



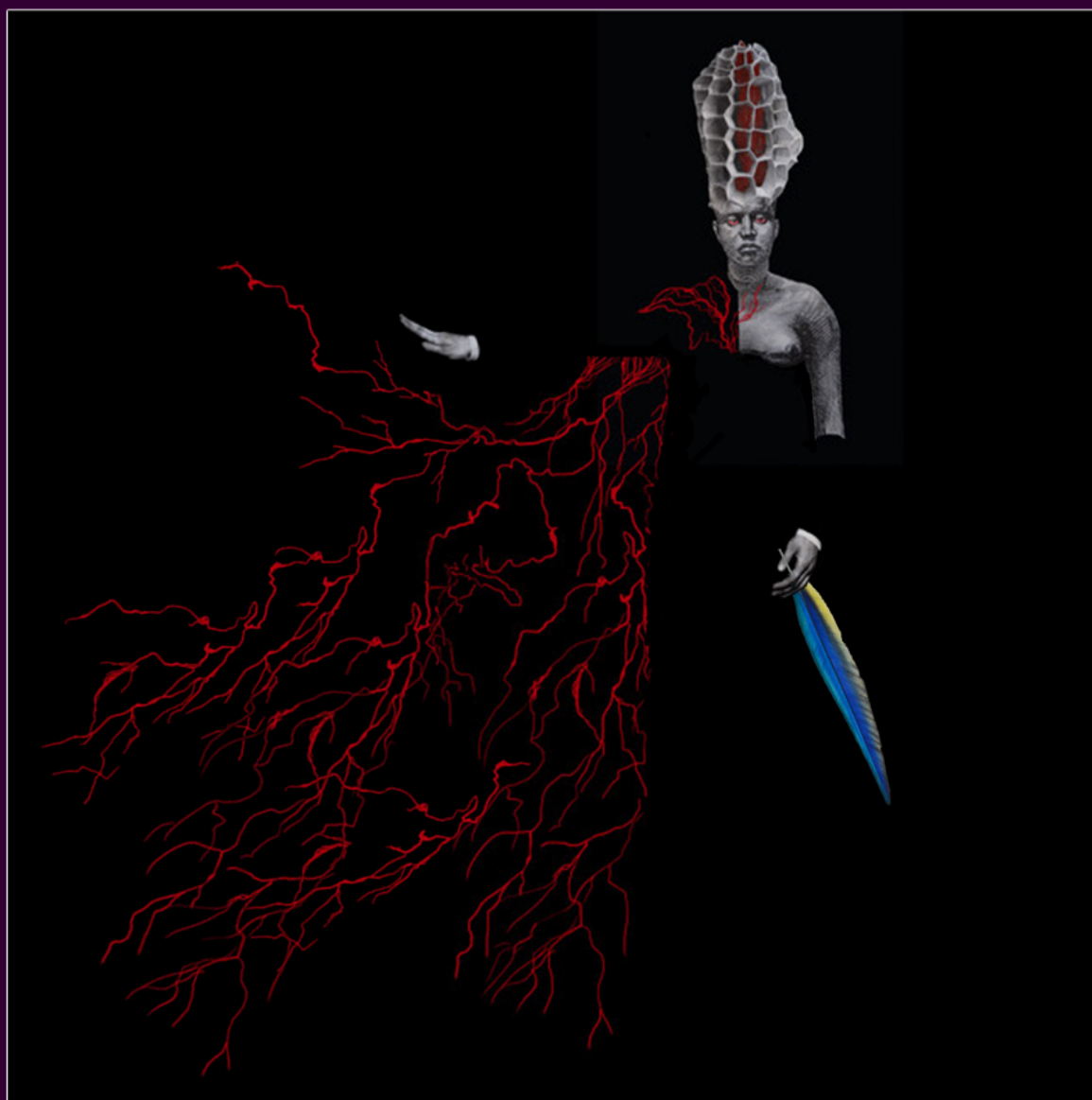
UWI IGDS



CARIBBEAN REVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES

A Journal of Caribbean Perspectives on Gender and Feminism

Gender and Anti-colonialism in the Interwar Caribbean



ISSUE 12

DECEMBER 2018

Cover Image Courtesy
Jasmine Thomas-Girvan
Of Flesh and Ether, 2015
Mixed Media



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



IGDS
INSTITUTE FOR GENDER AND
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES



ISSUE 12

Gender and Anti-colonialism in the Interwar Caribbean

Editors: [Reena N. Goldthree](#) and [Natanya Duncan](#)

December 2018

i-iii **Contents**

iv-vi **Contributors**

Editorial

1-30 Feminist Histories of the Interwar Caribbean: Anti-colonialism, Popular Protest, and the Gendered Struggle for Rights [Reena N. Goldthree](#) and [Natanya Duncan](#)

Peer Reviewed Essays

31-66 Travel Sickness: Pan-Africanism, Medicine and Misogynoir in Caribbean Harlem [W. Chris Johnson](#)

67-94 More than Auxiliary: Caribbean Women and Social Organizations in the Interwar Period [Tyesha Maddox](#)

95-120 A Section for Women: Journalism and Gendered Promises of Anti-Colonial Progress in Interwar Panama [Kaysha Corinealdi](#)

- 121–142** Burial Rites, Women's Rights: Death and Feminism in Haiti, 1925-1938
[Grace Sanders Johnson](#)
- 143–168** Discrimination in Any Shape or Form: Black Activism and Women's Rights in Interwar Bermuda [Nicole Bourbonnais](#)
- 169– 198** "Race" and Class among *Nacionalista* Women in Interwar Puerto Rico: The Activism of Dominga de la Cruz Becerril and Trina Padilla de Sanz [Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz](#)
- 199–220** "Do Something to Mek She Change:" Reading Respectability in- and unto the National Female Body in two Jamaican Interwar Fictions of Obeah [Janelle Rodriques](#)
- 221–244** Fabricating Intimacies: Artificial Silk and Cloth Wives in the Interwar Moment [Faith Smith](#)
- 245–268** Romancing Jamaica: The National Imaginary and Jamaican-Chinese Women [Amrita Bandopadhyay](#)
- 269–298** Protest and Punishment: Indo-Guyanese Women and Organized Labor [Aliyah Khan](#)
- 299–318** Negotiating Gender, Citizenship and Nationhood through Universal Adult Suffrage in Curaçao [Rose Mary Allen](#)
- 319–344** "She came as a stranger and made herself one of us": Two Irish Women and Anti-colonial Agitation in Trinidad, 1938-1945 [Bridget Brereton](#)

Interview

- 345–362** Writing New Histories of War and Women's Activism in Jamaica: An Interview with [Dalea Bean](#) by [Reena N. Goldthree](#)

Biographies

363–368



ISSUE 12

Gender and Anti-colonialism in the Interwar Caribbean

Contributors

Rose Mary Allen

Freelance researcher
Part-time lecturer in Caribbean studies
University of Curaçao

Amrita Bandopadhyay

PhD candidate in English
University of Florida, Gainesville, USA

Dalea Bean

Lecturer and Graduate Coordinator
Institute for Gender and Development Studies, Regional Coordinating Office
The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus

Nicole Bourbonnais

Assistant Professor of International History
Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
Geneva, Switzerland

Bridget Brereton

Emerita Professor of History
The University of the West Indies
St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago

Kaysha Corinealdi

Assistant Professor of History
Institute for Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies
Emerson College

Natanya Duncan

Assistant Professor of History and Africana Studies
Affiliate status in Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies
Lehigh University

Reena Goldthree

Assistant Professor of African American Studies
Princeton University

Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz

Associate Professor
Director of the Undergraduate Studies Program, Sociology Department
Binghamton University

W. Chris Johnson

Assistant Professor
Women & Gender Studies Institute and the Department of History
University of Toronto

Aliyah R. Khan

Assistant Professor of Caribbean Literature
Department of English and the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Tyesha Maddox

Assistant Professor
Department of African and African American Studies
Fordham University

Janelle Rodriques

Assistant Professor of English Literature
Auburn University, Alabama

Grace L. Sanders Johnson

Assistant Professor of Africana Studies
University of Pennsylvania

Faith Smith

Associate Professor of African and Afro-American Studies and English
Brandeis University



Feminist Histories of the Interwar Caribbean: Anti-colonialism, Popular Protest, and the Gendered Struggle for Rights

Editors

[Reena N. Goldthree](#)

Assistant Professor of African American Studies
Princeton University

and

[Natanya Duncan](#)

Assistant Professor of History and Africana Studies
Affiliate status in Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies
Lehigh University

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank the editors and staff of the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* for their enthusiastic response to our proposal for this issue. We extend our special thanks to Tivia Collins, the journal's editorial assistant, for shepherding this issue through the publication process. Finally, we are grateful to John D. French, Jocelyn Olcott, and Lara Putnam for their feedback on an earlier draft of this article.

