: 5A). Boyce goes on to call for the revamping of legislation that would include provisions to imprison women for not allowing men to see their children and who knowingly but wrongfully name men as fathers of their children. "I would like to see women also being sent to prison for not letting men see their children as has been ordered by the court. . . .The Maintenance Act is out of date and unjust in much of its treatment to men. The Act provides that once a man has had access to a woman within 12 months before birth, then he could be the father" (Price 2006, 5A).

The decision to erase considerations of gender is very curious on the part of the framers of the plan. In the executive summary, the planners present two tables to support several of the statements and conclusions offered in the narrative. Table 1.1 presents leading economic indicators for Barbados between 1993-2004, and Table 1.2¹ presents selected social indicators for Barbados for the same time period. The first table provides the annual unemployment rate for the country without dis-aggregating these into male and female unemployment. This is not for a lack of data. The Plan cites the annual reports of the Central Bank of Barbados as the source for the information presented in Table 1.1. Yet the annual reports of the Central Bank provides information on male and female unemployment ratios for every year for which the National Strategic plan ignores it. Even more disconcerting, in Table 1.2 on selected social indicators the planners manage to omit Barbados's ranking on the Human Development Indicator (HDI) and cite the UNDP's reports for this, whereas the same reports provide information on Barbados's ranking between 1995-1999 at which point there is no more information on Barbados on the gender indices, until 2002. The selected social indicators are not disaggregated by

¹ Editor's note: Tables 1.1 and 1.2 are the author's references to other documents and are not included or necessary to this text.

sex, adult literacy rates, life expectancy ratios and gross enrolment ratios in primary and secondary schools. Given the legitimate concerns within the country about male under performance and achievement in the educational system it would have been very useful to break these data into gender differentiated categories.

4. The way forward

One of the main tasks of the Bureau as it moves forward is to create a national policy on gender that would not only correct some of the distortions in the Draft National Strategic Plan but provide the State with a blue print to shape government's policy on achieving gender justice, a policy that would respect the dignity, freedom and social, political, economic and cultural rights of every Barbadian boy and girl, woman and man. The Bureau has already stated that the creation of a national gender policy is a priority area. It is not clear whether it knows it will have to begin with a critical assessment of the Draft National Strategic Plan (Bureau of Gender Affairs 2006, 16).

Through the use of gender analysis and motivated by a commitment to gender justice while incorporating gender main-streaming strategies as a means to an end, The Bureau should devise recommendations on the 14 areas of concern as identified in the Report on the Consultation for the Development of a National Policy on Gender that came out in February 2006. These are:

1. Education\Training; educational achievement of boys
2. Crime and Violence; men and violence; women and violence; societal violence; update of domestic violence legislation
3. Poverty; implications for maintenance of children; unemployment\underemployment; the importance of Care work to economic activity
4. Health; HIV\AIDS
5. Environment and Health Issues
6. Housing
7. Family Issues; family law reform; changing family structures
8. Sex Roles and Stereotyping; Discrimination on the basis of sex; sexuality
9. Sexual Harassment
10. Women and Decision Making; women and leadership; women's political participation
11. Unwaged Work; provision of minimum wage legislation for vulnerable workers
12. Minimum Wage
13. Integration of Gender into National Planning Instruments
14. Globalisation\Caribbean Single Market and Economy (Bureau of Gender Affairs 2006).

As The Bureau moves forward into its next 30 year cycle, it can be reassured that the Centre for Gender and Development Studies remains willing to make its programmes and resources available to assist in its work towards promoting gender justice in Barbadian

society.

Bibliography

- Andaiye “Smoke and Mirrors: The Illusion of Women’s Growing Economic Empowerment in the CARICOM Region, Post-Beijing.” In Gemma Tang Nain and Barbara Bailey (eds.) *Gender Equality in the Caribbean: Reality or Illusion?* (2003): 73-108. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Barbados. n.d. *Barbados Development Plan 1983-1988: Change Plus Growth*. Bridgetown: Government Printing Department.
- Barbados. *The National Strategic Plan of Barbados 2005 - 2025: Global Excellence, Barbadian Traditions, Draft*. Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs. Bridgetown, June 2005.
- Barriteau, Eudine. “Engendering Development or Gender Main-streaming: A Critical Assessment from the Commonwealth Caribbean.” In *Feminist Economics and the World Bank: History, Theory and Policy*. Eds. Edith Kuiper and Drucilla Barker. Routledge: New York and London, 2006.
- Barriteau, Eudine. “Constructing Feminist Knowledge in the Commonwealth Caribbean in the Era of Globalization.” In *Gender in the 21st Century: Caribbean Perspectives, Visions and Possibilities*. Eds. Barbara Bailey and Elsa Leo Rhynie. Ian Randle Publishers: Kingston, 2004.
- Barriteau, Eudine “Gendered Relations in a Post-Colonial Modernizing State.” In *New Gender Studies: From Cameroon and the Caribbean.*, eds. Joyce Endeley et. al. Women and Gender Studies, University of Buea: Cameroon., 2004.
- Barriteau, Eudine. “Theorizing Ruptures in Gender Systems and the Project of Modernity in the Twentieth Century Caribbean,” in *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, ed. Linden Lewis. Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2003 .
- Barriteau, Eudine. “Issues and Challenges of Caribbean Feminism,” in *Agenda. Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 2003.
- Barriteau, Eudine. “Requiem for the Male Marginalization Theory in the Caribbean. Death of a Non theory,” in *Confronting Power Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*. ed. Eudine Barriteau. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2003.
- Barriteau, Eudine. *The Political Economy of Gender in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Barriteau, Eudine. “Submission to the Ministry of Social Transformation from the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, University of the West Indies on the Decision to Rename the Bureau of Women’s Affairs.” Centre for Gender and Development Studies, (year) July 14th.
- Barriteau, Eudine. “Theorizing Gender Systems and the Project of Modernity in the Twentieth Century Caribbean.” *Feminist Review* 59 (Summer) (year). Rethinking Caribbean Difference: 187-210.
- Barriteau, Eudine. “A Feminist Perspective on Structural Adjustment Policies in the Caribbean.” *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 1: (year) 142-56.
- Barriteau, Eudine. “Gender and Development Planning in the Post Colonial Caribbean: Female Entrepreneurs and the Barbadian State.” Ph.D Dissertation, Howard

- University.
- Bureau of Gender Affairs. "Report On the Functions of the Bureau of Gender Affairs, Ministry of Social Transformation." Ministry of Social Transformation: Bridgetown.
- Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW. 'Equality in Barbados: "Committee Points out Gap Between Aspirations, Achievements."' Press Release, WOM/1357, CEDAW 579th meeting, United Nations, August 13, 2002.
- Commonwealth Secretariat. *Gender Mainstreaming in the Public Service: A Reference Manual for Governments and Other Stakeholders*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999..
- Gillings, Scarlett I. *Review of the Barbados Women's Bureau*. Study prepared for the ILO Sub-Regional Office, Port of Spain, Trinidad, 1987.
- Price, Sanka. "Use DNA for Fathers." *Sunday Sun*. June 18, 2006, sec. 5A.
- Sen, Gita. *Gender Mainstreaming in Finance: A Reference Manual for Governments and other Stakeholders*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999.
- United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1996*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.



ISSUE 1 • April 2007

Critical Moments: A Dialogue Toward Survival and Transformation

Amira Jarmakani and Donna Troka

*Keynote panel address on March 29, 2003 at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia
Panelists: Chela Sandoval, Susan Glisson, Layli Phillips and
Patricia Mohammed*

Introduction

Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences – if we can make meaning out of them – can lead us toward becoming more of who we are. Or they can remain meaningless. The coatlique state can be a way station or it can be a way of life.

-Gloria Anzaldúa

In January of 2002, in the midst of the overwhelming public focus on the events of September 11, five students of the Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia—Amira Jarmakani, Molly McGehee, Leigh Miller, Katherine Skinner and Donna Jean Troka—came together to plan a weekend called *Critical Moments*.

A critical moment, as we define it, is a moment of change – whether it is rupture or reassembly. It can be experienced as a time of birth and renewal, when people come

together, or as a time of death and loss, when they seem to become even more alienated from one another. Most importantly, it is a time of flux and movement, when things like war, segregation, genocide, disease, slavery, poverty, immigration and globalization impact on individuals and communities. Because such moments require strategies for coping, grieving, adjusting, remembering and reconciliation, we were interested in creating events that would bring people together to dialogue about finding a way to survive these moments of extreme flux and change.

The first phase of this project took place from March 28 to 30, 2003, and included an artist showcase, academic conference, keynote panel and closing brunch. Because the project was planned in the wake of the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and convened in the weeks following direct US military action in Iraq, it arose out of a need to understand these events within the context of similarly destructive moments. We wanted to find out what we could learn by looking at 9/11 in a comparative context and we sought to act on our feelings of devastation by forging a space for creative transformation. In this way, *Critical Moments* came to engage the question of survival: How do we get through individual and collective moments of crisis? Ultimately, it also explores the possibility of transforming these moments of change, loss and destruction into generative movements toward personal growth and social justice.

Critical Moments, then, is not only a project, it is also a process. It is an ongoing method for survival that we continue to practise daily. Indeed, at the moment in which we write this introduction, just months after Hurricane Katrina has devastated New Orleans and the Gulf shores, just over a year after the death of activist visionary Gloria Anzaldúa, and in the midst of ongoing violent crisis in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan, the need for and purpose of this project remain clear. The continued state of destruction in Iraq and Palestine are examples of the types of “painful experiences” that Anzaldúa herself references in her work *Borderlands*. As we respond with our own feelings of pain, grief and loss, we struggle and pledge to remember and honour Anzaldúa’s insistence that we find a way to make meaning out of loss and crisis – to make this quest for meaning “a way of life” by which we learn to move forward, rather than “a way station” in which we become stalled and strangled by inaction, anger and sadness.

Though there were five of us involved in the planning and implementation of the conference phase of this project, it is no coincidence that the two of us have continued further with the project. We both came to this project not only with a sense of global and national crisis, but also from a place of recognition of the undeniable intersection of personal and communal pain. We came to this project mired in the grief that comes with the ending of intimate, meaningful relationships and with the feeling of having come unmoored from the systems of support and community to which we had grown accustomed. The immediacy and urgency of these most personal crises therefore overlapped and resonated with the larger sense of crisis which was, at that time, quickly becoming known simply as 9/11.

Therefore, for us, the juxtaposition of our stories of loss and pain with others’ (whether personal, local or global) provided us with strategies for survival. Tim O’Brien says

“stories are for joining the past to the future. Stories are for those late hours in the night when you can’t remember how you got from where you were to where you are. Stories are for eternity, when memory is erased. When there is nothing to remember except the story” (1990, 38). By using stories of colonialism in the Caribbean, stories of female leaders in the civil rights moment, and stories about the effects of desegregation on black children in the American south and through the method of radical storytelling itself, what Anzaldúa called “autohistoria teoría” or spoken word art performance activism, our panelists began to theorize strategies of survival and transformation. These stories hold the history of the *Critical Moments*, and they became our touchstone for these events – a place to begin to engage each other and move forward together.

Our own experiences, coupled with the stories we were hearing from those around us, highlighted the way in which individual and communal “*Critical Moments*” become inextricably imbricated in one another. Since we often relate to global moments by connecting them to the individual details of our own lives, our project has been concerned with honouring the fragile individuals and relationships that are bound up in the messy aftermath of larger events. We have been dedicated to understanding and exploring the relationship between individual and collective moments of crisis and loss.

Ultimately, though, our goal has been to understand how to first survive, and then move through these moments. In order to do so, we acknowledge the need for the *Critical Moments* project to confront and engage the evidence and aftermath of painful events and stories and to work to shape it into something new – to create and transform it into something useful, profound and beautiful.

In planning the conference phase of the project, we were keen to structure it in a manner that merged activist, artistic and academic ways of understanding and responding to what we have been calling *Critical Moments*. We wanted to create a space that enacted the type of theoretical paradigm that could step out of the mode of traditional academic conferences and engage a wider range of voices in sharing tools and strategies for survival. What we offer here is the result of our efforts to re-imagine and reinvent some of the structures that typify academic conferences. Rather than replicating the hierarchical framework of inviting one ‘expert’ keynote speaker, we organized a keynote panel that was characterized by crossover and dialogue.

Instead of asking the panelists to prepare lectures, we asked them to envision the keynote panel as a generative space in which they engaged in dialogue with one another about questions we had prepared. Because of the nature of the larger questions the *Critical Moments* project is asking – questions about survival and forward movement in the face of destruction and change – we felt strongly that the keynote panel should *demonstrate* the type of creative response we envisioned. Therefore, we knew that it had to be constructed and witnessed as a *process* rather than as a finished *product*. As bell hooks asserts, drawing on the work of Paulo Freire, “it is dialogue that is the true act of love between two subjects ... and there can be no revolution without love” (hooks and West 1991, 2-3).

In this spirit, we formatted the keynote panel as a conversation between four scholar/activists: Dr. Susan Glisson, director of the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation at the University of Mississippi, Dr. Patricia Mohammed, senior lecturer at the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Layli Phillips, assistant professor of Women's Studies and African American Studies at Georgia State University, and Dr. Chela Sandoval, associate professor and Chair of Chicana and Chicano Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Each panelist brought not only her specific area of expertise, but also a general dedication to interdisciplinarity, dialogue and social justice work.

Each of these scholar/activists exchanges theories and paradigms for survival by telling stories about the work that they do. Susan Glisson shared stories of the lives of Ella Baker and Lucy Mason – two women, one black, the other white, respectively – who did the hard work of the civil rights movement without the recognition that “charismatic leaders” like Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks received. Through these stories, she teaches us that one may enter into a social justice movement in many ways and that the ultimate goal is to create what Ella Baker calls a “leadership” and not a “followership.” Patricia Mohammed tells the story of Caribbean nationalism and the way in which it has worked to flip the colonial script. With her project ‘Imaging the Caribbean’, she hopes to “rewrite 500 years of history – write a whole different text and a text that is so powerful it begins to make you have to think differently”. Much like Glisson’s work with the history of the civil rights movement, Mohammed aims to write “a liberating history” of colonialism in the Caribbean.

Layli Phillips tells the story of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* desegregation decision, and explains that after the “punctum” (a Sandovalian term) of desegregation, southern whites and blacks did not come to a perfect reconciliation, but instead both groups experienced a “reorganization” of their lives and communities. It is in this “reorganization” that Phillips sees “opportunity for change”. Moreover, as a result of such punctums, we find many “outputs”—some that maintain the violent status quo, and others that subvert and change it. This is the imperfect, but hopeful, outcome that maintains Phillips’ “march toward liberation”.

Lastly, Chela Sandoval reads the stories of the other panelists as “metahistorical forms”, which allow us to “move into more hopeful futures” and which can “create blueprints across time”. Sandoval suggests that these blueprints – or paradigms for creating change – can be shared through the method of SWAPA (Spoken Word Art Performance Activism), which is a way of exchanging “knowledge, dialogue and energy”. This process, she argues, not only transforms those participating (the panelists) but also those witnessing the exchange (the audience) and ultimately, we hope, those who read the transcripts of the discussion.

This current phase of the *Critical Moments* project represents our commitment, as well as the commitment of Chela Sandoval, Layli Phillips, Patricia Mohammed and Susan Glisson to continuing the process of *Critical Moments* by extending the conversation to a

wider audience. We present this once-begun dialogue as an example of the way in which engaging the “abundant waste”, or the stories of pain and loss that accompany moments of crisis, can ultimately be utilized to “make new growth possible” (hooks 2000, 80-1).

In working to create and document strategies for survival and tools for social transformation, we are honouring, and, we hope, *adding to* the work already begun by those activists, artists and scholars who have gone before us. We are joining a process that is not characterized by finished products or neat endings. Instead, it is, as Anzaldúa describes, a continuously forming and reconstituting entity. It is “a flawed thing – a clumsy, complex, groping blind thing – [which] is alive, infused with spirit” (1987, 67).

The unfinished product of the keynote conversation is the starting point for its next new phase of life. We offer it up, as flawed or clumsy as it might seem, with the hope that it can lead to productive and life-giving possibilities.

January 2006

Amira Jarmakani - Atlanta, Georgia

Donna Jean Troka - Brooklyn, New York

Q.1. How do we get through Critical Moments? After traumatic experiences or destructive events, what is the process of reconstruction? What does remembering, reassembling, or putting back together look like? What are the paradigms and structures for that? What are the ways in which the work of social justice movements, and specifically the civil rights movement, is not over but a continuous process?

Chela Sandoval: I loved the way in which Susan Glisson writes about civil rights and social justice in her article about “Women’s Leadership and Organizing”. She teaches us that we must all take responsibility as leaders in order to heal the world. In the past, the mythology of “charismatic leadership” has informed our movements for social change. Her argument is that this mythology of charismatic leadership creates a flawed paradigm for social change. In this paradigm the majority are encouraged to find comfort at the nadir of the group (nadir here is understood as that part of a sphere that lies just below a central defining consciousness). This paradigm assumes a consciousness at the zenith of the nadir, at the apex of the group. Let us consider a more progressive paradigm for collective action, for the radical work we are trying to accomplish at this conference. Let us say that our goal is to situate *all* of us here today, audience and keynoters alike, within a nadir that does not require a charismatic leader.

Layli Phillips pointed out to me earlier that a nadir occurs at the depths and extremes of any circular space. Many people are experimenting with the idea that a new form of leadership emerges from this very space. Glisson argues that we all need to take responsibility for leadership, and this means for speaking and active-witnessing. Gloria Anzaldúa believed that it is only through *autohistoria-teoría* that new forms of collectivity and leadership could emerge that would be capable of changing the world.

For Anzaldúa, *autohistoria-teoría* is transfigurative. It is a shamanistic method that depends upon the ability of performance to transform the storyteller and the witness into something or someone else. So I would like to begin today's keynote by saying that I would like all of us to take leadership at this conference by collectively inhabiting a progressive nadir. The method for doing this is to actively witness what is happening today. Begin by writing down interesting words, ideas, or concepts — words that strike you as moving — words you can take home with you. Words like nadir, for example, apex or *autohistoria-teoría* may enable you to make connections beyond what we now know. When you stand and deliver, sharing those connections with us, you transform from passive-witness members of the audience into active witnesses. As you speak you are transformed and transformer, leader, shaman. I am convinced that this kind of “shaman-witness ritual” is crucial to any methodology of emancipation. It is through this kind of spoken word art performance activism, or SWAPA ritual, that speakers and audience can be connected into a single community of activists.

Susan Glisson: From a personal standpoint it's sort of a catch 22. But I was actually drawn to studying the civil rights movement because of the sort of inspirational iconic images that we all have of the movement. You know, Martin Luther King at Lincoln's feet or Rosa Parks too tired to get out of her seat that day. These drew me into the movement, but at the same time that they drew me in, they distanced me from the kind of work that was done. Because first of all I can't speak like King. I don't have that gift of oratory that he did so I can't do that. I can't go out on Sweet Auburn, as I understood it, and call everybody to go to DC, which is what I thought he did when I first studied it. His charisma inspired me but at the same time didn't necessarily provide an outlet accessible to me to try to duplicate or follow him in producing the goals I shared with him. So that frustration led me to study the civil rights movement and try to find alternative ways of leadership that were accessible to me. Things like having a meeting and calling people and sending out letters is the boring stuff, but I can handle the boring stuff very well. It's the kind of unglamorous, unrewarded, often unseen mortar that builds this structure. We only see the bricks but the mortar keeps it all together.

I was able to find two wonderful women. The first one, whose name you may know more than the other, is Ella Baker. The second is Lucy Mason, a daughter of the First Families of Virginia and one of the first CIO organisers in the South. I wanted to study the ways that these two women in traditional male-dominated organisations created alternative ways for organising that were anti-authoritarian, anti-hierarchical, nurturing, and collective – that developed, as Ella Baker called it, a leadership and not a followship. I prefer not to refer to us as experts but rather as people who were able to enjoy a certain education and experience that may or may not be useful to you. It's so cool to read Dr Sandoval's work — it gave me the language to think about what I've been doing but not knowing what to call it. Your ideas of differential modes of thinking and dynamism finally provide a language to talk about this kind of work.