Keywords: anti-colonialism, gender, sexuality, citizenship, interwar period, historiography

How to cite

Goldthree, Reena N. and Natanya Duncan. 2018. "Feminist Histories of the Interwar Caribbean: Anti-colonialism, Popular Protest, and the Gendered Struggle for Rights." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12: 1–30

Editorial

Writing in the pages of the *Negro World*, the official organ of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), in October 1925, Jamaican journalist Amy Jacques Garvey heralded a new era of women's civic activism. "The exigencies of this present age require that women take their places beside their men," she proclaimed. "[W]omen of the darker races are sallying forth to help their men establish a civilization according to their own standards, and to strive for world leadership." Positioning women in the vanguard of the entwined struggles for racial and anti-colonial liberation, Jacques Garvey announced that women's activism could ultimately extend beyond protest politics to armed struggle. "The doll-baby type of woman is a thing of the past, and woman is forging ahead prepared for all emergencies and ready to answer any call, even if it be to face the cannons on the battlefield." In her gendered blueprint for liberation, militant women "of the darker races" would advance the fight "to victory and to glory."¹

Born in Jamaica in 1895, Jacques Garvey migrated to the United States in 1917 and played a central role in black nationalist and anti-colonial political movements in the decades between the First and Second World Wars (Adler 1992; Bair 1992; Taylor 2002; Duncan 2009; Goldthree 2010; Parascandola 2016; Blain 2018). While her work as an editor and columnist for the *Negro World* afforded her an unusually visible global platform, Jacques Garvey's unflinching efforts to challenge colonial rule were part of a far-reaching and sustained groundswell of popular activism by women and men in the Greater Caribbean.² In the islands and in the diaspora, new activist groups—sugarcane cutters and oilfield workers, military veterans and market women, physicians and middle-class suffragists, poets and trade union organizers—mobilised to challenge colonialism and its attendant inequalities. In this issue of the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, we examine the political ferment of the interwar period (1918–1939), tracking how gendered conceptions of rights, respectability, leadership, and belonging informed anti-colonial thought and praxis. Rather

than constructing a singular narrative of Caribbean anti-colonialism, we grapple with the varied political visions and modes of resistance that animated critiques of colonial rule, attending at once to place-specific strategies and to shared regional agendas.

Feminist scholars have exposed the imbrication of anti-colonial nationalism and gender ideology, revealing how understandings of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality structured nationalist projects from above and below. “Despite professed ideals, nationalisms do not address all individuals equally: significant distinctions and discriminations are made along gendered (and also class and racial) lines,” as literary theorist Elleke Boehmer has observed. “Gender informs nationalism and nationalism in its turn consolidates and legitimates itself through a variety of gendered structures...the idea of nationhood bears a masculine identity though national ideals may wear a feminine face” (1991, 6). Engaging with these insights, the twelve articles included in this issue present new research on gender and anti-colonialism in Jamaica, Haiti, Bermuda, Puerto Rico, Curaçao, Trinidad, British Guiana (Guyana), and Caribbean diasporic communities in Panama and the United States. The authors disrupt the longstanding focus on the “fathers” and “heroes” of Caribbean nationalism by excavating women’s contributions to the region’s nationalist struggles, casting fresh light on prominent activists such as Una Marson, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, Dominga de la Cruz Becerril, and Trina Padilla de Sanz, while also introducing readers to less well-known figures such as trailblazing newspaper columnist Amy Denniston, community organizer Elizabeth Hendrickson, suffragist Gladys Morrell, and radical educators Catherine Donnellan and Eleanor Frances Cahill. In addition, they foreground gender and sexuality as crucial sites of contestation within nationalist struggles, analysing them alongside race, class, religion, and other axes of difference,³ to show how Caribbean women and men alike employed gender ideologies to assess grassroots resistance movements, popular religious and healing practices, and forms of belonging. Bridging the fields of women’s history and gender and sexuality studies, then, this issue offers a feminist analysis of the social, material, and discursive dimensions of anti-colonialism in the interwar-era Greater Caribbean.

Turbulent and transformative, the decades between the world wars have garnered resurgent interest as governments mark the centenary of World War I and scholars reassess the era's many sociopolitical upheavals. Caribbeanist scholars have identified the interwar period as a critical conjuncture in the protracted struggle against colonial rule, uncovering both the structural conditions and the individual activists that catalyzed popular movements during the 1920s and 30s (e.g., Reddock 1988; K. Singh 1994; W. James 1998; Sharpley-Whiting 2002; Edwards 2003; Putnam 2013a; Dalleo 2016; Jiménez de Wagenheim 2016). In the articles showcased here, the contributors tackle several interrelated questions about the interwar Caribbean. How did the political shifts of the interwar era impact prevailing gender norms in the Caribbean? What roles did women—of various racial, ethnic, religious and class backgrounds—play in the era's major political movements? What ideas did political activists espouse about masculinity and femininity? How did nationalist leaders respond to normative colonial discourses on reproduction, sexuality, and the family? And finally, how have the political upheavals of the interwar era been remembered and reimagined in this contemporary moment? Each article engages with these questions through a focus on a specific site within the Greater Caribbean, while also considering regional commonalities and convergences. More broadly, the articles build upon foundational work by Caribbean feminist thinkers, while also introducing fresh theoretical and methodological approaches inspired by contemporary scholarly debates.

The islands and continental rimlands of the Caribbean possessed varying degrees of sovereignty in the interwar era, from Crown Colony status to political independence. Yet, across the region, colonialism and foreign military intervention limited most Caribbean residents' ability to participate in local governance. Three European powers—Britain, France, and the Netherlands—maintained longstanding networks of colonial possessions. The United States exercised jurisdiction over Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands as unincorporated territories. And, beginning during World War I and continuing well into the interwar years, the U.S. military led multi-year occupations of the region's formally independent nation states—Haiti, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic.⁴

The interwar Caribbean, therefore, should be viewed as a place of “constrained sovereignty,” a region where various forms of foreign intrusion “challenge[d] the principles of bounded territorial authority associated with the Westphalian order” (Bonilla 2015, 10).

Local Struggles and Pan-Caribbean Political Histories

The political conflagrations of World War I reverberated deeply in the Caribbean. Colonial territories became sites of rapid military mobilisation, which, in turn, provided a pretext for intensified policing of labouring men and women by the state. During the war years, over 30,000 conscripted troops from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana fought in the French Army (Edwards 2003, 3; Andrivon-Milton 2005; Guyot, Gardiennet, and Champesteing 2014). More than 15,600 volunteers enlisted in the British West Indies Regiment, while smaller numbers of soldiers from the British Caribbean served in the West India Regiment, in Canadian regiments, or in metropolitan army units (Howe 2002; R. Smith 2004; Goldthree 2016a; Goldthree 2016b). Approximately 18,000 servicemen from Puerto Rico served in the United States armed forces, deploying as guards in the U.S.-controlled Canal Zone in Panama (Franqui-Rivera 2018, 63–96). As an emerging body of literature has begun to document, women across the region aided the war effort in myriad ways—as nurses, recruitment rally speakers, fundraisers, sex workers, and literacy teachers (Del Moral 2013; Bean 2018). The mobilisation for war propelled other sociopolitical shifts of lasting importance, most notably the suspension of Indian indentureship, a system that had brought half a million Indian labourers to the Caribbean from 1838 to 1917. Indentureship’s end not only marked a watershed in the formation of Indo-Caribbean communities, but also facilitated novel possibilities for political engagement and claims-making (Shepherd 1994; Ramdin 2000; Mohammed 2002a; Mahase 2008; Bahadur 2014).

In the war's wake, anti-colonialists of various ideological stripes mobilised in pursuit of greater political rights and improved living conditions, presenting formidable challenges to the European and U.S. overseas empires. Issuing demands for self-determination and full citizenship, activists contested the legitimacy of foreign rule through new mass organisations—such as trade unions, political parties, and nationalist associations—as well as older collectives such as mutual aid societies, religious groups and cultural clubs. Activists also used printed texts to marshal support, publishing literary works, newspaper articles, and protest pamphlets. The duration, scale, and militancy of anti-colonial actions varied widely during the interwar years, with activists employing tactics ranging from formal negotiation with the state to armed insurgencies in occupied Haiti and the Dominican Republic; yet the surge in grassroots protest occurred throughout the Greater Caribbean, often linking the islands to the diaspora and to other sites in the colonised world (e.g., W. James 1998; Davis and Williams 2007; Luis-Brown 2008; Boittin 2010; Ewing 2013; Putnam 2013a; Guridy 2013; Makalani 2014; Dalleo 2016; Duke 2016; Umoren 2016; Duncan 2017; Stevens 2017).

What would result from the political upheavals of the interwar decades? Looking broadly across the region we see an expansion of electoral democracy by the end of the 1940s, including the enfranchisement of women in several Caribbean territories. In Cuba, for example, disaffected soldiers and student activists sparked the Revolution of 1933, deposing President Carlos Manuel de Céspedes y Quesada and rallying under the slogan “Cuba for Cubans” (Pérez 2011, 204). Seven years later, in October 1940, the region's most populous nation would enact a new progressive constitution, which expanded civil liberties, social welfare provisions, and workers' rights as well as codified universal adult suffrage (Stoner 1991; Whitney 2001; Pérez 2011). In the British West Indies, universal adult suffrage was introduced in response to the landmark labour rebellions of the 1930s, becoming law in Jamaica in 1944 and in Trinidad and Tobago two years later (Post 1978, 1981; Ryan 1972; Reddock 1988, 1994; K. Singh 1994; Palmer 2014; Teelucksingh 2015). In 1946, the citizens of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guiana voted to become part of metropolitan France, transforming the

vieilles colonies into overseas departments (Nesbitt 2007; Childers 2016). That same year, mass protests by militant students, urban workers, and peasants toppled the government of Haitian president Élie Lescot, inaugurating a new era of radical political activism (M. Smith 2009, 71–101; Joseph-Gabriel 2016, 6–10). In the colonies under Dutch rule, universal adult suffrage was enacted through a new constitution in 1948 (Oostindie and Klinkers 2003, 64–88). To be sure, these gains were not uniform or uncontested. The dictatorship of Raphael Leónidas Trujillo Molina in the Dominican Republic, which stretched from 1930 to 1961, offered a striking departure from the democratic opening in the Caribbean during 1930s and 40s, and presented a sobering example of how populist development projects could become a linchpin of authoritarian governance (Turits 2003; Derby 2009; Paulino 2016; Manley 2017).

Rethinking Gender and Anti-colonialism in the Greater Caribbean

This special issue originated through a series of conversations between the co-editors about how gender remains understudied and undertheorized, relative to race and class, in the scholarship on interwar Caribbean politics. Seeking to place studies of anti-colonialism more squarely into conversation with Caribbean feminist studies, the articles featured here approach the interwar period through a variety of academic disciplines: gender and sexuality studies, history, sociology, literary and cultural studies, and African Diaspora studies. The contributors draw upon an impressively diverse array of written materials—including advertisements, ethnographic field notes, novels, archival documents, memoirs, newspaper editorials, and short stories—as well as interviews and photographs. Geographically, they map the gendered terrain of interwar political activism across the islands and continental rimlands of the Caribbean as well as in the diaspora. When read together, the articles in this issue enable new comparative analyses of the interwar Caribbean across both geopolitical and temporal boundaries.

In the first two articles, W. Chris Johnson and Tyesha Maddox examine British Caribbean activism in interwar New York City. By the early 1920s, some 40,000 British Caribbean immigrants resided in Harlem, with smaller numbers in Brooklyn and other parts of the city (Putnam 2013b, 472; Watkins-Owens 1996). Johnson, focusing on the movement for equitable healthcare in Harlem, recovers the forgotten activism of black male physicians from the British Caribbean and the U.S. South. Like their African-American counterparts, Afro-Caribbean doctors spearheaded efforts to address the medical needs of black migrants, while simultaneously confronting the racist practices of white medical professionals. Yet, in their fight to improve healthcare for black Harlemites, “Caribbean Race Men of Medicine” drew upon eugenic theories to target young, single, working-class black women as dangerous sources of biological and moral contagion.

Maddox directs our attention to the activities and impact of Caribbean-American mutual aid societies and benevolent associations, reconstructing the social networks of immigrants during the interwar years. Through a vibrant web of local immigrant organisations, West Indians in New York City provided employment assistance to new arrivals, offered financial support to members, sponsored cultural events, and shared important news from the islands. Maddox highlights women’s untold contributions, noting their pivotal labour as organisers, fundraisers and officers. She reveals how Caribbean women used immigrant associations to redefine and extend constructions of home, forging new understandings of a shared “West Indian ethnic identity among islanders in the United States,” while also maintaining transnational connections with those “back home in the Caribbean.” By placing West Indian women at the center of histories of Caribbean immigration to the United States, Maddox illuminates women’s roles in the making and mobilisation of diasporic communities.

The next two articles, written by Kaysha Corinealdi and Grace Sanders Johnson, shed light on Afro-Caribbean women’s intellectual production as a crucial site of interwar activism. Corinealdi examines Amy Denniston’s tenure as the editor of the “Of Interest to Women” section in the *Panama Tribune*, an English-

language newsweekly for Afro-Caribbean Panamanians living on the isthmus. Analysing Denniston's editorials, Corinealdi explores how ideas about gender roles, modernity, and citizenship shaped Denniston's vision for black communal progress in Panama. As the article reveals, Denniston espoused contradictory positions about women's role in the Afro-Caribbean Panamanian community, at times calling on women "to steadfastly pursue self-progress" while at other moments articulating "fixed notions of women's roles in society" based on biological difference.

Sanders Johnson considers the intellectual legacies of the U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) through the work of anthropologist Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain. Carefully parsing Comhaire-Sylvain's publications in the feminist journal *La Voix des Femmes* and her field notes from the rural town of Kenscoff, Sanders Johnson reveals that Comhaire-Sylvain drew upon her personal experiences of grief and familial loss during the occupation to produce accounts of Haitian society that highlighted peasant women's roles in kinship networks, religious practices, and mourning rituals. She shows how Comhaire-Sylvain's scholarship informed elite feminist discourse in Haiti, while also vindicating the country's linguistic and cultural ties to West Africa. The article richly documents women's contributions to intellectual debates in interwar Haiti, shifting our focus beyond Jean Price-Mars, Jacques Roumain and other well-known male thinkers.

Capturing the dynamics of local political struggles, Nicole Bourbonnais and Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz reveal how fissures of race and class shaped political mobilisations in the decades following World War I. Bourbonnais traces the connections between two political movements in interwar Bermuda: the campaign for women's suffrage and the campaign against racial discrimination. Focusing on the period from 1934 to 1944, she explores the turbulent alliance between the leaders of the Bermuda Woman's Suffrage Society (BWSS), which was founded by a cadre of elite white women, and the editor of the *Recorder*, an Afro-Bermudian newspaper published in Hamilton. The leaders of the BWSS and the *Recorder* initially found common cause in the

fight for suffrage and in their opposition to a 1935 report that recommended compulsory sterilisation for unwed parents and “mental defectives.” Yet, as Bourbonnais points out, the alliance ultimately fractured because activists in both groups pursued narrow agendas that privileged the concerns of “women” (understood as white and propertied) or “the race” (understood as black and male). As a result, Afro-Bermudian women had limited opportunities to speak for themselves or to advance their own political agendas in either organisation.

Jiménez-Muñoz traces the fault lines within the *Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico* [Puerto Rican Nationalist Party] through the lives of Dominga de la Cruz Becerril and Trina Padilla de Sanz. Deconstructing the hegemonic discourse of “*la gran familia puertorriqueña*” [the Great Puerto Rican Family], she charts how *Nacionalistas* articulated conflicting understandings of *la patria* [the fatherland/motherland] and Puerto Rican identity in their writings and political protests. She argues that the divisions of the interwar era revealed a national family comprised of the island’s “white/near-white, property-owner” class and an alternative national family comprised of the “subaltern, mixed-race” majority. In a related point, Jiménez-Muñoz calls on scholars to devote greater attention to the contributions of black and *mulata* women in studies of Puerto Rican nationalism.

In their articles, Janelle Rodriques, Faith Smith, and Amrita Bandopadhyay each revisit debates about political belonging in interwar Jamaica through literature and the popular press. Rodriques interrogates gendered discourses concerning respectability, Obeah, and “the folk,” bringing together several central themes of this special issue. Like Corinealdi, she shows that anxieties about black womanhood permeated middle-class intellectuals’ visions of racial and national progress. Analyzing two short stories published in the Jamaican weekly *Public Opinion*, Rodriques tracks how literary representations of Obeah simultaneously presented women and African-derived spiritual practices as threats to creole nationalism. This article also suggests that gendered and sexualised tropes about

“feminised bodies” animated nationalist writers’ engagement with folk culture and aesthetics in the 1930s.

Smith analyses the entanglement of leisure, intimacy, desire, and consumption in fictions by Jamaican writer Una Marson and West African journalist Mabel Dove. Scrutinising references to textiles in both authors’ writings, Smith considers how the metaphor of clothing attunes us to “the material and symbolic resonances of a respectable black feminine imaginary.” The article disrupts teleological readings of politics in the interwar British Caribbean, which render the social and intellectual ferment of the 1930s as a dress rehearsal for post-World War II nationalist struggles. Instead, Smith calls attention to middle-class black women’s acts of self-fashioning—through adornment and intimate relationships—to pose new questions about gendered conceptions of freedom.