Layli Phillips: I wholeheartedly agree with Chela's reading of Susan's work. And it makes me really think about if we are going to have a society in which we each take up the reins of leadership, or what we have in the past thought of as leadership, in some way.

What is going to catapult us from our current state of apathy and inaction into that state of taking up that leadership? I always felt the critical thing is the development of critical consciousness. I find myself, with the tools of liberation psychology, thinking about what are the ways in which we can animate individuals to think about things critically and in ways that get them moving into changing society. But to do that requires not only to think how can we stimulate individual growth, but how can we create a supportive social environment, both in terms of the institutions of society and in terms of recreating them or rethinking them in ways that are supportive to critical consciousness on a mass scale. Not just on a scale of a few elite people who have been educated in these special institutions or who have happened to have had very unique political experiences, but on a much wider scale. I've also been thinking about changing the symbolic environment because so much of our society now, and the way consciousness is shaped and framed, is done through the symbolic media, through the mass media, through the symbols that circulate in our material culture. So in terms of thinking about how to shape consciousness I think, well, what specific actions can we take with regard to social institutions and to symbolic systems to alter the widespreadness of critical consciousness? I think that will segue into Dr Mohammed's work...

Patricia Mohammed: My passage through many incarnations of activism and academia – all of which have been so interspersed that it is hard to separate them – have led me to a point of trying to understand a way in which what we do in contemporary capitalism is a critical moment. We are always in a succession of critical moments, some of which are very long, others are sporadic events. This conference has forced me to make connections between parts of my own work, to see it as a set of Critical Moments which I also engage in, and attempt to locate, if you like, continuities in format, framework and methods. I have been labelled first and foremost a feminist scholar, which means different things in different contexts. In the Caribbean, where my work is most located, this is an attempt to validate a female voice.

In trying to think through how we as activists, feminists, and all other progressive people with progressive stances may begin to interact with that, how we change the ways in which we actually think, do, and act depends not just on activism per se, but how we change the basis of how knowledge is constructed, how we think about each other, and how the change we effect must be fundamentally vertical as well as horizontal.

In that sense, re-membering can never be the same and it should never be the same because culture never remains the same. It would be impossible for culture to remain static anyway. What is that whole we imagine? What is that thing we are holding on to? Is it an ideal vision that we seek? How are we doing that? How we proceed to do that happens in many different ways. What allows us to think progressively, to act on something progressive, to unify ourselves, while at the same time understand that those differences themselves create culture as we know it?

My work draws its insights from Caribbean feminist theory. The destabilisation of theory and the inter-disciplinarity of gender studies itself allows a way to rewrite knowledge and to find another way of viewing and seeing.

To return to the specific question again, does re-membling require making a whole? I do not agree, but it does require a vision of what that “whole” might constitute. The whole is in fact already in the process of being redefined in another way. Derek Walcott, in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1992, “Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory”, says this much better than I can in relation to how community is being reconstructed in the Caribbean. He writes, “Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars.”



Walcott elides the white scars of European colonialization, which made the crack in tradition, and focuses on the ethnic groups now dominant. However, in reconstructing, it is impossible to deny or only exclude the colonial heritage, for this becomes, ironically, the glue which fits pieces together back again into another whole. I am interested in how we do this as we configure present thought: political, academic and activist.

Figure 1: Reconstructed Amerindian Vase, National Museum Tobago
Photo: Patricia Mohammed

Q.2. Given the ways in which your work addresses intersectionality of identities, how do differences affect the way in which different people experience the same critical moment? The idea is not to look at one axis of identity, but to think about how, for example, ability, race, gender, and class work together in very specific ways and affect people in very specific ways.

Susan Glisson: Early on I chose to look at two women, one white and one African-American. I have to tell you, I was more drawn to Ella Baker because her work seemed more exciting to me. She was sort of the mother of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and she was instrumental in developing this really dynamic, organic, organising strategy that would incorporate a lot of people. Yet I knew I needed to complicate what I understood about her.

So I looked at Lucy Mason, who wrote letters, visited ministers, lobbied editors of newspapers and others one would call the power brokers of the community because she had the visibility of whiteness and a historic family lineage that’s important in Virginia. She was able to get into doors that, say, Ella Baker wouldn’t have been able to get into,

and yet her work initially seemed to me the more boring of the two. Until my advisor pointed out to me that that was more like what I do. Oh well, then, I thought, I can't really call it boring. What I learned is that each of us has a particular standpoint, a particular position, and it can be limiting, but we can also embrace the possibilities or the doors it opens up for us. So, for instance, at "Ole Miss" [University of Mississippi], it is probably more easy for me to talk to the chancellor than say someone who worked in the physical plant who might be African-American. And so in the living wage campaign we have there, it is incumbent upon those of us who do have that access to try and create that access for those who don't easily have it.

Ella Baker in turn used her invisibility. She encouraged the students she worked with to organise outside the gaze of the limelight. Her philosophy was: Don't call the newspaper when you are having your first meeting because the people in power will find you quickly enough. Get a chance to build trust, a chance to build a strong organisation so that when the power brokers display discrimination and backlash, you will be strong. You will be able to withstand the threat that comes with exposure.

So there were differences between Ella and Lucy in terms of visibility and invisibility, in terms of black and white, in terms of gender, but similarities in a collective, nurturing anti-authoritarianism. Both were outside the traditional balance of power. They weren't elected. Ella Baker was appointed director of the SCLC by Dr King, but he was never comfortable with her being in that position. So she had to figure out other ways to get to things.

If we had a longer explanation of the question, the two things I would add in terms of my experience in Mississippi are: 1) The ways in which people perceive the past, present, and the future are generational. Younger people – interestingly due to the successes of the civil rights movement – have this historical amnesia about what occurred. I mean, amazing things happened in Mississippi, but because you only get it for a few days in eighth grade in Mississippi History, young people don't have a clue about these rich traditions of organising in their own state. So these kids come to 'Ole Miss' and they certainly don't know who James Meredith is, much less Fannie Lou Hamer, Medger Evers, Unita Blackwell, Mae Bertha Carter, Victoria Gray Adams, and on and on.

The second thing is religion. Mississippi is 92 per cent Christian – that plays a role. We did a training workshop yesterday called cultural mapping. It involves asking questions in order to group yourselves in categories and find your commonalities. We asked the students to group themselves according to the religion they grew up in. I expected them to group themselves as Christian or another religion. They grouped themselves as Baptist, Methodist and Catholic...So you get a sense of the way they place themselves in that Protestant tradition in Mississippi, and that plays a critical role.

Patricia Mohammed: When I was given the list of questions I began thinking about them. I began to think how I, from the Caribbean, can begin to speak to some of these questions because I'm coming from a different space. I have another reality, though I travel a lot and experience this and other societies. My sense of what I know best, the

questions I ask myself, always come from that space. Within that space, which is a result of European colonisation in which Africans and East Indians were the greatest numbers of people brought in, what occurred is that these two groups were set in opposition to each other. In the context of colonialism, they were constructed as different – a difference of Africa from Asia. A difference of Europe was then set as a hierarchical construct against the other two. And I've been trying to, in a very epic way, to work out how these intersectionalities of identity can take place so that we no longer speak with a colonial script – so that we find another way of looking at the same thing. So that we can begin to think through this in an optimistic rather than a destructive way. In fact, what I sense we want to do is rewrite 500 years of history – write a whole different text and a text that is so powerful it begins to make you have to think differently of yourself and others.

I draw primarily, but not exclusively, from a body of work which I am engaged in at present, entitled *Imaging the Caribbean*. It is, in a nutshell, an attempt to reconfigure the past, going between image and text – but privileging the image, which is itself disputed terrain. I have been working on this area formally for the past eight years, but more realistically, I think all my life. I want to read you something from Chela's work, if I may, which will speak directly to this point. Referring to the foreword to *this bridge we call home*: “The authors of this book call for a science that can bring together the best wisdom of past indigenous spiritual traditions with current techno-digital knowledges, with the purpose of exploring and affirming the multi-dimensional places where body, mind, and spirit assemble, where spiritual work is seen as political work, where political work is seen as spiritual work, and where the erotics of love invest both” (25).

In a sense, I felt that what I had begun to do was embodied in this. I have begun to use image and symbols along with words because I think text alone is limited and the visual expands our appreciation and understanding far more than words alone can do. What I am trying to do is reconstruct the past to critically look at what has emerged as the script.



How can we look at the same thing and see similarities, rather than differences? To see the ways in which we are more alike than different, rather than recommitting to difference as part of recreating that whole. I look at the religious practices of voodoo in Haiti and Hinduism in Trinidad in particular, bringing together ideas of African religious and Asian spiritualism as

Figure 2: Rada Altar, Haiti
Photo: Patricia Mohammed



Figure 3: The Ordinance of Baptism, circa 18th century
University of the West Indies Mona Library

ongoing critical differentiations between peoples within, situated as different practices even though I have found many to be more similar than different, and still posed as counterpoint to Christianity. My interest stems perhaps from the point of view that these two are constituted as polar opposites within the construction of contemporary Caribbean identity, the Asian



Figure 4: Hindu ritual ceremony, Trinidad
Photo: Patricia Mohammed

influence located far more in the southern Caribbean, but nonetheless informing new ideas of difference. In the colonial script they were viewed as paganism and superstition. Religion and religious beliefs are the critical spaces which are used to establish hierarchies, i.e. Christianity over African and Asian religions. Why should this have been so and why does it persist as a justification for rule or exploitation?

Such ideas about what has constructed otherness of peoples make a direct link to the end of Layli's first comment when she says, "...in terms of thinking about how to shape consciousness, I think what specific actions can we take with regard to social institutions and to symbol systems to alter the widespread ness of critical consciousness." I think to do this we need to work with those symbols and reconfigure them with different meanings, not of hierarchies of beliefs but as different ways in which people do the same things, i.e. appease their gods and attempt to achieve fulfilling lives.

I interpret inter-sectionality from the point of view of how events and Critical Moments of the past still challenge us to deal with present and future as they have left very debilitating legacies. For instance, the New World encounter was couched in the form of bringing civilisation to heathen peoples. These were the same sentiments used to conquer

the Aztecs and Incas in Mexico, as it was over the Amerindian and native populations of the Caribbean and elsewhere

The construction of African religions was one of superstition, backwardness, heathenism and fear. Fear was grounded in a very pragmatic feature – the fear of religious gatherings being used to foment revolution, the fear of its powers which are not understood and therefore suffused with unimagined ills, and the fear of its overt sexuality – one distinctive difference between African spiritualism and Christianity was the music and dancing, or drumming and catching of the spirit.

In any society with different groups, what becomes entrenched is stereotypes, which ensuing generations inherit. They do not end here, but are carried over in social policies, as for instance one group is given preference in educational opportunity over the other because it is felt that they are more intellectual peoples, and so on and so on. Thus my point made earlier that *Critical Moments*, even if sporadic, can have continuous effects creating other successive *Critical Moments* in societies.

Layli Phillips: We had different understandings of the term “critical moment”. Each of us has had our own idea about what this term means and, as Patricia mentioned, it isn’t only always thought of as a single event or a single point in time, but sometimes as an ongoing axis that organises cultural and political experiences.

I’d like to shift it back to the sort of momentary, event-like meaning and talk about the way I’ve understood and used the term. I’ve drawn a lot from Chela’s work. I think of a critical moment as what she calls a punctum, which is like a point in time when the normal order of things is disrupted in some way. If you think of a bubble bursting, suddenly the order of things that existed within that bubble is no more and suddenly there’s an opportunity, an intense and powerful opportunity, for change and for things to be reorganised. So I thought about that type of a moment and in my own work and in some of the papers that were circulated amongst us. I’ve done work on the critical moment of desegregation. In particular, I’ve looked at the *Brown vs the Board of Education* desegregation decision and at how basically African-Americans and those involved in the black march toward liberation were orienting and helping to create that particular moment, that particular critical moment or punctum, alongside or in opposition to the status quo that was maintaining a racist society.

I imagine this whole board as historical movement up to the punctum of desegregation and after it. So you have this set of activities, which I call the march towards liberation, and this is specifically for African-Americans who obviously were disenfranchised from mainstream American society from as far back as slavery. Things that would cause a gentle and persistent movement towards this punctum include the NAACP Legal Defense Fund’s gradual legal campaign; the government actually desegregating the military forces through Truman’s Executive Order 1099; the labor organisation Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. All of these gradual things are adding up to this march, toward this punctum, where it is a coming together of the two societies that were formally opposed. So, on this side of the board you can draw a really harsh line, which I call the repressive and violent

status quo, the racist status quo. And it was upheld by things such as *Plessy vs Ferguson*, lynching, or rape, fire hoses, George Wallace and the Dixiecrats, and the confederate flag and all those activities that kept this going.

But at a certain point, in the US Supreme Court, the two groups had a meeting and that meeting created a punctum. It created a moment in American history when things could be different afterwards – a reorganisation could take place. And interestingly enough, what happened afterwards wasn't the perfect reconciliation that we might have hoped for but, rather, partial reconciliation that altered the experience of both groups of people and recreated it in terms of a new punctum later.

There were after-effects of that punctum. For instance “school integration”. I put it in quotes because in a national sense it was mitigated by things like tracking within the schools, which kept the segregation ongoing within. So both groups have a partial victory for their side. And then, on the larger social level behind schools, you have this thing called “access” where blacks can participate but there are tacit sorts of repression that keep people out. For instance, in terms of the way school desegregation itself was operationalised, a critical event occurred right here when we were deciding how to reorganise society. The NAACP submitted an amicus brief to the Supreme Court from social scientists, both black and white, who were against desegregation, which made the statement that segregation hurts both black children and white children. It makes black children feel inferior because of the social pressure of racism. With white children it gives them an unfair sense of superiority and leads them to have an authoritarian personality.

That was the input, but the output in the Supreme Court statement when they did agree to end school segregation was that segregation only hurts black children – they failed to mention the part about the harm to white children. So that opened the door for operationalising school desegregation in a way that ended up dismantling predominantly black schools, including the principals, administrators and teachers of those schools, and putting black children in white schools, rather than sending white to black and black to white and mixing up both and sharing the personnel of both.

So you can see we had this punctum – this opportunity for change; we had some kind of change and reconciliation, but not perfect change. Depending on what happens in that moment of great chaos, it determines whether we live up to the reconciliation we might hope for, or whether we maintain our status quo.

Q.3. bell hooks writes in Black Looks, “We’re always in the process of both remembering the past even as we create new ways to imagine and make the future.” What is the role of the past in remembering the future?

Patricia Mohammed: When your work is involved in the excavation of the past, it is sometimes viewed as esoteric, irrelevant in the face of very dominant present crises. But I think we often forget how that past has created what we have now. It is that past that has brought us here – that past was not static and sometimes there were elements which were

not read with the lens we have now. It is such a rereading that will allow us different options to proceed if we want to listen to it. I think the question has no specific answer; in a sense that history itself and writing of history is always current and still given too many interpretations. We are always writing about the past in the present and therefore still dependent on the individual scholar or activist to place the importance of history in the present and challenge it to provide us with something that is valuable for the present.

When we do research in the social or physical sciences we investigate phenomena and read our data to see how this helps with the problem with which we are confronted – the challenge of history is finding the relevance of it for intervening in our present. To underscore this point, I think the past is important because it is prehistory as well as the continuous past that creates the symbols that we then build on, as for instance the symbols used in all religions and all practices which have reinforced gender inequality for millennia. These are the kinds of moments that we think back to which then force the point that Layli was making: in that particular moment of thought, how do we act? Because it comes back as a flash, as for example the way people often locate memory as the feeling they have in an event like “Where were you when President Kennedy died” — an attempt at locating universal emotions and strategies. It is the lesson learnt from that that we should draw on to shape the present and the future.

Susan Glisson: I think I would talk about two things that are going on in Mississippi and other parts of the South, especially where I am. The way that the past is used in two instances: one is in jurisprudence, which is the reopening and prosecution of old civil rights murder cases, and in the other, the memorialisation of civil rights activity, honouring civil rights heroes, creating monuments so that a reconciliation could be effected. I get calls every time a new case gets opened and it’s going to trial. Reporters will call and ask, “What do you say to the idea that perhaps that’s in the past and you should leave it there? Are we just reopening old wounds?”

My response is that there are certain values that society should come together and affirm. One of those values is that all life is important and this value is timeless. So if a life was taken in 1800 or 1902 or in 1963, on June 12, like Medger Evers was, that is an important marker and we should seek justice for the premature and criminal death of that person. And that is timeless. That is why there is no statute of limitations on murder because our society says it is wrong all the time across history, but we have to enter into history in order to recover that and to try to seek justice.

The second thing is in creating rituals of healing. October 1 of last year was the 40th anniversary of the integration of the University of Mississippi. Forty years ago there were marshals and national guardsmen, there was a full-scale riot, two people were killed, all because James Meredith wanted to go to school at the flagship university of his state. On October 1 of this past year we created a ceremonial — I don’t want to use the word reenactment — but we created a ritual in which the chancellor of the university apologised for the exclusion of African-Americans and others from the university and then had a dinner on the grounds, because we’re southern and we like to eat well together and that is a source of great joy. But we had a ceremonial walk through the Lyceum,

which is the main administrative building in front of the Circle where the riot occurred. Any pictures you've seen of 'Ole Miss' would be that site of the riot in front of the Circle. The Chancellor Khayat and James Meredith walked through the building, followed by Governor William Winter and Myrlie Evers, and by 2,500 black and white Mississippians to the other side, where we then dedicated a space for a civil rights memorial to conclude this year of remembrance. You can't have justice and you can't have reconciliation without going through the past.

Chela Sandoval: I'm interested in Layli Phillips' exposition of the 'punctum'. What she has done is provide a radical theoretical model for understanding history and social change. Theoretical models are very useful when they are translated into a visual mode as she has done today. I always understand theory best when I see it mapped visually. When we translate, when we recode from one medium to another, a new life is given to theory in a way that makes it somatic; our understanding becomes physical — and different. We felt this happening when Phillips gave us a theoretical model of the punctum, and then gave us its visual transcoding. We were able to better perceive how the punctum allows us to understand and map any critical moment, any great moment of social transformation. The model of the punctum, as Layli points out, allows us to plug in different kinds of critical moments in order to understand how they can create more liberatory presents and future times. In Layli's use of the punctum, therefore, we do not become caught in recovering lost times, lost histories: Rather we are actively-constructing and reconstructing these for the sake of the present and future.

Much scholarship devoted to ethnicity, gender and sexual difference is focused on recovery projects, recovering lost histories. Over the last century arguments have ensued over whether and when such historical projects constitute a liberatory activity. I am interested in what, following Hayden White, are called 'meta-historical' forms. That is, I am interested in the moral consequences of someone's structuration of historical and cultural epochs. Phillips and Mohammed use theoretical models that call up history in order to better understand the present and move into the future.

Chela Sandoval: I am my ancestral and cultural memories embodied — here, now. How to understand our contemporary historically-active being-ness, how to translate that, and how to speak this across all our differences is the method that we four active-witnesses are similarly seeking. We're all interested in creating blueprints that call up history, that recognise how history has carved our very bodies, souls, psyches, minds and speech forms — while at the same time generating a "present-speak" that can free us from our pasts in order to create nows and futures full of hope. Susan, you write about this in your work, when you tell us to not become so fixated and fascinated with our past historical figures, but instead see the way in which these figures are embodied in our beings and our presences right now.

Susan Glisson: Right and that's where it's useful history. Diane Nash in the SNCC reunion in 2000 talked about Adolf Hitler and Martin Luther King being the flip side of the same coin. I'm not sure I would go quite that far, but it's a powerful statement in a sense that these are charismatic figures who came to the attention of the public at Critical

Moments in their societies' lives. Hitler came to power, or to public notice, during the Weimar Republic, during a terrible time in Germany and people were looking for answers to explain the terrible time and how they were going to get past it. The answers Hitler gave were, Well, we need to blame the Jewish people and anybody else we want to. At the same time, King came along and people were looking for answers to deal with this critical moment of the post-Brown decision and how we were going to move forward and he provided answers that I would argue were positive. The problem is you get fixated on the individual so much so that you think that when the individual is gone you cannot do it yourself and that's limiting. History is supposed to be useable. The other wonderful way of giving voice to his argument is understanding that segregation is harmful to both blacks and whites and that message is too often not coming through on the other side. William Winter says of Medger Evers – he didn't just free black people, he freed white people too. We have to be able to uncover that in order to recover.

Q.4. If we are unaware of each other's histories and cultures and Critical Moments, then how do we make connections horizontally across regions and cultures and nations? How do we start to build something that doesn't stay within our own little spectrum of concerns and ordeals, but instead reach out and be able to talk across different groups, different cultures, and different regions and start to understand some of the underlying problems?

Susan Glisson: One of the differences that creates a kind of dynamic is technology or technologies. That seems to be one way to talk about...

Chela Sandoval: It's not going to be easy but we can do it, and we are doing it.

Layli Phillips: I would just like to elaborate. I also think Chela's work is extremely useful in thinking about this question in terms of when she talks in *Methodology of the Oppressed* about differential social movements and the idea that, rather than competitively trying to replace and supplant one another's movement strategies and perspectives on change, we can think of them as things which can harmonically coordinate with each other and all inform one another simultaneously. On a very organic level this model of operating, this model of movement, is already beginning to take place. I think our society, and global society, is beginning to recognise this form of movement, but hasn't really well articulated it in some sort of mass lingo as yet. But if you look at the various kinds of actors – and I mean collective actors – who are participating in global social movement in its many forms right now, we find what you might call strange bedfellows: people who would not have formally tried to organise together, and it's not in a classic formal coalition-type sense, but in a much more tactical, spontaneous improvisational kind of sense. In my belief, this is the emerging form of social movement that is going to break in those conversations that the question is asking about.

Already, we find as a result of some of these spiraling things that come off of desegregation we now have people of younger generations who are willing to talk to each other in a certain informal way that their parents' generation and their grandparents' generation never would have done. And it's already in some sense naturally creating

these conversations. I feel like it's occurring and there's no need to force it, but what we do have to do is recognise it and articulate it and help it along.

Patricia Mohammed: Just building off of what Layli said, I think of an opportunity of generational change. This conference, for instance, and the way it is set up and the kinds of questions that were asked is different already, and it's the kind of thing we want to see, I suppose. In a sense, we have to have a predisposition even when we reach out because we can look at others and still not see. We have done that in the past. I wonder where that predisposition comes from. I think one could call on postmodernism as already that space which has been provided to look at one's existence to try to get rid of the meta-narrative and think of all those many narratives which we were kept from or remained ignorant of. Again, this is part of what came out of feminism along with other social movements. That process of consciousness raising as it is taking place is very diffuse and we don't fully understand it.

The only way I can describe it is with an anecdote about how I personally have done it. I remember reading Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* many years ago, as a much younger scholar. It was a fictional story then, unrelated to real people and their lives. I reread it in 2001 after I had begun to study African religions and African images in the Caribbean and after I had visited Namibia to teach in different regions of the country for three summers. In 2000, I had carried out ethnographic research in a small traditional village of the Ovambo peoples in northern Namibia, near the Angolan border. This traditional village, with its thatched houses set in homesteads or *kraals*, was intersected with a modern highway and city springing up just alongside. Achebe's book could have been set in this terrain. The centre could not hold here again, the younger ones were leaving the traditional farming of goats and *mahangu* (a variety of grain) for the city, the traditional chief of the village had no clout again as chief to hold people together. I spoke to a woman who had grown up in polygamous households about the problems but also the possibilities which were available to them. The book now made sense to me. I came across almost the exact things that I read about in Achebe's book. It was being played before my eyes. Over a learning process of 20 years, I developed what I hoped was a capacity to be more perceptive about people and difference, to bring together things in a short time and to appreciate the reasons for this difference. What is the basis of perception and understanding – is it socialist, feminist, or consciousness raising, or progressive thinking and so on? How do we engage with that? I think that's the question we are all asking. I would like to think there's an optimism that we can begin to envision difference even without the actual experience of it.

Chela Sandoval: An example is this conference where the organisers have asked us to come together to have a dialogue, to think and speak off the top of our heads – and to take the vulnerability of this process and its outcomes as an example for how to build a new sense of self and community. This method of conferencing and keynoting represents the organisers' attempt to undo the relations of hierarchy and domination structured into the very ways knowledge and being are exchanged. It was scary for us to do this but fun – what it reminds me of is a SWAPA event. Gloria Anzaldúa wrote about SWAPA as *autohistoria-teoria*, a new way of speaking to ourselves and to one another that is

transformative, ‘shamanistic’. This idea is similar to Susan Glisson’s work when she argues that we need to reveal the “unconscious screens of our being” in order to make the kinds of changes necessary to create collectivities that can move us into hopeful futures. But how do we reveal, even to ourselves, the unconscious screens of our beings? SWAPA, or *autohistoria-teoría* and the shaman-witness ritual are techniques that comprise the formal method that will allow us to do that. SWAPA is a method of exchange that is about swapping energy, information, dialogue, and wisdom. The SWAPA approach creates collectivities that identify tactics and strategies for confronting the present. It is an immense social and political apparatus into which we are born, and within which we would like to intervene in order to bring about more humane forms of exchange. How do we make these interventions? We need to find new ways of thinking, talking, performing, exchanging, becoming. It was Foucault who said the greatest challenge of the 21st century would be for us to question, given our histories, what we have now become. Such questioning will make us vulnerable both to ourselves and to one another. In this way, we learn about ourselves and about each other’s past histories as these are currently inscribed on our bodies and beings.

Answers to our questions may lie in the upsurge of spoken word art performance activism that is being produced everywhere today. Answers can be found in those moments of vulnerability when a speaker is willing to stand up and speak her or his truth knowing that this hard-won truth is changing even as it is spoken.

But SWAPA is not enough. It is not enough to hear someone doing rap, hip-hop, slam or SWAPA. The radically democratic form of SWAPA I am talking about must be accomplished within a committed progressive environment created by those who want to bring about social justice. Groups commit to three-minute intervals of SWAPA in what I call a shaman-witness ritual. Each person in the group actively-witnesses each SWAPA. Social movement groups that commit to this type of shaman-witness ritual develop a shared language. The SWAPA process is transformative – it teaches us about each other, enables us to create community inside of difference, and enables that community to make decisions about how to act next. That community is now prepared to create the forms of exchange necessary for identifying the tactics and strategies required for social justice. They are engaging in an overriding methodology of emancipation.

We need to create many cadres of people willing to do this kind of work; we need to create these languages of exchange and sharing. It’s not going to be easy because it takes developing skills on a micro level in order to make changes on the macro. There is a kind of rising up of skills involved in SWAPA that enables practitioners to make decisions about whether to act as integrationists, revolutionaries, nationalists, separatists or as what we now refer to as ‘differential’ actors.

What’s interesting to me about this keynote/panel is that each one of us is coming up with similar blueprints for action. I think that’s why we were invited here today. Each of us is trying to develop blueprints for how to be able to move into the future in ways that can help heal our ancestors as they live within us; heal our contemporary moments as we live them; and heal our connected communities.

Patricia Mohammed: But we need funds. We need to be able to have funds in the direction in which this kind of work can take you. There are lots of funds that go into other areas but not into this kind of work.

Susan Glisson: I guess I'll just add to that in terms of the improvisational nature, the dynamic nature, the organic nature that fuses what we're doing. We're five communities in Mississippi, three in the Mississippi Delta, one in the urban area of Jackson, and Oxford which is a smaller town of about 10,000 people and 20,000 students. We're doing something different in every community. I have no idea what's in order for each place. In Rome and Drew, which are two communities that border Parchman Penitentiary in the Delta, we would use more of what I would categorise as an Ella Baker model, which is to say, organise people around the use of the water. In Oxford, we are doing a Saul Alinsky model, the Industrial Areas Foundations, which is not the Ella Baker model. In fact, he organises people around their own self-interests rather than around the interests of the poor. The idea and the hope is that once people realise when they are talking to people they wouldn't normally talk to, their self-interests look remarkably similar to the self-interests of other people and organise in that way.

What we're trying in Clarksdale I wouldn't even say is a methodology. We're using oral history training with young people to have them hear from their elders, so that they can learn that in Clarksdale the civil rights movement was actually brought to that community by its young people and these young people now have no clue about the civil rights movement. In Jackson, the capital, we got some funds for a predominantly black school in a poverty-stricken area, and it has become a First Amendment School. The idea is that we expect kids to graduate and start voting when they're 18, but we don't train them to vote and it's serious business. So we use the principles of the First Amendment in that school to train students to get them more invested in school so they're more involved in decision-making. They now have their first school newspaper. This year they are writing a school constitution and the hope is that the renewal of this school will then help renew that neighbourhood in the sense that it's tied to that school. Very soon we will work in new communities that have significant civil rights history. We are part of a project that uses, amazingly enough, SWAPA sorts of techniques. They bring in arts folks, educators, and organisers and they work with all three entities in the community. They collect oral histories, they educate people about their histories, and the artists then work with local artisans to create some kind of performance out of that and that translates into unified issues around which the community organises. We'll use this module and see what works. What works in one place may not in another. But we are being open to the improvisational nature of it and creating a network of all these people to be supportive of each other so they don't feel like they are in isolation.

Feedback question 1 from the audience:

I'm very interested in the last question on cross-pollinisation or political creolisation. I've been reading about George Padmore, and of course Padmore went on to be educated at Fisk University in the US and

participated a little bit in the early civil rights activity. What are some of the lessons you learned from what I guess the term that stuck around in the civil rights movement would be the 'outside agitator'. How does somebody from a different cultural background go into another cultural background and have something to contribute?

Layli Phillips: An interesting example is one that Chela writes about in *Methodology of the Oppressed*. It's not a specific individual, but what she calls "the eccentric cohorts of black feminists and US third world feminists". The second wavers who were shuttling back and forth between the feminist movement, ethnic nationalist movements, lesbian and gay liberation movements and were cross-pollinating across all of those. There are a million individuals I could name that fall into that group but because of their location as women, as members of ethnic minority groups, often sexual orientation minorities, often other class groups and so on. They had connections to all those movements; movements at that time were not engaging in intersectionality with their members. They developed the theory and articulation of how to work among the groups simultaneously and they are a very valuable example in the general sense to what you were talking about.

Patricia Mohammed: It is interesting that George Padmore could have conceived the revolution which, within Africa, could not be imagined. To configure an idea of Pan-Africanism, one had to be outside of it because within Africa those differences were so constituted and closed, the metaphor of sameness could not be created. I can see how Padmore was able to do this – maybe this happens when you come from a small island that drives you out. A similar thing happened to Eric Williams, who was able to write *Capitalism and Slavery*. And to some extent, V.S. Naipaul. As maligned as he is, in a sense he left the colony and re-colonised himself in another way.

What all of these people are saying is that the concept of nation needs to be re-thought, and maybe it is precisely the limitedness of being small ourselves that allows some of us to think outside the box. So to answer your question, yes it is possible for someone from one background to go into another background and contribute. You bring another outsider lens that can be very useful and valuable to those inside and too wrapped up in the situation.

Chela Sandoval: Allow me one further example. Two weeks ago, Rachel Corrie, a 23-year-old white US peace activist and college student, tried to prevent the Israeli army from destroying homes on the Gaza Strip. This young woman called herself an 'internationalist'. In doing so, Corrie was redefining and reclaiming the idea of internationalism as a method for moving in between nations, of making connections between nations. Her politics can be witnessed in her remarkable emails, which are themselves examples of a SWAPA that is mobilising other international communities. These communities are different from globalising communities that are colonising and/or neo-colonising. Corrie's inter-nationalism transforms postmodern globalisation into a positively dissident mode of globalisation. In the name of this radical internationalism, this US citizen stood to protect a Palestinian house threatened by Israeli troops, and gave her life. We could say that Rachel Corrie was martyred to an internationalist form of

dissident globalisation, to the form of radical internationalisation we are talking about in today's keynote shaman-witness exchange. This sort of consciousness is developing in small, ever-growing groups all over the globe.

Feedback question 2 from the audience:

I am interested in this idea of a “march toward liberation”. Two years ago you would perhaps have problems saying, “What are the critical moments?” “Where is the march?” So I think it's important for us to remember there are marches and that we make them. I think in that long march towards liberation from slavery to now, a lot of folks kept on going. They didn't know they were part of the march and we look back and write history and say that was a march. I think we shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that we will always know.

Another thing is, we can't rest satisfied once we reach a critical moment and it seems things are going well. We can't sit down and just take a rest because it's never over. So you can't rest satisfied and you also can never give it up, right? And the last thing, it seems to me that we need to have is a patient urgency, you know, that we've got to build it and we're in for a really long haul and there are hundreds of years before us and hundred years after us and what we do now matters. You've got to learn to be patient and urgent and I don't know how to do that well all the time.

Layli Phillips: In terms of the model having a certain amount of hindsight – 40/40 vision or artificiality. Along those lines I would agree with you that I would never essentialise this model as this frozen picture of how things take place. What I do find heuristically useful about a model like this or any model that I find appealing is that it can help me prospectively to think of what I want to do. For instance, I may perhaps be unaware that my actions are part of a movement. But at the same time if I'm aware there is this sort of march-like thing happening, I may turn up my vision extra-sharp to see who is around me, who are my allies and how we can work together. I might start somehow coalescing in ways that I wouldn't if I wasn't imagining the march was taking place and that helps the effort. So in that sense let's not freeze it but then let's not ever have models either.

On the second point, about not resting, I am thinking about conversations that I've had with Patricia and some of these women, particularly about feminism and passing the generational torch in various kinds of ways, for instance, thinking about longevity of movements in a generational kind of way. We all have a certain kind of energy in our teens and 20s, and another kind of energy in our 40s and 50s, and we can all contribute. We do pass torches on certain kinds of activities to keep them going – we can't always have our 100 per cent energy level going and that's okay. I think it is good to just be aware of that and then actively cultivate that ability to have that passage through movements and across different phases.

Chela Sandoval: I want to add this: we are in a new century following the great social movements of the 20th century, yet in the last couple of decades following this great punctum, the progressive left experienced feelings of disillusionment, even hopelessness. There are good reasons for these feelings. Transformations: postmodern globalisation, cultural and economic globalisation have shifted everything – perhaps consciousness above all else. But if nothing made sense for a while, sense can be made now insofar as we retool lessons from the past, and make them meaningful in relation to new contemporary planetary conditions. We need to appropriate older forms and use them in new ways. So, if the progressive left has undergone an era of disillusionment, loss, even hopelessness, it is understandable. But I agree with my colleagues that we have to conceive of this zenith of despair as part of a planetary process wherein new nadirs of human possibility and connection are possible.

Feedback question 3 from the audience:

Can you all say more about the role of the past in re-membering the future?

Susan Glisson: Here's an example that is complicated. At the University of Mississippi we have the Trent Lott leadership Institute and I work in the same building with this Institute and the building is called Vardaman Hall. I don't know if y'all know who James K. Vardaman was but he said the only thing an African American was good for, (and he didn't use that term), was manual labor, so I like to call my office the "Fannie Lou Hamer suite." I had to counteract some of that energy. When Lott got in trouble for praising Strom Thurmond, my initial thought was mercenary. I thought "Maybe he will give a bunch of money to do racial reconciliation work. Maybe his embarrassment will make him get money for this state to end racism." My second thought was when Lott just kept fumbling through all of those apologies I began to feel really sorry for this man. And I started thinking here's an opportunity for reconciliation, here's a guy who clearly isn't getting it and his handlers aren't getting it either and communicating it to him. Who do we need to hook him up with to get some transformative experiences in his life? I was excited when I thought he would go on tour of civil rights sites with John Lewis and then chagrined that he, in fact, had a scheduling conflict. So I'm not sure what you do with that. The University of Mississippi has this sort of challenge of having this thing called the Lott Institute and nobody wanting that kind of leadership and yet there's 13 million dollars in the bank so how are we going to spend it? Cornel West, who visited our campus during Black History Month, said that institutions have ambiguous legacies. The way we deal with that is to make sure that something called the Trent Lott Leadership Institute has, as part of its charter, discussions of race and democracy. So that is the conversation we are trying to have now on working with that Institute.

Patricia Mohammed: I'm thinking about one of the ways in which I look at deconstruction or excavation of the past. One of the problems with the colonial historiography is that it has depicted colonised subjects in a way which continues to entrench notions of inferiority and victimhood. My sense is that there have been sufficient people who have written, who are continuing to write in this vein, as one trajectory of history. But I would like to write a liberating history. All history is passion.

But I think to name something and to confront it in all its many sides, though painful, can be cathartic. Perhaps I don't fully understand how painful it is for other people who have gone through various experiences. For example, I am not Jewish so I may feel or interpret the Holocaust differently. Similarly, others have argued in our region that Indian indentureship was not supposed to be as bad as African slavery. It wasn't – in no way am I trying to compare two systems of enforced labour. But I am trying to go beyond who was most brutalised or victimised and bring us to another space in our present understanding of ourselves and what we now owe to each other as having all had bad experiences of one sort or another. To do this, I also have to not be blind about what happened in the past, but do so without flagging it as a stick to beat ourselves or others with.

Chela Sandoval: How to re-member the future? The great American Third World feminist Audre Lorde wrote in 1972 that sister outsiders “were never meant to survive”. But that doesn't mean outsiders aren't developing an understanding of social reality capable of bringing liberation to ourselves, to our people, to our communities, and to the larger society. When we speak, when we find vocabularies for sharing insights with one another, when we bring those recognitions and apparatuses outside our communities, we engage in a radical inter-nationalism. SWAPA, *autohistoria-teoria*, and the shaman-witness ritual are key techniques for re-membering the future.

Feedback question 4 from the audience:

I belong to a group of artists and activists and we fuse the arts with our activism to workshop, but what we find difficult sometimes is engaging those communities and engaging those peoples whose issues we are organising around – some of the folks who are directly being oppressed and held down by these very issues we are organising around. We are finding it difficult sometimes to get them to buy into the fact that this is a real situation we are dealing with and looking outside of the box of their day to day and to see what are the institutional and systematic things that are put in place. Do you have any thoughts on how we can really reach out to these people and get some buy-in from them in terms of the issues that they are dealing with that they may not have the ability to analyse?

Chela Sandoval: The answer to these questions is active witnessing – like we are doing right now. So that it's not only the most verbal, the most articulate, the ones who have been trained to speak, the ones who have *not* been relegated to silence who are speaking and defining. When everyone in the group participates, active-witnessing is easy to do. This active-witnessing component of the SWAPA experience is essential; it is what turns SWAPA into a shaman-witness ritual.

Let me give you another example. I asked you, audience as active-witnesses, to jot down one word, idea or concept that struck you as we spoke together today. This is an interesting exercise, even when you think your own word is not interesting. What we have to do to create critical exchange in communities. The energy has to move not just

within you, the performer, and within the performance itself, but it's got to move in the audience in a palpable way. My goal is to create active-witnesses. Indeed, when we become active-witnesses we become transformers, what Anzaldúa called "shaman". In the past we have witnessed in silence. We cannot relegate ourselves to silence again. We must find new ways to witness, and to speak. The keynote panelists have acted as active-witnesses/transformers/shaman for you here today, but when you witnessed for us now the roles reversed – you became the shaman and we changed in response to your perceptions. And that process, the SWAPA shaman-witness exchange is what creates a collective – a collective that speaks from the power of the nadir, and that generates a new shared language, not my language, but our language – together. The creation of such collectivities will require much love, commitment and hard work.