Bandopadhyay interprets depictions of Chinese Jamaican women in the work of three writers: interwar editor and novelist Herbert de Lisser and contemporary authors Victor Chang and Kerry Young. Historians have documented the fissures between the black and Chinese communities in Jamaica, noting how economic and ethnic tension fueled anti-Chinese riots in 1918. Building on this work, Bandopadhyay argues that sexual anxieties and competition over Chinese women profoundly shaped inter-ethnic clashes. Examining the literary magazine *Planter’s Punch*, she notes that de Lisser’s portrayal of Chinese Jamaicans invoked middle-class notions of respectability, characterizing Chinese women as dutiful “helpmates” and as symbols of the Chinese community’s integration into the island’s merchant elite. In contrast to de Lisser, Chang and Young underscore Chinese women’s battles against sexual and xenophobic violence and expose the marked cultural and generational divides among Chinese Jamaicans. Their contemporary writings, as Bandopadhyay suggests, respond to the elision of Chinese women from both the colonial archive and Jamaica’s creole nationalist project.

Shifting our focus to British Guiana, Aliyah Khan explores Indo-Caribbean women's participation in labour protests from the era of indentureship to the rebellions of the 1930s. Attentive to gendered erasures in the archival record, she reads Guyanese author Ryhaan Shah's acclaimed novel *The Silent Life* (2010) alongside historical accounts of labour activism by women in colonial British Guiana. The article illuminates how *jahaji bahin* ("ship sister") stories contest hegemonic Indo-Caribbean histories that center the migration experiences of the *jahaji bhai* ("ship brother"). By foregrounding the history of Indian women's interwar activism—through archival traces and literary representations—Khan reveals new accounts that subvert patriarchal, heterosexist understandings of the labour movement, anti-colonial struggle, and the process of Indo-Caribbean community formation.

In the final two articles, Rose Mary Allen and Bridget Brereton highlight women's activism during the late 1930s and early 1940s, tracing the impact of World War II on political movements in the southern Caribbean. Allen chronicles the campaign for universal adult suffrage in the Dutch Caribbean colony of Curaçao, exploring how women intervened in local debates about citizenship, gender, and race. Situating the suffrage campaign in the context of Afro-Curaçaoans' long struggle for socioeconomic mobility and racial and gender equality in the decades following emancipation, she finds that both elite and working-class women challenged conservative gender ideologies that limited women to the domestic sphere and excluded them from the public world of electoral politics. Their demands, as revealed in interviews and newspaper accounts, were framed not through the language of anti-colonial nationalism, but rather, through a call for voting rights on par with those granted to metropolitan women in the Netherlands. Yet, the long-term political changes engendered by the March 1948 bill instituting universal suffrage in Curaçao laid the foundation for anti-colonial uprisings during the 1960s and 70s.

Brereton recovers the activism of two Irish women schoolteachers in Trinidad during World War II. Hired to teach at a prestigious Catholic girls' secondary

school in Port of Spain, Catherine Donnellan and Eleanor Frances Cahill joined the local trade union movement and collaborated with anti-colonial intellectuals on the socialist newspaper *New Dawn*. Analysing their political activities and published writings, Brereton reveals how Donnellan and Cahill breached the norms of colonial society by labouring in solidarity with black activists in the male-dominated labour movement. She documents the brutal repression that both women faced, which included being fired from their teaching positions and imprisoned without trial by the colonial government. Contributing to the historiography on anti-colonialism in Trinidad by highlighting an example of intra-imperial collaboration, the article underscores the dire consequences faced by those who dared to challenge the entrenched hierarchies of race, class, and gender that underpinned British colonial rule.

To conclude, this issue features an interview with Dalea Bean, Lecturer and Graduate Coordinator at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, Regional Coordinating Office, at The University of the West Indies, about her groundbreaking book, *Jamaican Women and the World Wars: On the Front Lines of Change* (2018). Bean calls attention to the world wars as vibrant, yet overlooked, moments of activism for women in Jamaica. The outbreak of war in 1914 provided unprecedented opportunities for Jamaican women—particularly white and near-white women from the upper classes—to participate in the public sphere through fundraising campaigns, recruitment rallies, and other patriotic activities. During World War II, Jamaican women served as soldiers in the Auxiliary Territorial Service as well as spearheaded initiatives on the home front to support the Allied war effort. In the interview, Bean discusses how gender and racial ideologies shaped the response to the world wars in Jamaica and reveals how wartime mobilisation transformed women's roles in Jamaican society. Linking past and present, she also considers how the activism of Jamaican women during the world wars might inform contemporary feminist movement building in Jamaica.

Charting Future Research Agendas: Enduring Questions and Possible Directions

By carefully tracing the intellectual and political genealogies of popular movements in the decades between the First and Second World Wars, the articles presented here expose the multiple variants of anti-colonial critique that emerged in the interwar Greater Caribbean. Rather than viewing anti-colonialism as a unitary set of principles or as a fixed ideology, the authors demonstrate that challenges to colonial rule emerged from activists who identified as revolutionary nationalists, Garveyites, socialists, and communists as well as from local reformers who advocated for self-government *within* empires. This move away from the traditional focus on nationalist party politics helps underscore how civic associations, labour unions, migrants' groups, women's organisations, and the periodical press engendered new anti-colonial counterpublics. While middle-class intellectuals and activists often sat at the helm of these initiatives, women and men from the labouring classes intervened—at times decisively—to broaden the scope of popular politics. Further, this issue unearths the webs of connection that linked local anti-colonial struggles to inter-island, regional, hemispheric, and global political currents, allowing us to study anti-colonialism as a process that unfolded at various geographic scales concurrently, instead of situating it solely within national histories. Finally, the articles recover the surprising alliances and coalitions that nourished anti-colonial movements. The protracted struggle against colonialism necessitated myriad forms of collaboration—sometimes across boundaries of race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, and political orientation—in pursuit of a shared objective. Thus, the contributors prompt us to wrestle with the messy world of interwar protest politics as it unfolded in the streets and in literary and cultural production. In conjunction with the newly published articles included herein, we have also provided an extended bibliography of relevant scholarship in an effort to draw attention to the growing literature on the interwar Caribbean.⁵ While we are pleased that the interwar period is now subject to heightened scholarly interest, many crucial questions remain unanswered about the intersection of gender, anti-colonialism and political change in the decades between the First and

Second World Wars. We conclude, therefore, by calling attention to several lacunae in the existing literature in the hope of stimulating new research.

Historical studies of interwar anti-colonialism have focused disproportionately on the political imaginaries and networks of urban residents, with much less attention given to the political worlds of rural working peoples. The voluminous writings of intellectuals and activists—from personal diaries to literary works to public speeches—offer a fascinating window into urban political culture, particularly in the region's capital cities. Yet, in order to craft a more complete picture of Caribbean anti-colonialisms, we urge scholars to shift their view from Kingston, Havana, and Port-au-Prince to the region's vast rural expanses. To date, insightful research has been done on the political culture of sugar and banana workers in the 1920s and 1930s, but many looming questions remain about the political consciousness of rural women and men. How did rural smallholders and wage labourers view the educated, urban, middle-class activists who led nationalist organisations? To what extent did women and men from the countryside participate in new political parties, labour unions, and civic clubs? How did rural people conceptualise political belonging and their relationship to the state? And to what extent did anti-colonial nationalism resonate beyond capital cities and port towns in the interwar decades? The nuanced scholarship on rural subjectivities in the interwar Dominican Republic—which combines deep archival research with innovative use of oral testimonies, historical photographs, literature, and popular songs—offers a promising example for scholars working on other Caribbean locales (Derby 1994; Turits 2002; García-Peña 2016; Ramírez 2018), as does Erna Brodber's groundbreaking research on life in the Jamaican countryside (2004a, 2004b).

We should also consider how popular spiritual and religious practices informed anti-colonial movements in the interwar Greater Caribbean. Building on pioneering ethnographic studies conducted by Zora Neale Hurston and Melville J. Herskovits in the 1930s, scholars have highlighted how Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices have provided “alternative political and symbolic orders” for the

region's subaltern (Bogues 2002, 27).⁶ In a similar vein, studies of Indo-Caribbean communities have revealed that religious epics like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* influenced the worldview of not only Hindus, but Muslims and Christians as well (Mohammed 1998; S. Singh 2012). In order to develop these suggestive insights, scholars must now parse how ideas about gender, power, and authority derived from Caribbean spiritual practices shaped anti-colonial activism.