ISSUE 1 • April 2007

Masculinities in Motion

Photo Essay

Gabrielle Jamela Hosein



Figure 1: Tending Nets on the Wharf
All author photos 2004

Almost appearing to float on the water, a fisherman's net billows as it is being mended onshore. Net mending pays almost TT\$500¹ a day, but this man's pride is not in his earnings. It is in his hard-earned skill and the dexterity required of net mending. Here, he proudly shows me his tools, his conductor's graceful moves and the threads that link his trade to his stories about how time has changed life on the San Fernando King's Wharf.



Figure 2: Save the Last Dance for Me

¹ As at January 2007, TT\$500 is approximately US\$30.

To surrender to what is in their imagination, men will do whatever it takes to satisfy their longing. In the bars around the market, men beg, hustle “small wuk” for a few dollars or steal and sell. “Bay rum”, made from the leaves of the bay tree and used by mothers to rub on children’s fevered heads, is often the cheapest alcohol to buy. This man has earned enough to purchase the illusion of having a woman to hold in his arms and dance tenderly. The chutney song “Rum till I die” is blaring from rum shop speakers with its lament, “she tell me she doh love me and that’s the reason why...”



Figure 3: Imagining Fatherhood

Some men ‘create’ fatherhood, which then becomes a compelling motive to work. A father tries to secure temporary employment so that he can support his common-law partner and son. Yet, the boy is a neighbour’s child. His mother couldn’t look after him as well as the young couple nearby. So, without any formal “paper”, the couple has informally adopted him. The three live together in one room they built from gathered and donated materials. This union is a long Caribbean tradition of making family that defy “fictive” and “blood” categories, and rules regarding legitimacy.



Figure 4: Making Style and Money

This young man’s cart is overflowing with colourful treasure comprising almost anything a passer-by might want to possess. Indeed, it creates desire. In classic, advertising counter-logic, it says, “more is less!” “spend and save!” The shopping cart, turned travelling discount warehouse, creates an aesthetic derived from need, extravagance, promise and ambition. The vendor’s relationship to his means of transportation, choice of goods and style of layout all suggest his readiness to earn a dollar despite any obstacle and at almost any cost, but with immense character and style.



Figure 5: Patterns Make the Man

“Fancy Indian” mas bandleader Lionel Jagessar told me, “One time, if you come out in more rhinestones you is the real man. We used to come out with more beads”. Complex bead patterns on his “roach” style headpiece and jacket, and rich plumage redefine masculine status. Each bead, and then bead pattern, is sewn in place. The arresting effect of them all laid against the body trumpets the kingly claim of this “East” Indian artist in the Carnival season.



Figure 6: Bois!

In the ritualized violence of Carnival, blood – drawn, felt and noticed, ascribes royal status. When they are about to fling a blow on their opponent in the stickfighting circle or *gayelle*, men shout “bois!” French for “wood”, literally calling the stick to travel though the air. The power of manhood is a “buss head”. Gripping the eye of the entire crowd, gathered on the San Fernando Wharf repeating “bois!” to make the blow materialize, this stick made from the harder “Poui” must crack skulls and turn a man from fighter into winner.

Men’s aspirations and emotions mediate their participation in a marketplace, a Carnival “mas” camp and a fishing wharf in San Fernando, Trinidad. Each man’s narrative exposes how pride, love, livelihood, family, ambition or violence can be interwoven with masculinity. They illuminate the significance of men’s relationships to each other, to things and to what they do.



Volume 1 - . April 2007

LA SALSA NUESTRA DE CADA DÍA

Photo Essay

Ivonne María Marcial

El movimiento en el tiempo. El cuerpo en el espacio. La salsa, baile tan nuestro, celebra la relación espacial entre dos cuerpos. *Uno que lleva, una persona que se deja llevar.* Con la fotografía se extiende un segundo, para llegar a ver lo que solo la cámara puede observar. De lo que nos parece una relación armoniosa puede también intuirse un acto de violencia. Esa violencia doméstica tan nuestra, delito de agresión entre dos cuerpos. Rito que, muchas veces, es baile. *Uno que lleva, una persona que se deja llevar.*

Movement in time. Bodies in space. Salsa, a dance so akin to us, celebrates the interaction between two bodies. *One leads, another is willingly led.* Photography extends a second, succeeding in showing what only the camera can see. What resembles a harmonious relationship can also be inferred as an act of violence. So much of our own domestic violence is a crime of violence between two bodies. It is similar to a ritual, like that of dance. *One leads, another is willingly led.*



Figure 1: Salsa 1



Figure 2 – Salsa 2



Figure 3: Salsa 3



Figure 4: Salsa 4



Figure 5: Salsa 5



Volume 1. No. 1. April 2007

“A Gift from God”: Gender and the Feminist Ethnography of Water in Three Trinidadian Communities

Diana Fox¹, Heidi Savery, Ron Dalton

Abstract

Water is abundant in Trinidad, but only 14% of the population receives piped water to their homes seven days a week for 24 hours a day. The rest struggle to meet their water needs through a number of strategies ranging from simple rainwater collection tanks to locally engineered dams. This article has three objectives: 1) to report on a preliminary ethnographic study of water acquisition and management processes in three Trinidadian communities, examining the impact of gender ideologies as a key component in the decisions, work patterns, values and meanings associated with water; 2) to situate the study within the larger research project, ‘Women, Gender and Water’ organized by the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, UWI St. Augustine; 3) to explore the nexus among international, national and local water discourses examining overlap and divergences among UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), national water policy and local processes at the village level. Conclusions point to the centrality of gender

¹ I would like to extend my thanks to Rhoda Reddock, Patricia Mohammed and the staff of the CGDS, St. Augustine, for their assistance, instruction and kind support while I was a Fulbright fellow in their department from April-June 2005. I would also like to thank my co-authors, Heidi Savery and Ron Dalton as well as Wendi Murray, for their assistance in designing, implementing and analyzing the project. Last, but by no means least, we are all deeply appreciative of the warm, generous welcomes and assistance we received in all three of the study communities by members of those communities.

analysis to any policy recommendations that seek to improve the water problem in Trinidad and Tobago, arguing that effective public policy is more likely to result if policymakers understand the gendered, cultural meanings of people's behaviour.

Introduction

“As I does always say, I find it does be fair to the nation, that all of us have to buy water, because now, if you doing something very important or yuh doh have a cent, how it is yuh will get a glass of water?” (*Interview with man in Mt. D'Or, Eastern Main Road 6/13/05*)

“If we doesn't have water here and we should leave from this area and go by a stand-pipe in another area that has water, we's get in real trouble because the villagers and the people in that area does want to run you from by the stand-pipe and ting” (*Interview with woman in Jones Village, Barrackpore, 6/13/05*).

“Women control water. Because I for one doesn't like to see water runnin' and pipes runnin'. I doesn't like to see water wasted. I tell my children not to waste, to cherish” (*Interview with housewife, Plum Road community, Manzanilla, 5/26/05*).

This paper is a reflective analysis of preliminary ethnographic research conducted in three Trinidadian communities from April to June 2005. One goal is to contribute to a discussion of the intersectional relationship between water management and gender constructs in the Trinidadian context. Trinidad's mismanagement of water issues at the level of the nation-state is felt deeply in communities throughout the island, producing local, gendered discourses of water development in response to an ever-growing urgency surrounding reliable, equitable distribution and access to potable water. Such mismanagement is connected to the priorities of the state, which have inadequately addressed the development of the island's water infrastructure since the oil boom of the 1970s², the ensuing recession of the 1980s, and subsequent economic restructuring through World Bank/IMF³ neoliberal structural adjustment policies. In the 1990s, the development of water resources was subsumed within discussions about privatization oriented around profit—to the ongoing neglect of local concerns (Mycoo, 2005). As such, another goal of this article is to elucidate the articulation of local water issues as they pertain to gender, by locating them within national and international development discourses. We begin at the community level with an arrival story⁴...

² In 1974, the oil industry was nationalized, leading to a new prosperity as revenues were directed back into the economy through joint governmental and privatized ventures. The government provided small loans for business investments and infrastructure development ensued, including modernization of roads, ports, a major international airport, housing, and the importation of consumer goods, particularly electronics and cars (Klass, 1996: 53-54, 67).

³ See glossary for all acronyms at the end of this paper.

⁴ Arrival stories are standard ethnographic textual strategies employed by anthropologists to transport readers conceptually and emotionally into the world of their research communities.

...The red striped, white maxi-taxi van slowed to a stop on the Eastern Main Road at the foot of Mt. D'Or. We paid the driver and stepped out into the bright, late afternoon sunshine. "We can take a route taxi up the hill or walk," my guide said. As a graduate student from Holland, doing her doctoral research with the Centre for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS) at the St. Augustine campus of UWI, Hebe Verrest had already conducted substantial research with residents of Mt. D'Or. I was fortunate that a few days before heading back to the Netherlands, she was able to take me along on one of her last visits, to show me around and introduce me to people she had worked with. I had arrived a month earlier on a Fulbright fellowship—a cultural anthropologist with substantial fieldwork experience in Jamaica—but this was my first trip to Trinidad, and my first foray into formal fieldwork with a specific project. With my background also in environmental studies and gender studies, the director of CGDS and I had earlier decided that I would contribute to the project known as 'Women, Water and Gender'. Since Hebe had been doing research on small home businesses in the community for a number of years, and had established a solid rapport, she was well-placed to introduce me to community members to begin my own fieldwork.

Key among my first introductions was "Dorris"⁵, an organizer of women and widely respected in the community, whom I hoped would assist me, and my American research assistants Heidi Savery, Ron Dalton and Wendi Murray, in gathering together groups of women, men and children to discuss emic⁶ views of water management. We sought to understand the meanings and values attributed to water both in households and in the public domain of community spaces, such as springs, collective water storage tanks, and the open drains/gutters lining the roadside. Central to this inquiry was the role of gender in shaping, 1) a division of labour around water usage; 2) decision-making power regarding water regulation and distribution; 3) attitudes, ideals and perhaps even the metaphysical/spiritual significance of water linked to religious beliefs; and finally 4) stories or folklore surrounding water. The quotations at the head of this article, acquired from interviews in the three communities of research⁷, identify some of the ways in which villagers interpreted these topics. The emotional import penetrating just these three comments indicates the centrality of issues of fairness and morality in the control of water, socialization of children, and inter- and intra-community tensions surrounding water usage. They also offer an initial insight into the contributions of an ethnographic methodology toward understanding the layered complexity of the above topics.

I anticipated a hot, sweaty climb up Mt. D'Or, but "walking is fine" I said to Hebe, knowing that going on foot afforded me more intimate observations of my first entry into the community. Moreover, being *seen* walking in this future fieldwork site was a crucial, and literal, first step in building rapport with the residents. We began the steep climb,

⁵ This is a pseudonym. All names in quotations are pseudonyms which I use for those individuals with whom I did not secure permission to employ their real names.

⁶ The anthropological term for the insider perspective, or the anthropological examination of a society, using concepts and categories meaningful to members of that group.

⁷ Thanks to Ms. Rennette Feracho, graduate research assistant, CGDS, for her assistance in transcribing the interview tapes.

which I would repeat numerous times over the next few months, either on my own or accompanied by Heidi, Wendi, and Ron, and also equally numerous, by my 3 ½-year-old daughter. A similar process⁸ occurred over the next few months in the communities of Plum Road and Jones Village. The villages had been visited by other researchers⁹ associated with a project already underway. This initial ethnographic component was only a small part. Contact persons were already established and an appreciation of each community's struggles to obtain water acquired. Our research therefore became an extension of earlier work. Moreover, both Jones Village and Plum Road are rural communities, Plum Road located in the eastern part of the island, and Jones Village in the southwest. The addition of Mt. D'Or meant the inclusion of a peri-urban community in the highly populated northwest corridor. In addition to representing different geographic regions and population densities, the ethnic make-up of the communities differed. Plum Road is a mixed Afro-Trini and Indo-Trini (East Indian) community; Mt. D'Or is predominantly Afro-Trini with a small cluster of East Indian squatters, and Jones Village is an East Indian community. These ethnic variations¹⁰ were regarded as potentially significant, offering insight into different religious beliefs surrounding water and different political alliances, based on Trinidad's two-party, ethnically based parliamentary democracy. Thus, in addition to providing continuity with previously conducted research, the communities were selected for their geographic and demographic attributes.

The established project 'Women, Gaunter and Water' is ongoing and involves a multidisciplinary team of researchers at UWI¹¹ as well as outside consultants¹², and is coordinated by the CGDS. Its central aim is "to apply gender analysis to the sustainable management of human and natural resources to ensure adequate and equitable access to safe water for all users and uses" in Trinidad and Tobago (CGDS, "Research Project: Women, Gender and Water," p.1).

In order to achieve the two goals outlined above—1) the intersection of water management and gender dynamics in the three communities; and 2) the articulation of local with national and international discourses of water development policies—this article reports on the insights gained through a brief, but productive period of ethnographic research. We begin with a concise history of Trinidad's national water policies and their connection to UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are currently the most significant globally, defined objectives driving national water policies. Next, we present an overview of the feminist ethnographic methodology employed in the

⁸ Hebe did not accompany us to the other communities.

⁹ Jill Schneiderman, a Fulbright scholar from Vassar College, conducted research with Rhoda Reddock, director of the CGDS, in Plum Road and Jones Village (2004); and Grace Sirju-Charran of UWI also did research in Plum Road (2004). Both established the centrality of women's roles in organizing community members to improve water access.

¹⁰ The ethnic demography of Trinidad is as follows: African: 39.5 %; East Indian: 40.3 %; Mixed: 18.4%; Chinese and Caribs (indigenous): 1.2%. Afro-Trinidadians, many of whom refer to themselves as "Africans", trace their ancestry to the transatlantic slave trade, while East Indians and Chinese arrived in the 1830s as indentured servants.

¹¹ Departments of Life Sciences, Chemistry, Civil Engineering.

¹² Kairi Consultants, Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC)

data-gathering process that structured our focus on the role of gender with respect to water. A discussion of findings ensues, concluding with some reflections on the direction of future ethnographic research for the CGDS study.

Trinidad¹³ on the global stage

Within the next 20 years freshwater will become the most important strategic resource, essential for sustaining life and achieving sustainable development. Its control will be a source of power and the key to economic development, and it will be one of the root causes of socio-political stress (UN Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water, 4: 2005).

Trinidadians do not need UN experts to inform them of the socio-political stresses surrounding water. Reliable access to clean water has taken centre stage on numerous occasions in the island's history since the colonial period when the public began to rally their leaders for an improved water supply. Schneiderman and Reddock state, for example:

The Water Riots of 1903 happened because Trinidadians, especially the poor and women, feared imminent government infringement of their rights to a basic necessity of life. More than one hundred years later, in the year designated by the United Nations as the International Year of Freshwater, Trinidadians in general and women in particular, still had reason to riot regarding their water supply (2004:180).

After independence from Britain in 1962, Trinidad embraced international trends, which called for urban industrialization and modernization of infrastructure. The Water and Sewage Authority (WASA), currently the country's largest public utility, was established in 1965 to manage water resources and growing demand during this period of rapid development. In the 1970s, following the World Bank's agenda to meet "basic human needs" through expansion of the public sector, the T&T government, aided substantially by oil revenues, expanded its social services. These included increased subsidization of utilities such as water supply. It was at this time as well that WASA applied to the Inter-American Development Bank for funds to build the country's largest water dam (Mycoo, 2005). However, in the 1980s, the burden of public spending initiated major economic restructuring. Michelle Mycoo contends, "if the 1970s can be described as a period of increased public sector activity in pursuit of more equitable development, the early 1980s witnessed a reemergence of free market economics as part of an ever-changing development orthodoxy" (2005: 515).

These shifts in government approaches, informed by international development agendas, resonate locally. The belief, for example, that governmental appropriation over the use of natural resources, including both water and oil is unjust, is a theme that pervaded our interviews. One man in the village of Plum Road for instance expressed his anger that so much money was made off the oil—which, he asserted, comes from the land that

¹³ Because our ethnographic study focused on conditions in Trinidad, not Trinidad and Tobago the two-island republic, references will generally refer to Trinidad, except when discussing national policies and directions, when there will be references to Trinidad and Tobago. All references to the national government include by definition Trinidad and Tobago.

supposedly belongs to all Trinis—but the people see no return. He was particularly perturbed by the prospect of water privatization, stating that it “is a waste of time; its only purpose is for someone to make money. We are a rich country and the people do not receive any benefits.” He, along with others, contended that economic development policies have largely not considered the pressing needs of the majority.

The current global movement to privatize water focuses on large profits through high prices, which ultimately denies the poor their expressed right to the most necessary substance for life, what many people described to us as “a gift from God”. Our case study material does not substantiate the underlying premise of privatization, which views the public sector as inefficient and under-resourced while the private sector is capable of bringing greater efficiency through competition in water provisioning (Mycoo, 2005, see also Elmendorf and Isely, 1983). Instead, Trinidad’s historical flirtation with water privatization¹⁴ combined with its current, persistent inefficiencies leads local social actors to feel isolated and alienated from the very same politics that claim to protect them and improve their standard of living.

On the international stage, political strategies around water have been proffered most compellingly through the UN’s Millennium Development Goals, specifically goal number 7, to “ensure environmental sustainability”. Three targets are associated with this goal including: (1) to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse loss of environmental resources; (2) to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water; and (3) to achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020.

Achieving these targets and other MDGs rests on intergovernmental cooperation and the involvement of a wide array of actors including academics, NGOs, international donors and of course UN agencies. The effort is a global one, “in the service of a great global cause... a microcosm of a larger truth: achieving the Millennium Development Goals will require a global partnership suitable for an interconnected world. The world truly shares a common fate (www.millenniumproject.org/reports)” Yet, as Taylor and Buttel contend (2006), global environmental discourse has emphasized peoples’ common interests to the exclusion of “differentiated social groups and nations having different interests in causing and alleviating environmental problems” (2006: 408). The decisions rendered by the government of Trinidad and Tobago engendering community disaffection are linked to mandates derived from the global discourse, emphasizing commonalities over important differences. According to Taylor and Buttel this discourse:

¹⁴ In the 1990s, the government of Trinidad and Tobago was convinced by arguments for privatization that were taking place on the global stage, encouraged by international agencies such as the , the World Bank and the IMF. The country required a World Bank loan in 1994 to assist WASA with wide-spread emergency repairs. The move to privatization occurred in 1996 in a contract with the British company Severn Trent that drew up the terms of the agreement. This followed the government’s 1994 decision to delegate WASA’s responsibilities in an effort to improve efficiency. However, the contract ended three years later and was not renewed as the result of protests organized by the National Union of Government and Feunderated Workers (NUGFW). Rather than improving economic viability, the deficit increased (press release of Feb. 18, 2006 “Leading Caribbean trade union leader visits UK”, www.wdm.org).

...privileges two allied views of politics—the moral and the technocratic...emphasizing remedial environmental efforts...In technocratic formulations, objective, scientific and (typically) quantitative analyses are employed to identify the policies that society...needs in order to restore order or ensure its sustainability or survival—policies to which individuals, citizens and countries would then submit...Moral formations reject coercion and rely on each individual making the change needed to maintain valued social or natural qualities of life. Yet, in many senses the moral and technocratic are allied. The solutions appeal to common, differentiated interests as a corrective to corrupt, self-servicing, naïve or scientifically ignorant governance...*In short, the global society needs management to achieve control* (ibid: 408, 411, emphasis added).

An argument can be made that the government of Trinidad and Tobago, with respect to its water policies, has followed this global society model since independence, to the neglect of varied, localized, gendered perspectives. The model continues today with pursuit of the MDGs, embracing, rather critically it appears, the contradictory features of this international discourse. In so doing, the government of Trinidad and Tobago has limited its capacity to address the problems of distribution, delivery efficiency, and sustainable use in ways that encompass the complexities of distinct communities in their particular environmental settings.