The work of producing more nuanced and comprehensive accounts of interwar political mobilisations will likewise require further research on Caribbean women's contributions to the era's major civic organisations. Over the past four decades, scholars have produced biographies of notable women leaders and have also documented women's participation in political parties, labour unions, feminist groups, and international organisations like the UNIA (e.g., Brodber 1986b; Reddock 1990; Matos-Rodríguez and Delgado 1998; Boyce Davies 2007; Hoeft 2007; Macpherson 2007; Martin 2007; Mayes 2008; Manley 2017; Brunson 2018). Building on this valuable corpus of work, we must now direct more sustained attention to the rank-and-file, studying the perspectives and motivations of the working-class women whose labour was essential for movement building. Recently published collections of primary sources—such as *Cien años de feminismos dominicanos* and the *Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*—should yield significant new insights about the content and scope of women's popular activism.⁷ We also eagerly await further research on the political activities of Amerindian, Syrian/Lebanese and Chinese women during the interwar period, given the paucity of Caribbeanist scholarship on these groups.⁸

Important questions remain, too, about interwar-era conceptions of sexuality and respectability, particularly in regards to the experiences of queer Caribbeans. “One of the greatest silences in Caribbean historiography,” as sociologist Mimi Sheller has noted, “is the invisibility of queer subjectivities” (2012, 3). Even as scholars have produced a sophisticated body of research on

postcolonial queer literature, performance, and practices of “erotic self-making,” focusing on the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Allen 2011), the queer presence in the colonial Caribbean remains a neglected topic.⁹ In order to disrupt heterosexist nationalist narratives, we need to explore how queer and transgender identities were constructed in the region historically, while also attending to shifting understandings of the body, sexual desire, and eroticism more broadly. In this effort, M. Jacqui Alexander’s foundational claim that erotic autonomy is a constitutive and deeply contested aspect of citizenship provides a framework for thinking about the relationship between anti-colonialism and queer embodiment in the interwar decades (2005, 21–65).

Finally, we call on scholars to investigate the domestic sphere as a pivotal terrain of political struggle. “The public and private lives of individuals are inextricably linked,” as feminist theorist Patricia Mohammed has noted. “[A] neat separation of gender in the past into a privileged public masculinity and a subordinate domestic femininity has assuredly never been an adequate description of the lives of men and women in the Caribbean” (2002, xv). Marriage, reproduction, and child welfare were matters of intense concern for nationalist leaders during the interwar period, as promising recent studies demonstrate (Gregg 2007; Altink 2011; Leeds 2013; De Barros 2014; Putnam 2014a; Amador 2016; Bourbonnais 2016; Merritt 2017). How did concerns about domestic life shape anti-colonial projects, and how did anti-colonial activism remake the domestic sphere? To answer these questions, future studies will need to conceptualise the household as a deeply politicised space that both contributes to, and is transformed by, activism in the public sphere. Furthermore, scholars of interwar-era anti-colonialisms will need to take seriously the feminist insight that domestic, reproductive, and care work are essential to the making and unmaking of empire (McClintock 1995; Stoler 2002; Briggs 2002; Olcott 2011).

References and Further Reading

- Adler, Karen S. 1992. "'Always Leading Our Men in Service and Sacrifice': Amy Jacques Garvey, Feminist Black Nationalist." *Gender and Society* 6(3): 346–75.
- Alexander, M. Jacqui. 1994. "Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas." *Feminist Review* 48: 5–23.
- . 2005. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Alexander, M. Jacqui, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, eds. 1997. *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. New York: Routledge.
- Allen, Jafari S. 2011. *Venceremos?: The Erotics of Black Self-making in Cuba*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Altink, Henrice. 2011. *Destined for a Life of Service: Defining African-Jamaican Womanhood, 1865–1938*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Amador, Emma. 2015. "Organizing Puerto Rican Domestic Workers: Resistance and Household Labor Reform in the Puerto Rican Diaspora after 1930." *International Labor and Working Class History* 88: 67–86.
- . 2016. "Women Ask Relief for Puerto Ricans": Territorial Citizenship, the Social Security Act, and Puerto Rican Communities, 1933–1939." *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History* 13 (3–4): 105–29.
- Andrison-Milton, Sabine. 2005. *La Martinique et la grande guerre*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Ashdown, Peter. 1981. "Marcus Garvey, the UNIA, and the Black Cause in British Honduras, 1914–1949." *Journal of Caribbean History* 15: 41–55.
- Ayala, César J., and Rafael Bernabe. 2007. *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History since 1898*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Bahadur, Gaiutra. 2014. *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bair, Barbara. 1992. "True Women, Real Men: Gender, Ideology, and Social Roles in the Garvey Movement." In *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History: Essays from the Seventh Berkshire Conference on the History of Women*, edited by Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M. Reverby, 154–66. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Barriteau, Eudine. 1998. "Theorizing Gender Systems and the Project of Modernity in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean." *Feminist Review* 59: 186–210.
- Bean, Dalea. 2018. *Jamaican Women and the World Wars: On the Front Lines of Change*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Blain, Keisha N. 2018. *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Boehmer, Elleke. 1991. "Breaking the Silence: Stories of Women and Mothers." In *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*, edited by Susheila Nasta, 3–23. London: Women's Press.
- Bogues, Anthony. 2002. "Politics, Nation and PostColony: Caribbean Inflections." *Small Axe* 11: 1–30.
- Boittin, Jennifer Anne. 2010. *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

- Bonilla, Yarimar. 2015. *Non-sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bourbonnais, Nicole C. 2016. *Birth Control in the Decolonizing Caribbean: Reproductive Politics and Practice on Four Islands, 1930–1970*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Boyce Davies, Carole. 2007. *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Brereton, Bridget. 1998. "Gendered Testimonies: Autobiographies, Diaries and Letters by Women as Sources for Caribbean History." *Feminist Review* 59: 143–63.
- . 2002. "Gender and the Historiography of the English-speaking Caribbean." In *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*, edited by Patricia Mohammed, 129–46. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Brereton, Bridget, and Kevin A. Yelvington, eds. 1999. *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Postemancipation Social and Cultural History*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Briggs, Laura. 2002. *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Brodber, Erna. 1986a. "Afro-Jamaican Women at the Turn of the Century." *Social and Economic Studies* 35(3): 23–50.
- . 1986b. "The Pioneering Miss Bailey." *Jamaica Journal* 19(2): 9–14.
- . 2004a. *The Second Generation of Freedmen in Jamaica, 1907–1944*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- . 2004b. *Woodside, Pear Tree Grove P.O.* Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Brunson, Takkara. 2016. "'Writing Black Womanhood in the Early Cuban Republic, 1904–16.'" *Gender & History* 28(2): 480–500.
- . 2018. "'In the General Interest of all Conscious Women': Race, Class, and the Cuban Women's Movement, 1923–1939." *Cuban Studies* 46: 159–82.
- Bustamante, Gladys Maud. 1997. *The Memoirs of Lady Bustamante*. Kingston, Jamaica: Kingston Publishers.
- Calder, Bruce J. 1984. *The Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic during the U.S. Occupation of 1916–1924*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Campbell, Kofi Omoniyi Sylvanus, ed. 2014. *The Queer Caribbean Speaks: Interviews with Writers, Artists, and Activists*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cancel, Mario R., ed. 1997. *Historia y género: vidas y relatos de las mujeres en el Caribe*. Mayagüez, PR: Asociación Puertorriqueña de Historiadores.
- Candelario, Ginetta E. B., April J. Mayes, and Elizabeth S. Manley. 2016. *Cien años de feminismos dominicanos: una colección de documentos y escrituras clave en la formación y evolución del pensamiento y el movimiento feminista en la República Dominicana, 1865–1965*. Santo Domingo: Archivo General de la Nación, Departamento de Investigación y Divulgación, Área de Publicaciones.
- Carr, Barry. 1996. "Mill Occupations and Soviets: The Mobilisation of Sugar Workers in Cuba, 1917–1933." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28(1): 129–58.
- Castillo Bueno, María de los Reyes. 2000. *Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Caulfield, Sueann, Sarah C. Chambers, and Lara Putnam, eds. 2005. *Honor, Status, and Law in Modern Latin America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Childers, Kristen Stromberg. 2016. *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace: National Identity, Decolonization, and Assimilation in the French Caribbean*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Colón Warren, Alice. 2003. "Puerto Rico: Feminism and Feminist Studies." *Gender and Society* 17(5): 664–90.
- Crespo-Kebler, Elizabeth. 2003. "'The Infamous Crime against Nature': Constructions of Heterosexuality and Lesbian Subversions in Puerto Rico." In *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, edited by Linden Lewis, 190–212. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Dalleo, Raphael. 2016. *American Imperialism's Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Davis, Darién J., and Judith Michelle Williams. 2007. "Pan-Africanism, Negritude, and the Currency of Blackness: Cuba, the Francophone Caribbean, and Brazil in Comparative Perspective, 1930–1950s." In *Beyond Slavery: The Multilayered Legacy of Africans in Latin America and the Caribbean*, edited by Darién J. Davis, 143–67. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- De Barros, Juanita. 2014. *Reproducing the British Caribbean: Sex, Gender, and Population Politics after Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Decena, Carlos Ulises. 2011. *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire among Dominican Immigrant Men*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Del Moral, Solsiree. 2013. "Colonial Citizens of a Modern Empire: War, Illiteracy, and Physical Education in Puerto Rico, 1917–1930." *New West Indian Guide* 87: 30–61.
- Derby, Lauren. 1994. "Haitians, Magic, and Money: Raza and Society in the Haitian-Dominican Borderlands, 1900 to 1937." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36(3): 488–526.
- . 2009. *Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Donnell, Alison. 2003. "Una Marson: Feminism, Anti-colonialism and a Forgotten Fight for Freedom." In *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, edited by Bill Schwarz, 114–31. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Duke, Eric. 2016. *Building a Nation: Caribbean Federation in the Black Diaspora*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Duncan, Natanya. 2009. "The Efficient Womanhood of the Universal Negro Improvement Association: 1919–1930." PhD diss., University of Florida.
- . 2017. "'Now in Charge of the American Field': Maymie De Mena and Charting the UNIA's New Course." *76 King Street: Journal of Liberty Hall: The Legacy of Marcus Garvey* 3: 43–57.
- Dunkley, D. A. 2018. "The Politics of Repatriation and the First Rastafari, 1932–1940." *Souls*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2018.14343777>.
- Edwards, Brent Hayes. 2003. *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Elwin, Rosamund, ed., 1997. *Tongues on Fire: Caribbean Lesbian Lives and Stories*. Toronto: Women's Press.
- Ewing, Adam. 2013. "Caribbean Labour Politics in the Age of Garvey, 1918–1938." *Race & Class* 55: 23–45.