In order to clarify the shortcomings of Trinidad's present water policy, it is useful to explore in greater depth the contradictions pervading the MDGs, and the UN's conceptualization of shared requirements for managing water resources. In 2003 the Johannesburg Implementation Plan declared 2005-2015 the International Decade for Action,¹⁵ outlining, among others, three agendas: 1) *community control of water planning* where women are integrated into central roles from village level water boards to Water Ministers; 2) *policies that are both sustainable and equitable*, so that water distribution is not interrupted by class/race/ethnic/gender discrimination; and 3) *private sector water development* where there is competition for corporate control over water facilities—albeit with an emphasis on corporate accountability. While the first two agendas are closely linked, the third is starkly contradictory. According to the Water for the People Network (WPN)¹⁶,

Privatization grossly violates the people's human right to water because it distorts the provision of water supply and sanitation as a basic service and regards water just like any other commodity that corporations can exploit and profit from. This distortion results in prohibitive user fees and other charges that poor households could not afford (Independent Media Centre (IMC) 9/14/2005).

Moreover, a report entitled 'Gender, Water and Sanitation' prepared by the Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water Sub-program of the UN Water and Interagency Network on Women and Gender explains that the tension between the right to water and the privatization of water services mainly affects women and girls as primary water collectors, "when corporate profit motives supersede attention to human needs and rights" (2005: 10). Ironically, a UN agency task force involved in the pursuit of the

¹⁵ The Decade was entitled 'Water for Life'

¹⁶ An alliance of NGOs and grassroots-based groups campaigning for people's control over water services and resources

MDGs is itself critical of one of the central components of the Water for Life Decade for Action.

Yet, rather than being atypical or a mere incongruent oversight, these contrasting agendas, according to the WPN, are part and parcel of “the promotion of the MDGs of the same neoliberal policies such as privatization that have, in the first place, aggravated chronic global poverty and severe inequity” (IMC 9/14/2005). Christa Wichterlic, author of *The Globalized Woman: Reports from a Future of Inequality*, expresses a similar view. She writes, “the global age...is a contradictory and desynchronized process that pulls in different directions at once...women are integrated into the economy and the world market, but at the same time are immediately re-marginalized (1998: x). Wichterlic further explains that neoliberal economic policies collide with “the household economy and reproduction that are still the centre of life for most women” (ibid: xi), including women in Trinidad.

The inclusion of women as a pivotal factor of the Decade for Action is based on recognition of their knowledge of water resources and community-level contributions to local water projects. Around the world, women are primarily involved in cleaning, sanitation, and family health, as well as children’s education around water access and conservation. As a result, women are usually highly knowledgeable about water sources, their quality, reliability, and any restrictions to their use. Thus it is reasoned, women’s involvement at multiple levels in the design of water distribution and management plans will ease their access to water by producing an efficient, regular supply close to home. This in turn will affect women by generating greater self-esteem, reducing their exposure to the threat of violence¹⁷ and health hazards, and expand time for education, childcare, and other activities, all of which improve women’s life conditions. Moreover, according to the report by the UN Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water, where the above contributions of women are outlined, the MDGs are closely related, so that pursuit of MDG No. 7, “to ensure environmental sustainability,” is closely linked to MDG No. 3, “to promote gender equality and empower women” (<http://www..org/millenniumgoals/>).

Let us now examine how the MDGs have been incorporated into the water policies of the government of Trinidad and Tobago (including WASA). Importantly, a woman, the Honourable Pennelope Beckles¹⁸, currently heads the Ministry of Public Utilities and Environment, and women head other ministerial positions¹⁹ as well—perhaps reflecting a small but growing worldwide trend.²⁰ Their appointments contain the potential to

¹⁷ Women and girls who take long treks daily and at night to fetch water are exposed and vulnerable to the threat of rape and molestation.

¹⁸ An effort was made to gather the opinion of MP Beckles prior to the completion of this article, via telephone and e-mail exchange. However, the email inquiry about the role of gender equity in the government’s water plans was not returned prior to publication date.

¹⁹ The Honourable Mrs. Dianne Seukeran MP, Ministry of Social Development; the Honourable Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis MP, Ministry of Planning & Development; the Honorable Senator Mrs. Joan Yuille-Williams MP, and the Honourable Mrs. Eudine Job-Davis MP, Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs.

²⁰ The Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water Sub-program of the Water and the Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) note the following in a 2005 report: “An interesting

precipitate gender-oriented changes in WASA. Nonetheless, gender is presently not explicitly mainstreamed into WASA's national water development plans, in spite of the government's proclaimed objective to meet the MDGs of water safety and environmental sustainability. In her presentation at the Fourth World Water forum in Mexico City in March 2006, Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment Penelope Beckles stated:

Trinidad and Tobago, a small developing state with a population estimated at 1.3 million, has implemented a program of action, which targets improvements in water supply and sanitation services, security of food supplies, protection of ecosystems, prudent management of water resources policy and legislative development and institutional reform and capacity building. This program of action flows out of a vision for developed country status by the year 2020. It incorporates a very broad and comprehensive strategy for development involving all sectors of our national landscape. Our vision for development is placed within the framework of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The program of action relating to water sector issues is largely directed by Targets 1 and 2 of MDG No. 7 (3/22/06, p. 1, 2).

In her ensuing discussion of the institutional mechanisms to achieve these targets, there is no mention of gender equity.

A year earlier, during the thirteenth session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in New York, Ms. Beckles stated the government's position, identifying the authorization of a new wastewater treatment plant among other growth initiatives which would contribute to the achievement of MDG No. 7. These included: a) developing plans to integrate water, wastewater and integrated solid waste management; b) launching a national reforestation and watershed rehabilitation programme to improve the protection of freshwater sources; c) a community-based programme for the protection and enhancement of the environment; and d) the implementation of a US\$200 million programme to improve the delivery of water (Grimes, 2005). Although Beckles highlighted community involvement, environmental sustainability and efficient delivery of water as part of the agenda, again gender equity was not explicitly discussed. It thus appears that the two allied views of politics highlighted by Taylor and Buttel, and the contradictory agendas of community empowerment and privatization, are critically cluttered together in Trinidad and Tobago's water plans.²¹ Moreover, there is no mention of MDG No. 3 and its links to goal No. 7.

trend which may provide an impetus to gender and water programmes is the recent increase in the number of women who have been appointed as water and environment ministers. As of mid-2005, there were about 40 women ministers of water or the environment, representing every region and level of development in the world. The recently elected chair of the African Ministerial Council on Water (AMCOW) is Maria Mutagamba, Minister of Water, Lands and Environment of Uganda. This is a concrete illustration of gender mainstreaming; these ministers constitute the critical mass needed to get gender integrated into water and sanitation policies and programmes (p. 1)."

²¹ The President General of the National Union of Government and Feunderated Workers (NUGFW), Mr Robert Guiseppi, visited the UK as the guest of the World Development Movement to warn about the dangers of privatization in the Caribbean related to the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), an international trade agreement that could undermine public services globally. NUGFW, the largest union in Trinidad and Tobago with about 20,000 members, organizes throughout the public sector, campaigning

Additionally, in a search of WASA's website²², the terms 'gender' and 'gender equity' are also absent; nor are they incorporated into any discussions of future plans.²³ Instead, CEO Errol Grimes reports in the company's future plans, 'Look into the Future':

In our thrust forward, we will be considering ways to expand our partnership with the private sector and to collaborate more with our customers and the trade ions whom we recognise as key stakeholders. We want to expand our reach locally, regionally and globally and have already signed a mutual assistance agreement with the Public Utilities Board of Singapore, a company recognised as the world-class model in wastewater management and water recycling.

Moreover, in spite of WASA's stated intentions to collaborate more with customers, there appears to be a rather complacent view of community water conditions, adopted both by the UN Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water and by the government of Trinidad and Tobago. As recently as 2005, the Task Force reported:

In Trinidad and Tobago, most of the community water projects have been run by women, *and these projects have been working very well*, according to the Water Development Division of the Ministry of Food Production and Maritime Resources" (Background Paper No. 2 DESA/DSD/2005/2, emphasis added).²⁴

The problems of such a superficial summary are many. The statement is hardly expressive of inequalities at the community level, manifested in a traditional gender division of labour where women assume inordinate work burdens. Nor does it adequately describe the varying experiences of most communities with their water projects, as our study has clarified. The statement ignores fluctuations in successes, recent changes in local initiatives which have yet to be played out, and communities where such organizing is nonexistent. The three communities included in this preliminary ethnographic study represent examples of each of these constraints, and will be elaborated below in sections devoted to each. It is clear from the above discussion that comparative, multi-site ethnography of Trinidadian communities is necessary to produce the kind of layered insights required to craft effective public policy, and to underscore glaring inconsistencies.

The CGDS study and Trinidad's water distribution troubles

The contours of Trinidad's water problem, community activism around it, and its solutions are all within the purviews of the CGDS project 'Women, Gender and Water'. Thus, to pursue the second goal of this article, to examine the intersectional relationship between water management and gender constructs in the Trinidadian context, the

against privatization of water and most recently, broadcasting (press release: "Leading Caribbean trade union leader visits UK", February 18, 2006 (www.wdm.org.uk/news/presrel/current/guiseppivisit.htm)).

²² www.wasa.gov.tt

²³ However, it should be noted that as of February 1, 2006 WASA's board of commissioners includes four women: Ms. Charmaine Caballero, Ms. Cheryl Guide, Ms. Helen Drayton and Ms. Margaret Rose

²⁴ Renamed the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources

following segment offers a summary of Trinidad's predicament with respect to water availability and distribution, drawing from the project's first stage of geological and case study research (Schneiderman and Reddock 2004; Sirju-Charran 2004). Schneiderman and Reddock's article "Water, women and community in Trinidad, West Indies" (2004) is devoted to an in-depth examination of the current water supply predicament, its historical antecedents and community efforts to meet their water supply needs. Some of their findings will be concisely reiterated here.

Trinidad does not have a shortage of water. Instead, its existing resources are poorly managed so that water deficits persist, aggravated by a five-month dry season, and rapid deforestation. The country obtains 31% of its potable water from tapping groundwater and 69% from surface water drawn from three reservoirs. Water use is distributed among domestic purposes (one-third); industrial purposes (one-fifth) and for irrigated agriculture (less than one-twentieth). Approximately 50% of the island's water supply is accounted for:

Examples of accounted-for water losses include illegal connections, accounting procedure errors, reservoir seepage and leakage, reservoir overflow, leaks, theft and evaporation...the high percentage of accounted-for water in Trinidad and Tobago suggests problems with the water supply infrastructure and a lack of efficient management of WASA (*ibid*: 181).

As a result, even though most Trinidadian households are connected to pipe-borne water, supplies are regularly interrupted. In December 2005, according to Minister Beckles, "the level of the population receiving a 24/7 (interrupted) water supply...stood at 25%" (2006: 2). This represents a marked improvement from 2003, at which time only 14% of the population received an interrupted supply (Sirju-Charran, 2004: 4).

Still, because 75% of the population receives an interrupted supply, communities across the island have engaged a range of strategies to meet their water needs, but they do not do so easily or without significant costs, both economic and social. People are frustrated with "the loss of productive time spent carrying water; fear for the safety of people—especially women and children—who must fetch water late at night; and concern for children, elderly and disabled people who had to fetch water from a standpipe and transport it up a steep hill (*ibid*: 185).

Methodology: Feminist Ethnography

We adopted a feminist ethnographic analysis to deepen understanding of local configurations of larger gender patterns distilled in water management practices. We examined the ways in which behaviours surrounding the access, distribution and use of water both embed gender ideologies reinforced through the politico-economic policies of the nation-state and offer resistance to them. The application of feminist theory in research methodology earths these configurations. Listening to women's perspectives, for example, and weighing their insights alongside those of men privileges "the images and meanings given...by social actors as they construct their worldviews and understand themselves as gendered individuals" (Barrow, 1998: 344). This acknowledgement takes

the so-called objectivism of logical positivism to task, packing cultural interests and assumptions²⁵ that infuse this system of inquiry. The supposition that value-free procedures guide research is erroneous—an insight that has stood at the centre of feminist epistemology for at least two decades. Yet, as Harding has clearly stated in her critique of masculinist science,

I am not proposing that humankind would benefit from renouncing attempts to describe, explain, and understand the regularities, underlying causal tendencies, and meanings of the natural and social worlds just because the sciences we have are androcentric. I am seeking an end to androcentrism, not to systematic inquiry (1986: 10).

Because the feminist ethnographic analysis we applied shares this supposition, it is not a detour but rather a pivotal component of this article's thesis, to outline how systematic ethnography proceeds, guided by the tenets of feminist theory.

An initial insight is that systematic analysis itself is not devoid of social processes (ibid: 50). Social processes occur in the moment of doing research, not only as historical and cultural tropes impacting topics of study, such as gender and water. Structured procedures, for example, are frequently interrupted and redirected by anticipated events and insights, so that an unbroken, seamless operationalization of a conceptual process is exceedingly rare in ethnographic inquiry. The 'system' of ethnographic feminist methodology thereby *incorporates* flexibility so that recognition and subsequent inclusion of the foreseen and expected is regarded not as detractions from or errors in the process of inquiry, but rather as reflections of social processes embedded within inquiry.

A sudden downpour, for example, which occurred during the group interview with women in the community centre of Mt. D'Or battered the aluminium roof and drowned out all possibility of further discussion for its duration. The startling deluge occurred as we were discussing differences in water management practices during the rainy season, just commencing in Trinidad. The rain injected a moment of ironic humour. Standing in front of a semi-circle of women, we paused in our questioning, shrugging our shoulders in a "What can you do?" gesture, while many of the women held up their hands, gesturing to the outdoors and laughing as if nature herself and the prescient timing of the powers that be could be no better illustrator of the fact of full water storage tanks during this season. Instead of continuing with the impossible task of a soggy discussion, we switched the steps of the data collection process around, and began to pass out surveys, only returning to group discussion once the rains had ended.

Now, our conversations were influenced by the ideas that the women had introduced into the questionnaire. Since each of the researchers talked with individual women, helping those who had questions about the surveys, their responses to the group questions were more specific, informed by their answers to their individuated, household and family situations that they had just expounded on in the survey. Also, the feeling in the room had changed. It was more relaxed and intimate. When the group broke up, a few women

²⁵ See, for example, (1) *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* by Emily Martin, 1992. Boston: Beacon Press; (2) *The Science Question in Feminism* by Sandra Harding, 1986. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

stayed behind to talk to us, their demeanour less formal and open. Other examples of the *ad hoc* in the course of this research abound; some of their tales will be told as the story of this research project folds. Suffice to say, they are not aberrations, but part of the social process of ethnographic research, which feminist analysis embraces.

Implications for the present study

Equipped with this methodological toolkit, we developed an approach that built on many of the above insights. Rhoda Reddock, director of CGDS, assigned the three selected communities to us for the demographic and geographic reasons outlined at the start of this article, and because Plum Road and Jones Village were part of the initial component of the study. For consistency, the research team planned to be in each community for three days at minimum. During this time, and with the assistance of local community leaders and representatives, we organized residents into four study groups—men, women, households and schoolchildren. We held group discussions and administered individual surveys with separate groups of men and women to compare and contrast their perspectives regarding the value and meaning of water. We also elicited areas of distinction between the two, sharing when possible, the views of women with men and vice versa after they had supplied us with their initial responses. Sometimes this led to disagreements, other times concurrence. Following the assumptions of under-based research, we believed that separate groups of men and women would be more likely to speak openly and honestly about the other group. Women in particular would be less likely to be critical of men in their presence. In addition, we scheduled visits to local schools to talk with the children in the hopes of understanding what values and meanings they may have learned at home, at school and in the community.

Two or three researchers led group discussions on specific categories of ideas related to water as a necessity of life; as a source of stress and worry; as a pollutant and possible source of illness; as it is used in religious activities or rituals; as it is portrayed in folklore and myth; and as a commodity. We then stimulated discussion regarding ideas and beliefs on related topics with the conversation ideally taking on a life of its own. We recorded these sessions with permission and they were later transcribed by a research assistant at CGDS and added to project documentation. Additional researchers took extensive notes both of the discussion and on the general atmosphere, location, personal appearances, body language, expression, and group interaction. Each discussion group and session included photographs of participants, again with permission, one for the community and one for research purposes.

Next, we distributed survey questionnaires which included both multiple choice and open-ended questions allowing for more individualized data, and to acquire a large amount of information in a short period of time. Although surveys were also designed to collect demographic information on age, sex, religion and ethnicity, we inquired about beliefs and attitudes toward water in general and practices involving its acquisition and use. During further discussion and in working one on one, we were able to move beyond the limitations of short answer, yes/no and multiple-choice questions. The survey questionnaires for children were appropriately modified.

We also aimed to involve a sample of households via ‘door-to-door’ discussion and distribution of survey questionnaires to heads of households. Researchers worked in pairs, accompanied by a community representative whenever possible. This activity was planned for the evenings between the hours of three to six, canvassing the community in an attempt to draw a broad cross-section of household members. For the most part, we were able to follow the planned research methodology in each community with only a few minor adjustments.

Findings and the ethnographic process

With intermittent access to water in Trinidadian communities, many individuals as well as organized groups headed by women have assumed responsibility for their own water supply. By researching the strategies employed to obtain water by individuals and groups, their views about those strategies as well as feelings of powerlessness and frustration, the research revealed a variety of inequalities relating to under and power. These included the centrality of the gendered division of labour where women and children are the gatekeepers of household water conservation, related to the needs of household maintenance and social reproduction of prescribed gender roles. However, women’s roles, while critical in the limited context of water supply issues, are not in and of themselves transformative of women’s social status within their households and communities.

Although individual women are leaders of community organizations connected to water activism, and they are noted in their communities for their influence, their specific circumstances have not had a ripple effect in doing a traditional division of labour where the burden of household work pertaining to water falls on women. This observation reflects longstanding feminist insights that the historical role of individual women in positions of power and leadership is not sufficient to transform gender systems (see Langley and Fox 1998). Systemic inequalities must be accompanied by system-wide change to do the colliding and mutually reinforcing intersections between gender systems and politico-economic systems. Hence, the incorporation of MDG No. 3 into Trinidad and Tobago’s water agenda is critical.

The descriptive analyses of the communities below will highlight the gendered division of labour in relation to water availability and strategies for conservation. As earlier stated, the variations in communities with respect to their history and current involvement with WASA have shaped their differential access to water, and affect the nature of community water projects and their relative success. It will also become clear that *perceptions and meaning of water are shaped in relation to labour itself*, reproducing and informing persistent ideologies of gender inequality. At the same time, resistance to these ideologies are noted and recognized as potential points of intervention for the implementation of water policies that reflect the gender mainstreaming objectives of the international discourse in the Trinidadian context.

Mt. D'Or

Mt. D'Or is a peri-urban community about five kilometres east of Trinidad's capital, Port of Spain. Of the communities visited during this study, Mt. D'Or has had the most experience with WASA, and it was the only community without a women's group organized to pursue regular, efficient water availability. Public water is piped into the community, up fairly steep grades yet never reaching homes built at higher elevations due to the inadequacy of a pump, installed in the mid-1990s by WASA, located on a flat area in the centre of the community shops, below the government primary school. A constant flow of clean, fresh water from a local spring runs out of a rusted pipe from a condemned dam, lost to the gutters. WASA has done nothing to restore the dam destroyed in a flood over a decade ago, to its prior condition, and residents have not organized to bring this about. For this reason, and others, both men and women expressed enormous frustration toward WASA. One area of general concern, for instance, was a sense of fairness attributed to pricing regulations:

Woman 1: "Lots of people were complaining...like say two persons live in a house, they pay the same amount of water rate for the year as ten persons living in a house. Now that doesn't work."

Woman 2: "That's what people were complaining about. Because if you pay like \$500 for the year for water rate, right, and that person is just one person, he has to pay the same \$500 as the ten persons that use water."

In addition, because of arbitrary cut-offs, or the inability of the pump to transport water to hillside homes, community members, mostly women and children we learned, "tote" water for household cleaning. Climbing up the hill, carrying two or more large plastic canisters, they collect water from the rusted pipe emitting spring water for non-consumption, household use. Drinking water is collected and consumed treated from the spring above the pipe, or in household water collection tanks that fill up with rainwater draining from rooftops. In addition, people gather around the spring waiting for their turn to "shower" under it or to wash clothes. One day when we visited, two young men took turns soaping up and rinsing off under the pipe, while a couple waited their turn, perched together on a large rock, socializing and smoking. These apparent scenes of "leisure" do not undercut the explicit sense of outrage that is apparent in the above statements. They reflect an indignation about water-pricing policies that emerges out of a sense of injustice. *Feelings of injustice*, brought forth through the ethnographic method, are critical features of resistant ideologies, and signify potential openings for the inclusion of local perspectives in national policies. Such feelings emerged (in all communities) from women about their work burdens; from girls at the primary school when boys say that "washing wares and clothes is for girls"; and from men and women about pricing, water bills, irregular supply and other topics that will be enumerated in this section.

In addition to what we were told, we also observed the division of labour: we saw only women in Mt. D'Or washing clothes publicly—and watching children—in the open drains running alongside the road, through which the spring water passes, as it descends.

One woman sat right in the middle of the drain in a section near to the spring, scrubbing a large pile of laundry, while keeping an eye on at least four children who were playing and splashing in the water around her. We saw two boys approach the rusty pipe with plastic buckets. “What are those for?” I (Diana Fox) asked. “For washing,” one replied. “Are you bringing them home?” DF continued. “Yes,” said another, “to my mother.” Men collect bucketsful from these drains to wash their cars or mix cement for household repairs. Initially and for a few hundred yards downward, the water looks clear and relatively clean—while further down near the Eastern Main Road the water is filthy, brown and filled with garbage.

Residents of Mt. D’Or work and shop both in the community and in surrounding towns; there is a marked shift downward in the income scale as one climbs higher—apparent in the size of homes and yards, types of cars parked in driveways, construction materials and upkeep of properties. Because Mt. D’Or was a bus ride away from our home and the university, we came here most frequently, establishing more of a presence than in either of the other two villages. Work here resembled the early phases of long-term, in-depth fieldwork with the establishment of rapport, building networks of informants, and generating insight into the nature of community life, so that the particular problem at hand could be couched within a broader context. This is crucial to anthropology’s notion of holism—the interconnectedness of peoples’ practices, beliefs, values and norms and the relationship among social, economic, subsistence and other patterns of daily life. In the remaining portion of this section, we convey a sense of these anthropological characteristics, along with the feminist ethnographic methodologies of both centring gender and acknowledging the impromptu.

Each time we walked up the hill to Mt. D’Or we were struck by the sense of community that engulfed us the higher we went: neighbours talking, women clasping hands, “Hello darling,” they said, waving and smiling; car horns honked as drivers waved at passers-by. As we approached the community centre, we passed a piece of land housing a church, a small grocery store and a few smaller shops, typical of the kinds of mini-markets one finds throughout Trinidad, a salesperson standing behind a high counter—sometimes encased behind a window of iron bars—selling drinks, bread, cell phone cards, cigarettes, Stag beer, and the like. Groups of men and one or two women clustered outside these shops ‘liming’²⁶; they nodded and waved as we passed by, making our way to the community centre where we would hold our group interviews.

All of us, white Americans, stood out in this predominantly Afro-Trini population,²⁷ and were therefore questioned about our presence there. “We’re asking residents about water issues,” we invariably said, and, invariably, people had something to say, mostly about

²⁶ To ‘lime’ is a term found throughout the southern Caribbean for various forms of socializing.

²⁷ ‘African’ is one of the terms for the two major ethnic groups in Trinidad, the other being ‘East Indian’, marking significant ethnic cultural identities and political alliances common to the southern Caribbean. These divides are a dominant source of national concern in Trinidad, and much has been written on the topic; however, this article, while making note of ethnicity, does not examine or problematize it. In Mt. D’Or, the population is predominantly African although a group of poorer East Indian residents have established homes through squatting at the far end of the community. An East Indian family owns the main grocery store.

how water is wasted, seen dripping from pipes, and how, the farther up one goes into the hills, the more difficult it is to attain water. For the ethnographer, these ad hoc conversations become data, a gauge of the saliency of a topic. Water clearly was on people's minds and on a few occasions passing conversations led to more in-depth ones, or offers to assist, as was the case of the man who worked for an oil company, whom we frequently passed. He explained that the community contains many springs, not just the one at the top of the road, as we had assumed.

As anthropologists immerse themselves in people's daily lives, some individuals more than others will become interested in our presence and our work. One such man, a bamboo weaver crafting furniture, lamps, wine holders and other items out of bamboo fibres, took on this role. This young man was also connected to Hebe, the graduate student from the Netherlands, and, when she went home, transferred his attentions to us. I (Diana Fox) became the recipient of medical advice and frequent phone calls; in exchange for whatever prestige he acquired in being associated with us (on a few occasions both men and women called out to him, teasing him about his "American friends"). He organized the group of men whom we interviewed, took us on a tour of the main spring, introduced us to people along the way, and invited us to his home to show us his work-space. He also explained important insights into community life, such as the fact that it is small enough so that everyone knows who everyone else is, and, when children become adults, many of them remain, establishing their own households. For the ethnographer, this is all crucial information, in supplying a context and texture to community life. For the applied anthropologist, who seeks to use ethnographic data toward community-based projects that are deemed helpful by residents themselves, it provides valuable insights into potential areas of difficulty as well as ease.

On the evening of our group interview with men, for instance, we waited outside the community centre for an hour, and nobody arrived, except the community organizer, Dorris, who shook her head, and explained that this was typical of men; it's hard to get them involved in community work, she said. Just then, the bamboo weaver passed by and joined the conversation. A big debate ensued about how to draw men together for the interview. At first he encouraged us to bring beer, but Dorris said this would give the wrong message—it wasn't a party, and besides, we didn't want to encourage drinking. We finally settled on pastries, and our bamboo weaver friend personally assured us that he would gather some men for us to talk to the next evening. True to his word, a small group of four did appear, and we had a very productive discussion. All were his friends, and one, a father with his young son, did not live in Mt. D'Or, but happened to be on a social visit.

In the middle of it, a woman arrived, a jocular, outspoken taxi driver (an unusual occupation for a woman). She had driven us up and down the hill quite a few times, and quickly inserted herself into the conversation. While our methodology had underscored the importance of separate male and female groups, the men welcomed this woman, perhaps because she straddled a liminal line, working in a male world. Tellingly, another woman, the girlfriend of one of the men in the group, had seated herself outside our circle; the group did not invite her in, and when we extended an invitation to her, she

declined. Our taxi driver, however, engaged the men in a vigorous debate about the responsibilities of men and women in household water use and conservation:

Diana Fox: “What are the ways that men use water?”
 Man 1: “Men use water to plant, use toilet facilities, bathe, washing clothes, cooking...”
 DF: “Men use water for cooking and washing clothes? Is this true for men who live by themselves or men who live with women too?”
 Man 1: “Women too. Some do mind washing clothes...I have an uncle who wash all his clothes and he married over thirty years. And is not because his wife don’t want to do it—he just enjoy doing it.”
 DF: “Do you think that women wash more than men do?”
 Men: “Yes—of course” (all nodded).
 Man 1: “Well, really and truly, women do more cleaning, you could say well, 65%.”
 Man 2: “No, at least about 75% or 80% of women do the cleaning and you’ll find that 15-20% men clean the house...now and then.”
 Man 3: “Men will wash women clothes if their wife sick or something, right, they’ll wash the children...if she get back better...” (They all laugh).
 Later in the conversation, Ron Dalton joins Diana in asking the questions.
 RD: “Let’s say all the men and all the women had the same pile of money and they’re leading their lives like they do every day. Who is going to spend the most money on water?”
 Man 1: “Men.”
 Man 2: “Well they does really say women does shampoo they hair...”
 Woman (taxi driver): [Shaking head, speaking loudly] Women are more concerned than men. It come like going to the market. We will walk all around to save a five cents and a man will say that’s enough.”
 DF: “So even if women use water more than men, then women still will not pay—(cut off)”
 Woman: “Men waste water. I know big men who go by the pipe and just have this pipe running and running and they wouldn’t turn it off.”
 [Later in the conversation]
 DF: “Even though people have pipes in their houses, that doesn’t mean they’re getting water?”
 Man 1: “That’s right. And if they get it, it will be once...plenty people do but not on an often basis. People living on top of the hill, they will get water once a week, sometimes they get it twice, sometimes they get water four times a week, sometimes two weeks they ain’t get none.”
 Woman: “People still waste water. People don’t value water—they lookin’ to value water when it’s not there.”

This conversation underscores the differences in opinion that men and women have about who is responsible for conservation. Significantly, the sole woman participant links women’s protection of water resources to other household conservation roles—food purchases. But she also emphasizes the extra burden of work that this concern entails, “We will walk around to save five cents...” Additionally, when Man 1 discusses the irregularity of obtaining pipe-borne water, implicit is the understanding that women and children will be toting water to compensate for this lack. Thus, his frustration with dry pipes is shared, but the work burden is not.

Another problem is the reliability of water distribution from the WASA ‘water truck’ delivered to households when piped water is cut off by WASA itself (interview, Mt. D’Or, 5/19/05). Calling WASA to report a problem doesn’t ensure a speedy delivery,

though, and while residents who are not hooked up to pipes can also receive water, they must pay a fee. Those who already have pipe hook-ups get billed for this delivery in their regular water bill—something which many in all communities expressed as fair since they should have received water anyway.



Figure 1: Mt. D'Or Community Centre
All author photos 2005

Past the shops, one encounters the community centre, a long, rectangular, white building where we held our group discussions. Behind it is a large green space easily the size of a few American football fields, where you can find a group of men playing football (as the rest of the world knows it). To the right, basketball courts contained people of all ages shooting ball.

In the distance, on a hill, sits the large, rod, concrete water storage tank, recently covered because mischievous children had hopped over the fence encasing the tank and dived in. A child had drowned, we learned. Back in the field, we noticed that vegetable crops lined its borders and we were told that people often 'wet' their plants with water previously collected for bathing or 'washing wares' (dishes). Walking farther up, we approached the Mt. D'Or Government Primary School, but not before passing the fenced-in water pump, which, notably, was leaking.

Mt. D'Or is a community with a wellspring of natural resources, and the community clearly would like to harness them more efficiently to supplement existing water supplies. We regularly heard comments about the tapped potential of the various springs, and people also bemoaned the loss of spring water to the gutters. At the same time, women told us that things are better now, with pipe-borne water, however irregular it is. They tell their children stories about waiting every morning in long lines at the standpipe. One of the researchers asked, "Is community spirit diminished now that you don't wait together for water?" to which one woman responded that fights often broke out while waiting in line, and people's sense of irritation undermined any sense of togetherness. The women said that they wanted their children to understand that however hard it is now, things are better, and since they got better, they can continue to improve. Here again is a sense of resistance against apathy, as women endow their children with a sense of social responsibility in seeking to live a dignified life by obtaining the most basic of necessities.

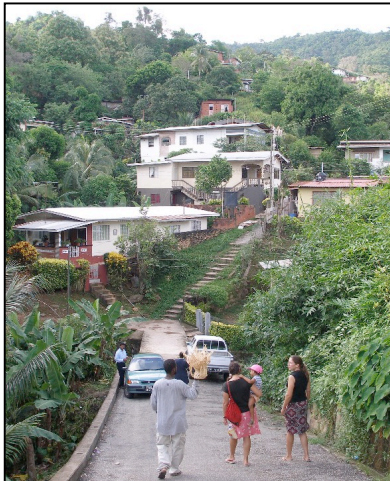


Fig.2 – Walking in the community



Fig.3 – The Mt. D’Or Community Water Tank



Fig.4 Young man showering with water from a spring-fed rusted pipe

It is important not to overlook this fact: children are growing up with a sense of the value of civic involvement, and that even with relative improvement the understanding of what is rightfully theirs persists. In seeking “to generate civic responsibility for the stewardship of resources” as outlined in the MDGs, and reiterated in Penelope Beckles’ address to the UN, the government of Trinidad and Tobago should be aware that this already exists in many communities. With more than a decade of experience with WASA, Mt. D’Or residents are in a position to evaluate the improvements in water access and also the problems associated with government-distributed pipe-borne water. Their knowledge should be tapped.

Plum Road

Based on its commitment to an agenda of ‘Water for All by 2000’, WASA has made its way into communities around the island, connecting some for the first time to a public water supply (Sirju-Charran et al, 2004). These new connections reinforce the obvious: communities are not encapsulated entities, so that even when local initiatives appear to be working well, outside forces—WASA as a case in point—may not agree. In the example of Plum Road, where women’s involvement has been instrumental in achieving improved conditions at the local level, their exclusion from top-level positions limits their ability to negotiate with WASA both within and across communities.



Fig.5 View from Plum Road

The village of Plum Road is a suburban community located near the eastern-most part of the Central Range, on the periphery of the town of Plum Mitan. Moderate to steep slopes are present with housing and shops situated primarily along or just off Plum Road. Most of the developed area is densely forested and a group of Howler monkeys still reside in the forest and can be heard loudly reporting approaching rainstorms. Several natural springs are present in or near the village and one particular spring has been dammed and used to supply water to the community.

As our study team learned, WASA connections have been made in Plum Road since 2004, because of requests made by an apparent majority of residents. However, *no claims of belonging to that majority* came from our interlocutors. Our host, Miss Rose, who has stood at the centre of community management initiatives in the maintenance of a local dam, said, regarding WASA's entry into the community: "Enough people from the community wanted WASA—and everyone has a right to water—so WASA came." Since not one person claimed to be part of the group agitating for government pipes, could WASA's entry represent an example of centralization of authority in resource management asserting itself over residents' own interests? Whether or not this is the case, there is certainly a disconnect between those who make decisions at the governmental level and those who experience their consequences.

Moreover, even if a majority had called in WASA, a local project is literally being cut off from central planning initiatives, undermining the work of those who had previously empowered themselves. To understand the current state of affairs it is important to understand the community mobilization around water that has been in place for more than five decades. Miss Rose explained to us what she had already described to other CGDS researchers:

"...in the 1950s, with help from Trinidad's health authority, villagers constructed a dam downstream from a spring in the village and laid pipes to distribute water from the resulting reservoir. Prior to that, without pipe-borne water, adults and children fetched water from the spring-fed stream in the village" (ibid).

Since then, the community has survived on their labours, collecting spring water from three strategically placed standpipes around the village, and from the home of Mr. Rajbansee, Miss Rose's father, who had led the initiative. Miss Rose, now 69, was just a child at the time, and she recounted to us, as she had to previous CGDS researchers, the pride she felt in her father and the impetus she gained to maintain the project as an adult. However, as the population has grown, Miss Rose explained, the supply doesn't meet everyone's needs. As a result, people apparently pressed WASA to connect them to the municipal supply.

When we arrived in Plum Road, this process of centralized disempowerment was underway. People relayed to us a sense of apprehension about the future of the spring and the nature of their future relations with WASA. At the same time, they were not complacent, and a number of individuals emphasized their intention to save their dam. Just as in Mt. D'Or, residents are not content to remain passive and let events sweep over them. As we walked throughout the village interviewing members of the community, a portrait emerged of a water system in transition. Rose Rajbansee still oversees regular cleaning of the dam, which she says is done mainly by men; however, as men clean, scrubbing the floor of the dam and the bore of the pipes with brushes and chlorine bleach, women gather around singing, encouraging the men in their work.

Today, Miss Rose is president of the Caribbean Network of Rural Women Producers and of the Trinidad and Tobago Federation of Women's Institutes. She works with the Ministry of Social Development to improve women's and children's quality of life (Sirju-Charran 2004: 8). Over the course of our conversations, she expressed concern that the sense of collective interest and involvement in community life in general generated by the dam might decline, now that some residents were connected to WASA, and had no need to attend meetings. Ostensibly, these meetings were organized to discuss matters relating to the community water supply, but as Miss Rose said, when people get together, they discuss all matters of things important to individuals in the village.



Fig. 6 Miss Rose's house – researchers' base

Others had their own misgivings. One elderly woman in her late 70s, who runs a small snack shop, said that one day she was connected to the dam and the next day she wasn't. WASA had come to town, disconnected her dam pipe and connected her to



WASA. The elderly woman lives alone, has one water storage tank and now complains about the irregularity of her WASA connection. While dam water was cut off at night to “save the flow of water”, residents knew this and could store water accordingly. She is

struggling to save money for another tank and asserted, “I intend to get a connection back to the dam. We are accustomed to dam water. I was fine with dam water.”

Fig.6 Water Reservoir

Other residents shared the sentiment, insisting that they would work to maintain the dam. We saw people who had WASA connections walking to the standpipe carrying dam water with empty cups to fill them for drinking. They informed us that they like the taste of dam water better, and they only used WASA water for cleaning. In another household, though, a brother and a sister living together said they preferred the taste of WASA water. Nonetheless, they were distressed that they apparently had had no say in WASA coming to town. In a third household, a mother came out of her home to fill her pot with spring water for cooking. She is connected to WASA also, but continues to use dam water as drinking water.



In Plum Road today, there are at least four forms of water access arrangements for households including: (1) WASA, dam and rainwater collection; (2) WASA and rainwater; (3) dam and rainwater; (4) and for at least one elderly resident, only rainwater collection. The great irony in this situation is that Trinidad’s ‘Water for All’ programme is supposed to reflect the gender equity principles of the UN Millennium Goals, yet here, one of the most defenceless members of the population—a widowed, elderly woman living alone—is

rendered even more vulnerable through WASA's intervention.

Fig.7 Reservoir Valve

Finally, there is a new anxiety in the village about WASA fees, and people find themselves in a range of predicaments with respect to bill payment. Some households that are not connected to WASA have received bills, while others connected for two years have yet to receive a bill, in spite of their inquiries. They are worried about the large fee they will owe and may not be able to pay when the bill finally comes. In addition, people are distressed that they are required to pay for full delivery even though water delivery is irregular. They are charged as if they are receiving water 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Jones Village

In contrast to both Mt. D'Or and Plum Road residents, the Jones Village community exuded enormous enthusiasm toward WASA, having received the first household connection *ever* on the day of our visit. Jones Village is a rural community located on the flat, agricultural plains of southern Trinidad. There is very little topographical relief besides a few small hills scattered throughout the community. Due to the low elevation of the area, three of the rivers that flow through or near the village, the Ciperó, the Oropouche and the Curamata are, fortunately, prone to flooding. The rivers are not clean: in addition to agricultural runoff, they serve as a convenient dump for a variety of waste materials discarded by auto garages, shopkeepers, residents and passers-by—a prominent concern that emerged in our interviews.

The women's group we interviewed was confident in WASA's ability to provide clean, safe water on a regular basis. It is perhaps because this community has survived through rainwater collection efforts alone, that the advent of pipes, however their potential irregularity, represents marked progress. As well, it is for this purpose that the Jones Village Women's Group organized. Even in Mt. D'Or, in spite of significant tensions, people prefer WASA's reliability to waiting for water in long lines at a standpipe. Moreover, like the Plum Road where there were apprehensions about community cohesion, this group was adamant that community spirit would remain intact, now that their organizing agenda was on the brink of being fulfilled. In the words of Neela Khan, the former community councillor:

“I don't think that having water in the village is going to send the village apart. This is a community that is closely knitted and bound together—all men, women and children and this is the meeting place, so I do not think that having enough water is going to spread them apart. They can stay together for the future development of this community and that I respect them for and I highly commend them for that method.”

Khan praised the group and its leader, Patricia Samaroo, for their efforts in working to bring pipe-borne water to the village:

“I want to commend all of you who have worked real hard together with Patricia, who have been the backbone of your community in the sense of bringing water. Patricia will call me 24 hours a day, whatever day, whatever time, Patricia will call me with regards to water in your community and I’m very happy today that at least one person can turn on their pipe for now and see that water is running.”