- . 2014. *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Findlay, Eileen. 1999. *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870–1920*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ford-Smith, Honor. 2004. "Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular: Performing Engendered Nationalisms in the UNIA in Jamaica." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 6(1): 18–44.
- Franqui-Rivera, Harry. 2018. *Soldiers of the Nation: Military Service and Modern Puerto Rico, 1868-1952*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- French, Joan. 1988. "Colonial Policy towards Women after the 1938 Uprising: The Case of Jamaica." *Caribbean Quarterly* 34(3/4): 38–61.
- French, John D., and Daniel James, eds. 1997. *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers: From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- García-Peña, Lorgia. 2016. *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ghisiyawan, Krystal Nandini. 2016. "(Un)Settling the Politics of Identity and Sexuality among Indo-Trinidadian Same-Sex Loving Women." In *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments*, edited by Gabrielle Jamela Hosein and Lisa Outar, 153–70. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gill, Lyndon K. 2018. *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Glave, Thomas, ed. 2008. *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Goldthree, Reena N. 2010. "Amy Jacques Garvey, Theodore Bilbo, and the Paradoxes of Black Nationalism." In *Global Circuits of Blackness: Interrogating the African Diaspora*, edited by Jean Muteba Rahier, Percy C. Hintzen, and Felipe Smith, 152–73. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- . 2016a. "'Vive La France!': British Caribbean Soldiers and Interracial Intimacies on the Western Front." *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 17(3): <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/639506>.
- . 2016b. "'A Greater Enterprise than the Panama Canal': Migrant Labor and Military Recruitment in the World War I-Era Circum-Caribbean." *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History* 13(3–4): 57–82.
- . 2017. "Writing War and Empire: Poetry, Patriotism, and Public Claims-Making in the British Caribbean." In *Caribbean Military Encounters*, edited by Shalini Puri and Lara Putnam, 49–69. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gregg, Veronica Marie. 2007. "'How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea': The Writings of Miss Amy Beckford Bailey as Moral Education in the Era of Jamaican Nation Building." *Small Axe* 11(2): 16–33.
- Guridy, Frank. 2013. "Making New Negroes in Cuba: Garveyism as a Transcultural Movement." In *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance beyond Harlem*, edited by Davarian L. Baldwin and Minkah Makalani, 183–204. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Guyot, Philippe, Marie-Céline Gardienet, and Léopold Champesteing. 2014. *Guyane, 1914-1918: une colonie et ses soldats dans la Grande Guerre: histoire, textes et documents*.

- Herskovits, Melville J. 1937. *Life in a Haitian Valley*. New York: A. A. Knopf.
- Hill, Robert A., ed. 2011. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Volume XI: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1910–1920. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- . 2014. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Volume XII: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1920–1921. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- . 2016. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Volume XIII: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1921–1922. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hoeftte, Rosemarijn. 2007. "Grace Schneiders-Howard: Suriname's Eerste Politica en Sociaal Activiste." *Historica* 30(1): 14–17.
- . 2013. *Suriname in the Long Twentieth Century: Domination, Contestation, Globalization*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Høgsbjerg, Christian. 2014. *C. L. R. James in Imperial Britain*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hosein, Gabrielle Jamela, and Lisa Outar, eds. 2016. *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Howe, Glenford. 2002. *Race, War, and Nationalism: A Social History of West Indians in the First World War*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle.
- Hudson, Peter James. 2017. *Bankers and Empire: How Wall Street Colonized the Caribbean*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. 1938. *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*. Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott.
- James, C. L. R. 2014. *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies, with the pamphlet The Case for West-Indian Self Government*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- James, Winston. 1998. *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America*. London: Verso.
- Jiménez de Wagenheim, Olga. 2016. *Nationalist Heroines: Puerto Rican Women History Forgot, 1930s–1950s*. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers.
- Joseph-Gabriel, Annette. 2016. "Beyond the Great Camouflage: Haiti in Suzanne Césaire's Politics and Poetics of Liberation." *Small Axe* 20(2): 1–13.
- Kempadoo, Kamala. 2003. "Sexuality in the Caribbean: Theory and Research (with an Emphasis on the Anglophone Caribbean)." *Social and Economic Studies* 52(3): 59–88.
- King, Rosamond S. 2016. *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Leeds, Asia. 2013. "Toward the 'Higher Type of Womanhood': The Gendered Contours of Garveyism and the Making of Redemptive Geographies in Costa Rica, 1922–1941." *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 2(1): 1–27.
- Lewis, Linden. 2000. "Nationalism and Caribbean Masculinity." In *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, edited by Tamar Mayer, 261–82. New York: Routledge.
- Lewis, Linden, ed. 2003. *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Lewis, Rupert. 1988. *Marcus Garvey: Anti-colonial Champion*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Lewis, Rupert, and Patrick Bryan, eds. 1991. *Garvey: His Work and Impact*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

- Lewis, Rupert, and Maureen Warner-Lewis, eds. 1986. *Garvey: Africa, Europe, The Americas*. Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies.
- López Springfield, Consuelo, ed. *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean Women in the Twentieth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Luis-Brown, David. 2008. *Waves of Decolonization: Discourses of Race and Hemispheric Citizenship in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Macpherson, Anne S. 2003a. "Citizens v. Clients: Working Women and Colonial Reform in Puerto Rico and Belize, 1932–45." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35(2): 279–310.
- . 2003b. "Colonial Matriarchs: Garveyism, Maternalism, and Belize's Black Cross Nurses, 1920–1952." *Gender & History* 15(3): 507–27.
- . 2007. *From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 1912–1982*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- . 2014. "Doing Comparative Caribbean (Gender) History: Puerto Rican and Belizean Working-Class Women, 1830s–1930s." *Small Axe* 18(1): 72–86.
- Mahase, Radica. 2008. "'Plenty a dem run away': Resistance by Indian Indentured Labourers in Trinidad, 1870–1920." *Labor History* 49(4): 465–80.
- Makalani, Minkah. 2014. *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917–1939*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Manley, Elizabeth. 2017. *The Paradox of Paternalism: Women and the Politics of Authoritarianism in the Dominican Republic*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Martin, Tony. 1976. *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- . 2007. *Amy Ashwood Garvey: Pan-Africanist, Feminist and Mrs. Marcus Garvey number 1, or, A Tale of two Amies*. Dover, MA: The Majority Press.
- Matos-Rodríguez, Félix, and Linda C. Delgado, eds. 1998. *Puerto Rican Women's History: New Perspectives*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Mayes, April J. 2008. "Why Dominican Feminism Moved to the Right: Class, Colour and Women's Activism in the Dominican Republic." *Gender & History* 20(2): 349–71.
- McClintock, Anne. 1995. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge.
- McPherson, Alan. 2014. *The Invaded: How Latin Americans and Their Allies Fought and Ended U.S. Occupations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Merritt, Brittany. 2017. "Insecurities of Empire: Struggles over Health Reform in Interwar Barbados." *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 18(3): <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/678797>.
- Misir, Prem, ed. 2018. *The Subaltern Indian Woman: Domination and Social Degradation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mohammed, Patricia. 1998. "Ram and Sita: The Reconstruction of Gender Identities among Indians in Trinidad through Mythology." In *Caribbean Portraits: Essays on Gender Ideologies and Identities*, edited by Christine Barrow, 391–413. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle.
- . 2002a. *Gender Negotiations among Indians in Trinidad, 1917–1947*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave in association with the Institute of Social Studies.

- . 2002b. "Introduction: The Material of Gender." In *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*, edited by Patricia Mohammed, xiv–xxii. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- . 2003a. "A Blueprint for Gender in Creole Trinidad: Exploring Gender Mythology through Calypsos of the 1920s and 1930s." In *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, edited by Linden Lewis, 129–68. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- . 2003b. "A Symbiotic Visiting Relationship: Caribbean Feminist Historiography and Caribbean Feminist Theory." In *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*, edited by Eudine Barriteau, 101–25. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- . 2004. "Unmasking Masculinity and Deconstructing Patriarchy: Problems and Possibilities within Feminist Epistemology." In *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*, edited by Rhoda E. Reddock, 38–67. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Mohammed, Patricia, and Catherine Shepherd, eds. 1988. *Gender in Caribbean Development: Papers Presented at the Inaugural Seminar of the University of the West Indies, Women and Development Studies Project*. Mona, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies, Women and Development Studies Project.
- Moore, Brian L., and Michele A. Johnson. 2004. *Neither Led nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865–1920*. Barbados: University of the West Indies Press.
- . 2011. *"They do as they please": The Jamaican Struggle for Cultural Freedom after Morant Bay*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Morris, Courtney Desiree. 2016. "Becoming Creole, Becoming Black: Migration, Diasporic Self-Making, and the Many Lives of Madame Maymie Leona Turpeau de Mena." *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 4(2): 171–95.
- Murray, David A. B. 2012. *Flaming Souls: Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Social Change in Barbados*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Nardal, Paulette. 2009. *Beyond Negritude: Essays from Woman in the City*. Translation, introduction, and notes by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Nesbitt, Nick. 2007. "Departmentalization and the Logic of Decolonization." *L'Esprit Créateur* 47(1): 32–43.
- Olcott, Jocelyn. 2011. "Introduction: Researching and Rethinking the Labors of Love." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 91(1): 1–27.
- Oostindie, Gert, and Inge Klinkers. 2003. *Decolonising the Caribbean: Dutch Policies in a Comparative Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Palmer, Colin A. 2014. *Freedom's Children: The 1938 Labor Rebellion and the Birth of Modern Jamaica*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Pappademos, Melina. 2011. *Black Political Activism and the Cuban Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Parascandola, Louis J., ed. 2016. *Amy Jacques Garvey: Selected Writings from the Negro World, 1923–1928*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Paulino, Edward. 2016. *Dividing Hispaniola: The Dominican Republic's Border Campaign against Haiti, 1930–1961*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Pérez Jr., Louis A. 1978. *Intervention, Revolution, and Politics in Cuba, 1913–1921*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

- . 2011. *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Plummer, Brenda Gayle. 1988. *Haiti and the Great Powers, 1902–1915*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Post, Ken. 1978. *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- . 1981. *Strike the Iron: A Colony at War: Jamaica, 1939–1945*. The Hague: Institute of Social Sciences.
- Puar, Jasbir Kaur. 2001. "Global Circuits: Transnational Sexualities and Trinidad." *Signs* 26(4): 1039–65.
- Putnam, Lara. 2002. *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870–1960*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- . 2013a. *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- . 2013b. "Provincializing Harlem: The 'Negro Metropolis' as Northern Frontier of a Connected Caribbean." *Modernism/Modernity* 20(3): 469–84.
- . 2014a. "Global Child-saving, Transatlantic Maternalism, and the Pathologization of Caribbean Childhood, 1930s–1940s." *Atlantic Studies* 11(4): 491–514.
- . 2014b. "Citizenship from the Margins: Vernacular Theories of Rights and the State from the Interwar Caribbean." *Journal of British Studies* 53: 162–91.
- . 2016. "Circum-Atlantic Print Circuits and Internationalism from the Peripheries in the Interwar Era." In *Print Culture Histories Beyond the Metropolis*, edited by James J. Connolly, Patrick Collier, Frank Felsenstein, Kenneth R. Hall, and Robert G. Hall, 215–39. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016.
- Ramdin, Ron. 2000. *Arising from Bondage: A History of the Indo-Caribbean People*. New York: New York University Press.
- Ramírez, Dixa. 2018. "Against Type: Reading Desire in the Visual Archives of Dominican Subjects." *Small Axe* 22(2): 144–60.
- Reddock, Rhoda. 1988. *Elma Francois: The NWCSA and the Worker's Struggle for Change in the Caribbean*. London: New Beacon Books.
- . 1990. "Feminism, Nationalism, and the Early Women's Movement in the English-speaking Caribbean (with Special Reference to Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago)." In *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, edited by Selwyn Reginald Cudjoe, 61–81. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990.
- . 1994. *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad & Tobago: A History*. London: Zed Books.
- . 2007. "Diversity, Difference and Caribbean Feminism: The Challenge of Anti-Racism." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 1: 1–24.
- Renda, Mary. 2006. *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915–1940*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Rosenberg, Leah Reade. 2007. *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rowe, Rochelle. 2013. *Imagining Caribbean Womanhood: Race, Nation and Beauty Competitions, 1929–70*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Roy-Féquière, Magali. 2004. *Women, Creole Identity, and Intellectual Life in Early Twentieth-Century Puerto Rico*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

- Rush, Anne Spry. 2011. *Bonds of Empire: West Indians and Britishness from Victoria to Decolonization*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ryan, Selwyn D. 1972. *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago: A Study of Decolonization in a Multiracial Society*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Schmidt, Hans R. 1995. *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean. 2002. *Negritude Women*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sheller, Mimi. 2012. *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Shepherd, Verene. 1994. *Transients to Settlers: The Experience of Indians in Jamaica, 1845–1950*. Leeds, England: Peepal Tree.
- . 1999. *Women in Caribbean History: The British-colonised Territories*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle.
- Shepherd, Verene, Bridget Brereton, and Barbara Bailey, eds. 1995. *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle.
- Silvestrini, Blanca G. 1975. "Women as Workers: The Experience of the Puerto Rican Woman in the 1930s." In *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the Women's Movement*, edited by Ruby Leavitt, 247–61. The Hague: Mouton Publishers.
- . 2001. "Women and Resistance: 'Herstory' in Contemporary Caribbean History." In *Slavery, Freedom and Gender: The Dynamics of Caribbean Society*, edited by Brian L. Moore, B.W. Higman, Carl Campbell, and Patrick Bryan, 161–82. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Singh, Kelvin. 1994. *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State: Trinidad 1917–1945*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press.
- Singh, Sherry-Ann. 2012. *The Ramayana Tradition and Socio-Religious Change in Trinidad, 1917–1990*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle.
- Smith, Faith, ed. 2011. *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Smith, Matthew J. 2009. *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934–1957*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Smith, Richard. 2004. *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity, and the Development of National Consciousness*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Stevens, Margaret. 2017. *Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919–1939*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. 2002. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stoner, K. Lynn. 1991. *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898–1940*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Stout, Noelle M. 2014. *After Love: Queer Intimacy and Erotic Economies in Post-Soviet Cuba*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Stubbs, Jean. 1999. "Gender in Caribbean History." In *General History of the Caribbean*. Volume VI: Methodology and Historiography of the Caribbean, edited by B.W. Higman, 95–135. London: UNESCO Publishing.

- Taylor, Ula Y. 2002. *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Teelucksingh, Jerome. 2015. *Labour and the Decolonization Struggle in Trinidad and Tobago*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tillman, Ellen D. 2016. *Dollar Diplomacy by Force: Nation-Building and Resistance in the Dominican Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Tinsley, Omise'eke Natasha. 2010. *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- . 2018. *Ezili's Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Turits, Richard Lee. 2002. "A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82(3): 589–635.
- . 2003. *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in Dominican History*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Umoren, Imaobong D. 2016. "Anti-Fascism and the Development of Global Race Women, 1928–1945." *Callaloo* 39(1): 151–65.
- Vassell, Linnette. 1993. "The Movement for the Vote for Women 1918–1919." *Jamaican Historical Review* 18: 40–53.
- . 1998. "Colonial Gender Policy in Jamaica." In *Before and After 1865: Education, Politics, and Regionalism: In Honour of Sir Roy Augier*, edited by Brian L. Moore and Swithin Wilmot, 190–201. Kingston: Ian Randle.
- Verna, Chantalle F. 2017. *Haiti and the Uses of America: Post-U.S. Occupation Promises*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Watkins-Owens, Irma. 1996. *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900–1930*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Wekker, Gloria. 2006. *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Whitney, Robert. 2001. *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920–1940*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

¹ Amy Jacques Garvey, "Women as Leaders Nationally and Racially," *Negro World*, October 24, 1925, 7.