Yet, while the community rejoiced about their success, they had other sources of stress—mainly regarding pollution of the waterways running through the village. One man present at the group interview described how dirty the river is today compared to years gone by:

“Long time I used to go to the river and dip a bucket and wash car and like when pipe water lock off—you cannot do that again...now you go to the river and take a dive and when you come back up, pampers all over yuh face and all nasty thing all over you—nobody wouldn’t want that.”

Additionally, disagreements emerged about the extent to which men are involved in domestic affairs and the importance of household work as paid labour, as this good-humoured but pointed exchange between one man and several women reveals:

Man: “Most of the time women are housewives...the majority of times women are housewives, so who is working? The men have to work to provide...”

Woman 1: “Ah, the bossman...”

Man: “...so I have to give from my pocket. Where the women work? [Laughter from women]. ...women workin’, right, but they are housewives...they are not employed like myself...”

Woman 2: “But that is work.”

Man: “I have to provide...no, but even though it is my money...it is my money I have to spend.”

Woman 3: “I have to pay for mines myself.”

Man: “Yes, but in your case it’s different. You are a housewife and you’re employed but most of the time men have to pay for the water, because if you’re employed, yuh wife not working...”

Woman 4 (Neela Khan): “But who is the real boss?”

Man: “Me.”

N.K.: “OK. [Laughter from women] I just thought I would ask.

Man: “I have permission to say that, right?”

N.K.: “Once you have your wife’s permission.”

Despite this man’s assertions about his wage work as ‘real work’, he appears somewhat tenuous about his authority in the presence of this group of women. After the women laugh (in a mocking sort of way) when he asks, “Where the women work?” he quickly corrects his view that housework is not work by saying: “Women workin’, right” although he immediately reduces its value by reasserting “but they are housewives...they are not employed.” Of course, later in the conversation he admits that at least one woman in the group does work for wages. When Neela Khan asks him who is the boss in his household, he names himself—although his part-serious, part-humorous response acknowledges Khan’s status, when he asks, “I have permission to say that, right?”

This exchange, brief as it is, nonetheless signifies an important, ongoing shift in gender roles that is taking place. It reinforces the point, made earlier, that structural change in

gender stratification requires multiple levels of coordination in order to break down entrenched inequalities. The dialogue reflects the friction of gender relations, an indication that they are in flux and stable both conceptually and in practice, and that the women and the defensive man are exposed to and influenced by wider ideas about domestic labour and women's work. After all, this community exhibits the combination of both a woman's group and a female political leader—not just a sole female leader—who together, and with the cooperation of like-minded men, have brought about a new condition in their water supply. A shift in the balance of power is underway.

In addition to domestic and monetary affairs affecting women's and men's views about water management, there is conflict regarding pollution and land use. It is a concern to all, but men and women negotiate it differently. Women are particularly disempowered when the sources of pollution come from societal arenas where they remain marginal. Yet village men too feel powerless to improve conditions when companies rather than individual, known persons are involved in the pollution. One man described how the oil company Petrotrin was contaminating the river from waste pond overflows. Community members use the pond, dug by Petrotrin itself on private land, during the dry season with permission from the landowner. As Schneiderman and Reddock learned earlier, "Women wash dishes and clothes in it. Children swim in it. Pond water is also collected and used to flush toilets...Children who swim in the pond have developed rashes" (2004: 184). In our 2005 interview, he also said that river water is dirtied by the "chicken pluck shops [that] dump in the night".

In some instances, though, men have been confrontational with individual polluters in ways that women are not likely to be. The following example of an altercation that a Jones Village man had with another from neighbouring St. Mary's, who was illegally dumping in a part of the river running through Jones Village, illustrates this quite clearly:

"About two months ago I was comin' from work. I work shift—I finish around 2 o'clock that morning. I comin' home and right between this junction here and the junction up there, it have a small bridge. I saw this pick-up there...park lights on and this guy dumping whole tires in the river. I stop. I say, 'Good night, good night.' Well, the three door lock and I come out from my car and I had my light on. I say, 'Good night. Yuh getting' problem?' He say, 'Nah, I alright...' I say, 'What yuh doin'?' Breds, this is illegal dumpin' man...this ent lookin' nice on the village here...why yuh doh carry it in the dump instead and dump it? This is cloggin' our waterways and it will have flooding.' He say, 'Well, who are you?' I said, 'That doesn't matter—you are dumpin' and it is illegal. What I'd like to ask you to do is to pick it back up, put it in your vehicle and get...I use some obscene, right...that time of the morning I coming home and you dumpin' in my village...what you expect me to do? I use some obscene and he took it back up, load it in the van and I waited there then I went home...I have my cell phone with me...I was going to call the Barrackpore police, but he leave and went. I have his number. Anytime I see tires anywhere I will further his number to the police. I will do that."



Fig.8 Dr Fox talking with a Jones Village community member

In Jones Village today, both men and women exhibit stress around water; however, they direct it differently. The distinct approaches to their concerns combined with their stratified uses express distinct meanings and values ascribed to water. The same can be said in all three of the study communities.

Summary: Water management and the gendered division of labour



Fig.9. Women's Community Group (with some men) completing surveys

Even within a relatively brief time frame, our investigation of community water management through a gendered lens revealed that the sexual division of labour has a significant impact on women's ability to control all aspects of community water usage. It is true that in both Jones Village and Plum Road women have played key roles in mobilizing their communities to change the sources of water access.

Nonetheless, they still harbour a range of stresses, contradictions and feelings of disempowerment with respect to water management, all of them tied in some fashion to gender dynamics. We have seen that women's general involvement in household responsibilities ('washing wares', 'washing clothes', 'mopping out', 'wetting plants' and 'cooking meals', for example) currently precludes any noteworthy impact they may have in other domains of water use where men's labour is dominant, such as agriculture, construction and car washing. Women in all three communities stated that they urged men not to wastewater, "to cut off the pipe", but their actual control seems restricted to domestic usage.

Men's cars are their "babies", one Mt. D'Or woman stated, and it a major concern to them. They continue to emphasize the importance of their paid labour over women's paid household labour. Even when women work extensively with domestic water supplies and involve their communities in political agitation for water supply improvement, if men regard their own labour as a source of leverage for decision-making in and out of the

home, then women remain structurally disempowered in spite of their activism, bearing the brunt of water acquisition and conservation measures. Moreover, they do so without formal political or economic profit, which makes you worry that their ongoing work will become increasingly marginalized, should WASA's proposed privatization measures be implemented.

Conclusions and recommendations: Toward a gendered ethnography of water

Four clusters of commonalities emerged in the course of our research. The *first* is tension between communities. These emerge when people illegally dump garbage and waste in the water supplies of communities that are not their own; when people in one community have no water and come to another to use the standpipe, and the ones who live near the working standpipe try to “run them away”. *Second*, there is disagreement between men and women over responsibility for conservation of water. Women claim that they continually pressure men and children not to let the pipes run. Men generally agree that women bear the burden of responsibility for conservation in the home, but they assert that because it is mostly men who pay for water, they are the ones who are concerned about the cost. They seem to indicate that this is a more important arena of worry than any other, implicitly devaluing women's concerns.

Third, in all three communities women tell their children stories about the recent past when times were harder, as an important part of their socialization, “to let them know what times were like and how they should be grateful” for greater ease today—in spite of whatever difficulties they still face. Women said it is important to tell children that if things have improved, they can continue to improve—without knowledge of the past there is no understanding of change and little sense of hopefulness for improvement.

Interestingly, we found little knowledge of Trinidad's rich folklore about water. Our questions about Mama Dlo—part woman, part serpent—who lives in streams, protecting them and punishing contaminators, seems largely lost to the memory of older residents. Children in schools in all three communities returned our queries about Mama Dlo with blank looks. Even in Mt. D'Or where there had been a theatrical performance the previous year about the legendary character, and their teacher prompted them with reminders, children shrugged their shoulders and shook their heads. Tellingly, across the communities, children were familiar with a water song from the American television programme Sesame Street. In Mt. D'Or and Plum Road, they also referred to the story of John the Baptist and the ‘parting of the waters’ for Moses and the Hebrews to cross the Dead Sea.

Finally, we were able to receive any detailed responses to our questions about the religious or spiritual significance of water beyond some general commonalities. Everyone resolutely asserted that they “prayed for water” and many said that water is “a gift from god”, “the source of life” and “sacred”. However, few shared any detailed ritual behaviour aside from references to baptism and the Hindu *lota* ceremony, in which a copper bowl placed outside is filled with water in the morning over prayers. A few people in Catholic homes said that they sprinkled water around doorways and windows also in

the morning as a way to bring peace to the home. It is likely that more in-depth knowledge of religious/spiritual significance of water can be gained through longer-term ethnographic research. The meaning and value of water, then, as it was conveyed to us, stems largely from social roles around collection and distribution, as well as stressors associated with limited supply.

With respect to children, further ethnographic research should consider developing alternative activities to make the most of interactions with children, since they are key representatives of gendered socialization in process. Children's responses are likely to capture shifting gender role attitudes and to display a spectrum of responses indicating various degrees of gender role change in households and communities. Incorporating research objectives into a formalized lesson plan in the schools may be one approach to involve students, along with observing children's use of water, and parental interaction with children in their daily environments.

An additional recommendation for follow-up ethnographic research includes cross-community collaboration and networking. With varying levels of experience with local initiatives and experiences with WASA, this type of collaboration could be extremely beneficial to communities. Plum Road's experience with their dam could be instructive to Mt. D'Or residents, and Mt. D'Or's experience with WASA could help prepare Jones Village residents for future interactions with WASA. Finally, WASA itself should be a subject of anthropological analysis²⁸ to gain insider perspectives on citizens' critiques. Since the 1970s, notably with Laura Nauder's call for "studying up", anthropologists have recognized the importance of turning the anthropological gaze toward cultures of power and affluence (Nauder, 1972). Certainly, WASA as a government bureaucracy qualifies as an institution of power in the eyes of the country's citizens. Ironically, as the government of Trinidad and Tobago becomes increasingly entrenched in the international development apparatus through SAPs, it may regard itself as more of a victim of global economic processes rather than an active agent. A study of WASA and related ministries might research the following questions, for example: who are the 25% of Trinidad's population receiving water 24/7, and what politics render their access possible? Why is it that female Cabinet Ministers are not centring gender in their planning, so that it is evident to all in public domains—websites, pamphlets, speeches, newspaper articles—that this is a central concern of water development initiatives? Because our findings indicate that gendered access and use are the strongest determinants of meaning at the local level, the multilayered, gendered power relationships at national and international levels, within which local conditions are couched, are critical subjects of study.

Water-related democracy will not be attained until all stakeholders participate in the political process. Moreover, water policies are more likely to be effective if policymakers understand the gendered, cultural meanings of people's behaviour and the mutually reinforcing nexus among local, national and international levels of water management discourse. International commitments to link women's status both to reliable access to water and to multi-level incorporation into decision-making power cannot be fully

²⁸ Thanks to Dr. James Millette, Dept. of African-American Studies, Oberlin College, for making this suggestion to Dr. Fox at a March 9, 2006 presentation of this article.

realized at the community level when national policies are only partially reflective of both local gendered realities and international gender equity objectives. The nation state as the intermediary between the two must understand and take seriously the ways in which its own actions reproduce two of the contradictions of international goals, stressing simultaneously community development and privatization, while neglecting the third goal, gender equity.

Additionally, the synergistic relationship among the international community, nation and communities identified by the UN as crucial for the success of the MDGs cannot occur if community actors are absent or marginally included in decision-making and planning processes. Since invitations may not be forthcoming, community agitation for inclusion is likely to be necessary. Understanding the organizations that NGOs are attempting to transform through ‘studying up’ is therefore critical. Moreover, communication and coalition building across communities, among those interested in local sustainable resource management, would help to build a grassroots base to pressure governmental action toward gender mainstreaming. Micro credit loans or grants to community groups and women in particular, through alliances with Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs), the private sector, NGOs and the government is one possible way of linking the private sector to community organizing, and could facilitate such collaboration, helping to amass detailed information on community variations important for national policy initiatives (Elmendorf and Isley, 1983:197). The fact of these variations—affirmed within the bounds of this preliminary study—is as important as the “global common good” asserted in the international discourse, in developing gender-sensitive approaches to sustainable water management practices.²⁹

Bibliography

- Barrow, Christine. “Anthropology, The Family and Women in the Caribbean.” In Patricia Mohammed and Catherine Shepherd, (eds). *Gender in Caribbean Development*. Mona (Jamaica): The University of the West Indies, 1988.
- Beckles, Penelope. “Development and Strengthening of National Mechanisms for the Monitoring of Water and The Establishment of Goals.” Round table discussion—Table 5. 3/22/06. Fourth World Water Forum, Mexico City, Mexico, 2006.
- Centre for Gender and Development Studies. Research project: ‘Women, Gender and Water’. Published report, 2004.
- Dirks, Nicholas B., Geoff Eley and Sherry B. Ortne (eds). Introduction in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*. New Jersey: Princeton University, 1994.
- Elmendorf, Maty L. and Raymond B. Isely. Public and Private Roles of Women in Water Supply and Sanitation Programs in *Human Organization*, 42, no.3 (1983).
- Escobar, Arturo. 1999. *Encountering Development: The Making and making of the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

²⁹ See Appendix 1

- Fox, Diana. *An Ethnography of Four Non-governmental Development Organizations*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998.
- Grimes, Errol. "Environmental Sustainability in Trinidad and Tobago: Ensuring Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation," *UN Chronicle*, <http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2005/issue2/0205p23.html> (2005).
- Harding, Sandra. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986.
- Hellum, Anne. "Towards a Human Rights Based Development Approach: The Case of Women in the Water Reform Process in Zimbabwe" in *Law, Social Justice & Global Development Journal* (LGO): (2001):1
- Klass, Morton. *Singing with Sai Baba: The Politics of Revitalization in Trinidad*. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1996.
- Langley, Winston, E. and Vivian C. Fox (eds). *Women's Rights in the United States: A Documentary History*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998.
- Mycoo, Michelle. 'Shifting Paradigms in Water Provisioning Policies: A Trinidad Case Study' in *Water Resources Development* 21, no.3 (2005): 509-523.
- Nauder, Laura. 'Up the Anthropologist—Perspectives Gained from Studying Up' in Dell Hymes (ed), *Reinventing Anthropology*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.
- Oread Daily,. 'Water for the People, Not for Profits' on <http://www.winymedia.org>. Sept. 14, 2005.
- Schneiderman, Jill S. and Rhoda Reddock. "Water, women and community in Trinidad, West Indies," *Natural Resources Forum* 28 (2004): 179-188..
- Sirju-Charran Grace, Jill Schneiderman and Rhoda Reddock.. 'Sharing Innovative Experiences: Safe Drinking Water—Innovative Experiences'. A project of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, 2004.
- Taylor, Peter J. and Frederick H. Buttel. "How Do We Know We Have Global Environmental Problems? Science and the Globalization of Environmental Discourse," in *The Environment in Anthropology: A Reader in Ecology, Culture, and Sustainable Living*. Eds. Nora Haenn and Richard R. Wilk. New York and London: NYU Press, 2006.
- United Nations Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water. Background Paper No. 2: 'A Gender Perspective on Water Resources and Sanitation'. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, April 2004.
- United Nations Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water. 'Report to the commission on Sustainable Development', 2005.
- United Nations Water and Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) 'Gender, Water and Sanitation'. 2005.
- World Health Organization. http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/
- World Bank. Intergovernmental Group of Twenty-four on International Monetary Affairs and Development communiqué, September 27, 2002.
- World Bank. The Gender and Development Group. 'Water, Sanitation and Gender Equality' 2002.

Glossary

CGDS	-	Centre for Gender and Development Studies
CSD	-	Commission on Sustainable Development
IMF	-	International Monetary Fund
MDG	-	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organization
PVO	-	Private Voluntary Organization
SAP	-	Structural Adjustment Policy
UN	-	United Nations
UWI	-	University of the West Indies
WASA	-	Water and Sewerage Authority

Appendix 1

A detailed list of recommendations adopted by the UN Task force on Gender and Water includes the following: Ensure that the overall national sanitation framework is gender-sensitive; earmark funds for hygiene education in school curricula; commission research to identify, through gender analysis, where social and economic groups are chronically excluded from access to sanitation; introduce affirmative action programmes for training women in technical and managerial careers in the water and sanitation sector; ensure a minimum percentage of women participate in decision-making from the Ministerial down to village levels; allocate funds to the capacity development of women and girls; provide assistance to facilitate research into gender considerations in water resource management; encourage women to participate in businesses involved in water resource management and sanitation schemes; promote sanitation education messages through women's organizations, schools and health clinics; design and implement capacity building to consider the needs of women and men in the design of water, sanitation and hygiene education programmes; remove internal gender biases and discrimination in public sector organizations; encourage gender-sensitive budgets so that local governments can assess the economic value of policy commitments on gender equality; lobby for better services targeting women and children; assist in collecting information on men and women's roles, access, needs, priorities and perspectives on water and sanitation-related issues; support equality for women in the decision-making process at a local level; enable women and girls to acquire access to information, training and resources related to water and sanitation initiatives; engage women leaders, especially environment and water Ministers, to serve as role models in the effort to mainstream gender into water management at all levels; promote gender mainstreaming in water and sanitation through linking with MDG 3: 'Promote gender and empower women'; compile and disseminate examples of good practices and develop norms and guidelines for gender mainstreaming; invest in the capacity building of the water sector, with emphasis on empowering disadvantaged women and men; encourage the media, in both developed and developing countries, to provide more coverage on gender and water issues (Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water Sub-program of the Water and Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE: 11-13).



ISSUE 1 • April 2007

Diana Mahabir-Wyatt: A meaningful life¹

Interviewed by Kimberly Byng

Diana Mahabir-Wyatt was born in Toronto in 1941 but grew up in northern Quebec. Her mother was a teacher of English literature, her father a surgeon. Waves of immigrants from war torn Europe populated the community where she was raised and most of her schoolmates were the children of refugees who migrated to Canada after World War II. From an early age Diana was exposed to people from all over the world and to their vastly different cultures, costumes, languages, religions and ethnic customs, a key experience that prepared her for life in multi-cultural Trinidad.

At the age of 17 she enrolled at McGill University in Montreal where she met her first husband, a Trinidadian. Two years later, although she had not completed her degree, Diana accompanied him on his return home. She became a volunteer at the Lady Hochoy Home for the Handicapped and during this time gave birth to her first two children before returning to McGill University, children in tow, to complete her degree. On her return, Diana first became a supply teacher at St Augustine Girls' High School and later taught in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the University of the West Indies. During this time she had two more children and started her masters' degree.

Diana took advantage of training provided by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in the development side of industrial relations. In 1964 she became a training and administrative officer at the Employers' Consultative Association. She later became

¹ This scripted interview was reviewed by the interviewee before publication.

Director of the organisation during one of the most difficult times for industrial relations in Trinidad and Tobago's history. She was a member of the tripartite committees that developed the IRA (Industrial Relations Act) and later the National Insurance Act. After the latter was passed, Diana served on the National Insurance Board of Directors for 15 years. She also served on an Advisory Committee to the Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations, while holding down the post of CEO of the Caribbean Employers' Confederation.

Those first years as a key player in business and industrial relations were extremely challenging. Here was a young, white, foreign-born woman in a position of leadership at a time when labour legislation, social security and small business development were new to the region and controlled by men.

Diana also got divorced around this time. She was just 26, with four children to take care of. She would often return home after a demanding day at work and collapse with exhaustion. Without a support network of dedicated housekeepers, pursuing her career and raising her children would have been infinitely more difficult. Diana had worked as a domestic servant, so she knew first-hand that they were often exploited and abused. She treated her housekeepers like family, providing them with training and avenues for improving their education; in return, they took care of her children and her home before moving on to pursue careers and homes of their own abroad.

Diana says she was a feminist from the age of five, when she had to compete with her male classmates and her younger brother for her father's attention. She is a passionate advocate for the rights of women and children. When she had her own radio programme, she focused on how international relations, economics and politics affected women's issues. In the 1970s, she took on the monster of domestic violence, attending conferences and workshops on the issue. Then she became more proactive and founded the Shelter for Battered Women and Children in Port of Spain with the advice and encouragement of Radica Saith who had previously opened the Business and Professional Women's Halfway House in Marabella.

In 1988 both women saw the need for a common forum and began working on a Coalition with other women's groups involved in Domestic Violence. Ten years after its inception, Diana handed the Chairmanship of the Board of Directors of the Port of Spain Shelter to Annette Rahael while she continued to chair the CADV which she continues to do up to today.

Over the years the Coalition against Domestic Violence (CADV) evolved its own programmes, ones that its member organisations did not or could not run themselves. These were programmes that were desperately needed, including "Peace, Love and Understanding in Schools" (PLUS), "Childline" and "Stop Elderly Abuse Now."

For 12 years Diana served as an Independent Senator. She used her position to champion Human Rights issues in Parliament. She instigated and pursued changes in law to industrial relations; equal opportunities for minorities; amendments to the Domestic Violence Act, the Sexual Offences Act, children's legislation and the Cohabitation Act.

Disturbed and bitterly disappointed by the failure of government to protect children by ensuring the implementation of the strong legislation that Parliament had passed in respect of children's rights, Diana resigned from the Senate to work for the implementation of measures to protect children at an NGO level.

But she did not abandon her cause; she accepted a fellowship from Radda Barnen on the Rights of the Child in Sweden and became one of the founding members of the Coalition for the Rights of the Child. She is still disappointed that no structures were put in place for the Children's Authority Bill but it was in the period after she left the Senate that she founded Childline, a counselling hot line for abused children and those at risk, the highly successful schools intervention programme, PLUS to make early childhood education integrated with an anti-violence culture and a programme designed to protect and assist elderly persons who are at risk of abuse, Stop Elderly Abuse Now.

After 35 years of campaigning against domestic violence, Diana has an enormous regard for women and their ability to survive atrocities. She is likewise concerned about the elderly who often receive sub-standard treatment in institutions. She applauds the parenting courses run by Servol,¹ and wishes they had been available to her when she was a young mother.

Her views on corporal punishment in schools are well known as she spoke out strongly against it in the media and at meetings with principals, teachers and parents' groups throughout the country, despite extensive criticism. Eventually the law was changed to forbid corporal punishment of children, at least in schools. Individuals fighting only for political change have not been able to do much in the Caribbean to help women and children, she says. However, pressure on governments from the United Nations and the ILO can bring about change as international organisations now recognise the power of women's NGO's which are usually involved in peace-building activities and, they in turn influence governments to change their policies.

Disillusioned by the abuse of power by those in politics, Diana has now established the Caribbean Centre for Human Rights. She remains the Managing Director of PMSL Caribbean Limited, a management consultancy firm focused on human resource management development. As she grows older, she has turned to meditation and nature for balance in her life and is catching up on quality time with her children and grandchildren.

Her advice to women is to focus on education, as well as develop their emotional and spiritual intelligences so that they become more attuned to others and enable themselves to persevere in leading lives that are meaningful on an integrated level.

¹Servol: Social services and community development organisation that focuses on education, pre-school, technical and post drop-out levels.



<http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/index.asp>



Volume 1. No. 1. April 2007

Gaietry Pargass: The making of a human rights feminist lawyer

Interviewed by Shelene Gomes

Gaietry Pargass was born in Carapichima, Trinidad and Tobago. After graduating from the Holy Faith Convent secondary school, she began working with the Caroni Research Station, at that time a male-dominated institution. As a Scientific Research Assistant, she was the sole female in a non-clerical post. This obvious inequity initiated Gaietry's foray into social activism, which began at the St. Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies during the 1970s. This post-independence period was characterized by the emergence of various movements in Trinidad and Tobago that included black power, socialist, Marxist, and feminist movements. During this time, she became involved with the Concerned Women for Progress (CWP), an organization in which women of different ideologies and from different backgrounds came together amidst an atmosphere of a second wave feminist movement that pervaded the global north, and spawned several autonomous feminist groups in the Caribbean. The path breaking campaigns and marches of the CWP focused on bringing into the public view issues such as sexual violence, domestic violence that were still relegated to the private sphere.

After graduating from the Faculty of Agriculture with a Bachelor of Science degree, she held the post of Agriculture Officer at the Crop Research Office in Centeno. This position enabled her to interact with rural women and women farmers that highlighted the different experiences of these women to those of their male counterparts.

Her subsequent movement from Agriculture to Law facilitated a channelling of her social consciousness and activism into concrete changes. When she took on the post of Legal Advisor in the Ministry of Social Development in 1991, she incorporated gendered analyses of existing legislation, particularly around children's and women's rights. This

position enabled her to bring together her background in gender and law, and tap into her community and activist experiences. During the 1980s-1990s, Caribbean governments formed Women's Desks, later Women's Bureaux, which actively pursued the introduction of legislation such as the 1991 Domestic Violence Act in Trinidad and Tobago. Her position as a government official may have appeared to be in conflict with her roles as a member of Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) and Women Working for Social Progress (Workingwomen) as the state's agenda appeared to be separate from the efforts of NGO's. Ms Pargass believed, however, that these two positions complemented each other. Nonetheless, negotiating the relationship between issues of the women's movements and issues that the Ministry focused on, since they often intersected strongly, was at times difficult.

One experience helped Gaietry to appreciate the importance of her role as both a member of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and as a governmental official and the potential this gave her to make valuable social contributions. During the debate on the Domestic Violence Bill in the Trinidad and Tobago House of Parliament, she sat in the House as a government official who had worked on the Bill, while looking on as the public gallery filled with women from various organizations and communities whose collective presence demonstrated a sense of solidarity with the Bill's mandate.

In the months preceding the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Congress on Women and the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, Gaietry negotiated these complex yet complementary roles by using her vacation time from the Ministry to attend the preparatory meetings in her capacity as a member of women's organizations.

Gaietry's stint as a legal trainee in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1989 enabled her to continue making similar connections. While working on housing and discrimination cases, she saw quite keenly the links between gender, class and race. In the U.K., she also volunteered with a feminist legal practice, created by a group of self-acknowledged British feminist lawyers, and founded on somewhat more egalitarian principles than other legal practices, of wage equality and equal valuing of jobs. Gaietry's decision to return to the Caribbean was stimulated by the desire to contribute to social reforms in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean.

On her return to Trinidad, Gaietry worked with a panel of solicitors in London preparing cases for death row prisoners who appeared in front of the Privy Council. This post highlighted the complexity of negotiating the legal, theoretical and social implications of violence. This is evident in the case of a woman on death row. The client's case was dismissed at the level of the Privy Council. Gaietry worked preparing to bring her case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). During interviews, systematic evidence of battering by her common law spouse over a lengthy period, emerged. Although this surfaced previously during the Privy Council case, it was used primarily as a motive for the murder of her common law spouse. After years of abuse, the client finally escaped from him taking her two youngest children. After a week, the client's common law spouse found them, broke down the door and grabbed her and the children and took them to their home. He virtually kept her there as a prisoner while at

times holding a gun to her head. Because of this evidence, the case was returned to the Privy Council and after a psychological evaluation, it was argued that the client was suffering from “battered wife syndrome”. The case was then returned to Trinidad and Tobago to determine whether this argument could be used in her defence, thus allowing the charge to be reduced from murder to manslaughter. This was the first instance in which ‘battered wife syndrome’ was successfully argued in Trinidad and Tobago. Gaietry mentions this was an immensely rewarding victory that has now set a precedent, used to defend battered women after psychological examinations.

Gaietry emphasises, though, that she works from a human rights perspective that opposes the use of the death penalty. Defences such as the above serve to complicate the simplistic dichotomy of woman as victim and man as perpetrator that often pervades gender discourse. It is evident, she argues, that there are close connections between constructions of masculinity and violent crime, for example it is generally the man who takes up the gun to prove that he is a man. The intersection of gender and class emerges because the majority of men on death row in Trinidad and Tobago are of poor educational and class backgrounds.

Gaietry’s nuanced analysis takes into account the question of understanding and penalising violent crimes. She questions whether enacting the death penalty for perpetrators of violent crimes, either men or women, who are often seen as the dross of society, help a society toward a more just and equitable future. This is an emotive question since in opposing the death penalty it is often assumed that one condones the violent acts committed by perpetrators. Rather than taking such a dualistic stance, Gaietry argues that all human beings, including those that have committed violent crimes, and have been imprisoned, are entitled to a basic standard of treatment and of life. This is an area in which she continues to work. As Gaietry explains:

I began as an activist many years ago and my work in gender continues with human rights and the different fields that I am in now. My activism started off on campus...then the CWP and...then the law. It is a slow process, and I know many people say this, but we have come a long way with...the passing of the Domestic Violence Act, and drafting a National Gender Policy...but there’s still a lot that has to change...rape and other sexual offences...are all areas highlighted in the Draft Gender Policy that still need to be addressed...we do not have sexual harassment legislation...The equal opportunity legislation is exceedingly important and is being debated as we speak and it is a really big gap because we don’t have legislation to deal with discrimination in the private sector...

The work and life of Gaietry Pargass indicates that feminist activism can be happen in various spheres, such as human rights lobbies. She is optimistic about the future of social activism, yet aware of the work still to be done in and through feminism to ensure the achievement of basic human rights for women and men.



<http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/index.asp>



ISSUE 1 • April 2007

Caribbean Mothers: Identity and Experience in the U.K.

By Tracey Reynolds
2005. London: Tufnell Press, 204pp

Book review:
Adele Jones

To write that black mothers in general, and Caribbean mothers in particular, have long been denied a history of their own making may seem an obvious introduction to the audience for whom this book seems intended. In fact, it is within this context that many feminist writers follow a well-used pattern of argument: they highlight the dearth of literature on the topic, they acknowledge and celebrate prior work and usually they emphasize the limitations of their own work, thereby pointing out further gaps. The recognition that feminists do not write only for one another, that black women do not only write for audiences that are black and female is the point Tracey Reynolds is making. Whether there is growing interest (or not) in writings about and by the black women of Britain, the fact that black mothers in the United Kingdom (UK) both shape and are shaped by constructions of mothering that emerge out of the societies in which they live and that their presence is not invisible is a point worth stressing. Indeed the acknowledgement of this may help to expand the book's audience.

Writers documenting the experiences of black women often uncover fresh insights and, although they inevitably build on the work of feminists before, each contribution should add something to the ferment of black women's voices, if only to remind us that there is no one voice that speaks of homogenized experiences. Reynolds' book is a contemporary analysis of Caribbean women's experiences that may be considered, in time, such a

contribution. From the outset, Reynolds makes the assertion that Caribbean mothers are “much maligned and misunderstood” in the UK. While this is not news, Reynolds chooses to explore areas in the context of modern British society that categorize all non-whites under umbrella terms such as “ethnic minorities” and view their culture as symbols of “diversity”. No one, either witness or participant, who has lived through the various incarnations and manifestations of racism and sexism in the UK, and the oppositional politics spawned in their wake, would argue with her claim.

Caribbean Mothers: Identity and Experience in the UK is based on research on the mothering experiences of 40 women, the ways in which their sense of mothering has been fashioned by the Caribbean societies they came from, and the society in which they now live. Reynolds crafts her interpretive framework from a substantial body of anti-racist and feminist literature and makes good use of her sources. The age of the women interviewed ranged between 19 and 81 years, and they include second- and third-generation black women whose view of mothering differs from first-generation women. This view has been shaped less by lived experiences of Caribbean culture than by creating their spaces in the English towns and cities in which they were born. However, through the narratives their own mothers and fathers weaved into their upbringing, even the younger women attribute some of their views of mothering to a Caribbean history. Reynolds reminds us here that the “journeying” of Caribbean peoples and experiences of migration and relocation of home occurs at both the material and the discursive levels. Constructions of self, therefore, are linked not only to places claimed in the present, but to the birthplaces of generations before. Also linked to this is Reynolds’ articulation of the notion of a “collective memory” as currency for political mobilization; a particularly interesting point.

The book is divided into nine chapters, which include sections on difference, identity, child rearing, fathers, community mothering and the socioeconomic impact of life in the UK on mothering. The author examines the meanings ascribed by Caribbean mothers to the relationships they have with their own mothers, their children, the fathers of their children and their communities. Reynolds examines the ways in which women have defied, defined and embraced societal and cultural norms about mothering and what emerges, inevitably perhaps, is diverse and complex – offering in Reynolds’ words, “differing conceptualizations of difference”. The individual accounts lead to a broader reflection on the various social factors that impinge on their lives, with lessons for understanding that mothering takes place within a context. The author also attempts to provide a deeper appreciation of the inter-relationship of race, class, gender and culture in present-day British society, although in the discussion these factors are sometimes conflated rather than explored as inter-related themes. The author takes care to ensure that taken-for-granted notions of ‘community’, ‘identity’ and ‘culture’ are teased apart. Her assertions, however, would have benefited from a similar scrutiny in certain instances; for example, the phrase “mothers as gatekeepers of culture” (48) is presented as universal and uncontested.

Reynolds writes about the unsung, the “unheroine”, the ordinary Caribbean woman. She uses her interpretive style to highlight a small section of what is inevitably a snapshot of

life experiences. She does this by searching out hidden meanings, exploring both explicit and implicit messages, and then delving into whatever meanings flow unspoken beneath the bridge that links the personal with the political. This is the art of making the invisible seen and the inaudible heard. Most importantly, by focusing on the 'ordinary', Reynolds challenges the privileging of the image of the 'authentic' black woman that emerges time and again in essentialized versions of black womanhood in some literature. That the 'ordinary' Caribbean mother matters not only to her family, but to the society in which her mothering takes place is the admirable intention and achievement of this book.

Despite its strengths, though, it contains omissions which are more notable because of Reynolds' concerns about universalized representations of mothers in general and the marginalization of Caribbean mothers in particular. She does not, she points out, speak for *all* Caribbean women and neither does she present her work as representative. Indeed, she stresses the importance of acknowledging diversity. Nevertheless, she should have grappled more forcefully with that all-evasive goal: 'inclusivity'. The absence of discussion about the ways in which Caribbean women of Indian descent experience and express mothering, for example, is especially problematic given that Indian women have been a significant part of the Caribbean landscape (in countries such as Guyana and Trinidad, certainly) for well over a century. Also missing are discussions of sexual diversity, especially lesbian mothers, and the impact of sexuality on parenting. Since the book is based on her research subjects and is thus inevitably self-limiting, these omissions are forgivable. However, Reynolds' mistake lies in her uncontested use of the term "Caribbean mothers" and the fact that in her search for the hidden, she has missed some of the more obvious areas.

This book should take its place among the increasing swell of black feminist literature that is slowly but surely washing its way through the hallowed libraries of British academia. Whether it achieves acclaim and recognition remains to be seen. The sharp writing; the commonalities and differences among and between first-, second- and third-generation Caribbean mothers; and the insightful analysis should help considerably in this regard. Despite its importance (and it does contain some important insights) however, it may find itself on the margins of feminist literature, largely because the editing is not tight enough and the overall effect is somewhat fragmented, assisted in this regard by some typographical errors. Turning a PhD thesis into a book always presents challenges and perhaps it might have been better presented as a series of inter-related essays. It has many strengths but greater attention to making the structure more cohesive would have produced a more readable work.



<http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/index.asp>



Issue 1 - April 2007

Midlife and Older Women Family Life, Work and Health in Jamaica

By Joan Rawlins
2006. Kingston.
University of the West Indies Press
169pp

Book review:
Donna Drayton

“I have not remarried because I am more independent than most of the men I meet” (127). So asserts one of the women in this study of widowhood in Jamaica, and attendant issues such as family life, work and health. Originally carried out for her PhD dissertation, this important piece of research by Joan Rawlins is based on the complex lives of midlife and older women from the working-class community of August Town and the middle-class suburb of Hope Pastures in Kingston, Jamaica.

The book is divided into five main chapters which address issues such as family life and power relations; the work the women do in and out of the home; lack of concern about their health; ambivalent feelings about their sexuality; and how they perceive widowhood. The study, carried out between 1990 and 1991, and focusing on women between the ages 50 and 74, seeks to disrupt the dominant discourses, the prevailing sentiments expressed in mainstream society on this cohort, and expose alternative ones that the women themselves raise with the researcher.

Rawlins uses case studies as part of the research methodology. Each case evolves with clarity and underscores the lived realities of the women interviewed. From these, she draws out theoretical arguments about women and the process of ageing. She specifically defines women in midlife as those who are essentially no longer able to bear children. Women in 'midlife' are those between 50 and 59 years old, while 'older' ones are 60 to 74 years old. Principally concerned with the biased perceptions that predominate in society about women of these age groups, Rawlins raises a few feminist concerns. She points out that older women and those in midlife are perceived as having very little power, if any at all, over their lives and that they are affected by the gendered division of labour, which automatically allocates them certain 'female' jobs, such as childrearing. Rawlins also finds that women in this age group are seen as non-sexual beings and are presumed by family and society to be 'dependent.'

An overview of the work situation of the women and the power relations influencing their work in and outside of the home reveal that they are still seen as the dominant carers in the society, performing active nurturing roles as either mothers or grandmothers. The reason the women willingly adopt these roles may be the hope that someone will care for them when they can no longer do so themselves; yet, they often find themselves "between a rock and a hard place" having to choose between caring for their families and receiving no financial reward, or participating in paid employment outside of the home where they can realize other forms of independence, including financial security.

Work, especially hard, unrewarding work, can take a toll on most people's health. Rawlins contends that some of the women in midlife behaved as if they were in perfect health, when they were not. They believed that as long as they were able to 'function,' they were well. They recognized that they are not perceived as a 'special group' and argued that the government needed to do more to improve health services and to pay more attention to the medical issues affecting them. Women would then be encouraged to be more responsible for their health and also challenge the belief that "their health was of no particular concern to anyone but themselves" (100).

Widowhood, for some women in the study, was an enabling experience. They grew more resourceful with their finances and their time. Nonetheless, most of the women complained about loneliness, with one respondent saying that she often felt lonely in a crowd. On the other hand, nearly all were not interested in remarrying, one admitting her fear that, "maybe he would be worse than my first husband" (132). Often the bereaved widows offset loneliness by sharing their homes with relatives or by taking in boarders. *Midlife and Older Women* successfully refutes myths that women "cannot do without men" and cannot cope with dramatic changes in their lives. The women in August Town and Hope Pastures related that after they had grieved for their husbands, they simply got on with their lives. Some returned to hobbies and jobs that they had had before marriage, such as the piano teacher who began giving lessons again and the woman who was able to go to church whenever she liked. Their stories indicate that marriage answers only some of a woman's needs. As long as systems are put in place to help them cope with different phases of their lives, women manage quite well.

Research on ageing in the Caribbean is limited despite the fact that in 2005 the United Nations projected that by the year 2025 there will be more than 1 billion people aged 60 years and over globally, 75% of whom will be living in developing countries. This anomaly can be easily explained: human beings are understandably afraid to face their mortality and talking to them about topics such as ageing, the need to write wills, to take out life insurance, to make funeral arrangements beforehand and so on, makes them uncomfortable, especially when they want to see themselves as healthy and young. Few come to terms with the fact that ageing is as much a part of life as adolescence, and needs to be confronted.

This scholarly work by Rawlins, a senior lecturer and head of the Public Health and Primary Care Unit at the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine, makes uncomfortable reading. It forces you to contemplate your own impending old age. It made me recognize that we live in a culture where growing older is not seen an achievement, but as a burden to families, friends and particularly to the state, which seems unaware that it has a central role to play in the care and protection of its older citizens. The elderly should be given the care, love, attention and respect they deserve, having, for the most part, spent their lives giving these to others. At the same time, old age does not necessarily have to be equated with sickness, disease, loneliness or misery. Many of today's seniors are healthy, happy persons who are enjoying their lives immensely.

The value of this book lies in the disconcerting questions it raises, and the way it moves the reader to contemplate how societies might devise more humane ways to provide a decent quality of life, at every stage, for both men and women.



<http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/index.asp>