² According to Lara Putnam, the circulation for the UNIA's *Negro World* newspaper "reached between seventeen thousand and sixty thousand in the early 1920s." The *Negro World* was "distributed through newsagents and local chapters where governments permitted its entry and surreptitiously in the hands of black seamen where they did not." See Lara Putnam, "Circum-Atlantic Print Circuits and Internationalism from the Peripheries in the Interwar Era," in *Print Culture Histories Beyond the Metropolis*, ed. James J. Connolly, Patrick Collier, Frank Felsenstein, Kenneth R. Hall, and Robert G. Hall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 218.

³ Significantly, Caribbean feminist scholarship has been characterized from its inception by a commitment to intersectional analysis. As Patricia Mohammed explains, "gender scholarship in the Caribbean has never limited itself to an examination of gender identity. There has been a consistent scrutiny and cross-examination of gender with the categories of race, ethnicity, class, age and regional difference by scholars of the region." See Patricia Mohammed, "Introduction: The Material of Gender," in *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*, ed. Patricia Mohammed (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2002), xx. For an analysis of the ways in which Caribbean feminists have addressed racial, ethnic, and class differences, see Rhoda Reddock, "Diversity, Difference and Caribbean Feminism: The Challenge of Anti-Racism," *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 1 (2007): 1–24.

⁴ During the interwar period, the United States occupied Haiti from 1915–1934, the Dominican Republic from 1916–1924 and Cuba from 1917–1922. The interdisciplinary scholarship on the origins, implementation and impact of these occupations is substantial. See, for example, Alan McPherson, *The Invaded: How Latin Americans and Their Allies Fought and Ended U.S. Occupations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Peter James Hudson, *Bankers and Empire: How Wall Street Colonized the Caribbean* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Intervention, Revolution, and Politics in Cuba, 1913–1921* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978); Hans R. Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of US Imperialism, 1915–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Bruce J. Calder, *The Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic during the U.S. Occupation of 1916–1924* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984); Ellen D. Tillman, *Dollar Diplomacy by Force: Nation-Building and Resistance in the Dominican Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Lorgia García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), chapter 2; Raphael Dalleo, *American Imperialism's Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016). In addition to these monographs, the *Journal of Haitian Studies* published a special issue in fall 2015, edited by Ermitte St. Jacques and Jeffrey W. Sommers, to mark the centenary of the U.S. occupation of Haiti.

⁵ There is a vast interdisciplinary literature on anti-colonialism in the interwar Caribbean. The bibliography provided here focuses on scholarship published in English.

⁶ Melville J. Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1937); Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott, 1938).

⁷ Ginetta E. B. Candelario, April J. Mayes, and Elizabeth S. Manley, eds., *Cien años de feminismos dominicanos: una colección de documentos y escrituras clave en la formación y evolución del pensamiento y el movimiento feminista en la República Dominicana, 1865–1965* (Santo Domingo: Archivo General de la Nación, Departamento de Investigación y Divulgación, Área de Publicaciones, 2016); Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Volume XI: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1910–1920 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Volume XII: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1920–1921 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Volume XIII: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1921–1922 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁸ As historian Bridget Brereton observed over a decade ago, "We know very little about the historical experiences of women in the smaller immigrant communities, the Chinese, Portuguese, Syrian/Lebanese and Jewish groups." Unfortunately, this lacuna still exists. Bridget Brereton, "Gender and the Historiography of the English-speaking Caribbean," in *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*, ed. Patricia Mohammed (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2002), 139.

⁹ For an interdisciplinary perspective on the contemporary queer Caribbean, see the November 2009 issue of the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, "Sexual Desires, Rights and Regulation," edited by Andil Gosine. See also M. Jacqui Alexander, "Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas," *Feminist Review* 48 (1994): 5–23; Rosamund Elwin, ed., *Tongues on Fire: Caribbean Lesbian Lives and Stories* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1997); Jasbir Kaur Puar, "Global Circuits: Transnational Sexualities and Trinidad," *Signs* 26, no. 4 (2001): 1039–65; Kamala Kempadoo, "Sexuality in the Caribbean: Theory and Research (with an Emphasis on the Anglophone Caribbean)," *Social and Economic Studies* 52, no.3 (2003): 59–88; Linden Lewis, ed., *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Gloria Wekker, *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Thomas Glave, ed., *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Faith Smith, ed., *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); Jafari S. Allen, *Venceremos?: The Erotics of Black Self-making in Cuba* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Carlos Ulises Decena, *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire among Dominican Immigrant Men* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); David A. B. Murray, *Flaming Souls: Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Social Change in Barbados* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Noelle M. Stout, *After Love: Queer Intimacy and Erotic Economies in Post-Soviet Cuba* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Kofi Omoniyi Sylvanus Campbell, ed., *The Queer Caribbean Speaks: Interviews with Writers, Artists, and Activists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Rosamond S. King, *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016); Krystal Nandini Ghisyawan, "(Un)Settling the Politics of Identity and Sexuality among Indo-Trinidadian Same-Sex Loving Women," in *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments*, ed. Gabrielle Jamela Hosein and Lisa Outar (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 153–70; Lyndon K. Gill, *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, *Ezili's Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).



Travel Sickness: Pan-Africanism, Medicine and Misogynoir in Caribbean Harlem

W. Chris Johnson

Assistant Professor
Women and Gender Studies Institute
and the Department of History
University of Toronto

Abstract: Healthcare was a cornerstone of black freedom movements in interwar Harlem. During the 1920s and 1930s, Caribbean-born healthcare providers organised local and transnational campaigns against medical abuse, racial discrimination, and fascism. Confronting Jim Crow medical industries that ostracized black medical professionals and “butchered” black patients, Caribbean Race Men of Medicine competed with white physicians and white colonial officials for authority over the bodies and health choices of black people. Engaged in broader strategies to eradicate social, political, and economic inequalities, these physicians successfully desegregated Harlem Hospital and marshalled their medical expertise and material resources in support of anticolonial and antifascist struggles in Ethiopia, Europe, and the Caribbean. Within varied liberation projects, they also selectively embraced eugenicist ideologies to eliminate poverty and uplift the race. Caribbean Race Men of Medicine empowered themselves as medical patriarchs, reproducing white supremacist stereotypes about gender, morality, and black families and asserting their authority over the sexual lives and reproductive choices of black women and girls.

Keywords: medical rights, eugenics, Reproductive Justice, Race Men, black doctors, Great Migration

Acknowledgements: For feedback on earlier versions of this article, I thank Dana Asbury, Hazel V. Carby, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Mary Ting Yi Lui, the editors of this special issue, the anonymous reviewers and my students and colleagues at the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. Special thanks to Cherisse Scott of SisterReach for her tireless work in education and advocacy for Reproductive Justice.

How to cite: Johnson, W. Chris. 2018. “Travel Sickness: Pan-Africanism, Medicine and Misogynoir in Caribbean Harlem.” *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12: 31–66

Great migrations of black folk from the U.S. South and the deeper south of the Caribbean transformed Harlem, New York, into a “Negro Melting Pot” of cosmopolitan blackness. But the gaiety of Harlem’s cabarets and the anthems of the New Negro veiled interiors of despair. Endemic poverty and the congestion of black and brown people packed into tenement slums created contagious terrains. Confronting high infant and maternal mortality, malnutrition and tenacious maladies like tuberculosis, an emerging class of black medical professionals wanted to improve the health of black migrants who had been neglected, abused and exploited by a white supremacist medical industry. White segregationists banned black patients from private hospitals and forbade black doctors from training and treating patients in public facilities like Harlem Hospital. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, under the broad banner of medical rights and equal access to healthcare, Harlem’s black medical guild combatted Jim Crow along several fronts. Entrepreneurs and institution-builders, health educators and medical journalists, integrators and anticolonialists, Harlem’s black doctors—the overwhelming majority of them men—anoointed themselves responsible protectors of black people not only in Harlem, but around the Atlantic world.¹

At the centre of the transnational medical rights movement were black men who had travelled to the United States from the Caribbean in the decades prior to passage of the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, a law that effectively banned black migrants. In January 1926, Dr. Wiley Wilson, president of the North Harlem Medical Association, celebrated New York City’s black doctors past and present. “There is not, in all this country,” Wilson said, “a more efficient, more ethical, more promising nor a finer type of enthusiastic manhood.” Of these eight manly medical “pioneers,” half had journeyed to North America from the British West Indies. Leaning on their wealth, medical training and moral standing, these “beacons of light” demanded personal autonomy and civic authority. Though they battled racism, these doctors upheld patriarchy. Trained in medical knowledge underwritten by the exploitation of black women, black doctors conformed to white supremacist ideas about gender, sexuality and class. In local and transnational campaigns against white supremacy, colonialism and

fascism, Caribbean Race Men of Medicine fused progressive ideologies of expert and efficient manhood to eugenicist theories of racial betterment through selective reproduction. Like their white counterparts, black medical patriarchs targeted single, independent, working-class black women as infectious agents and biological threats in need of control and containment.²

At the turn of the twentieth century, medical reformers around the Atlantic expanded government medical surveillance and power over reproductive health. Seeking to modernize childbirth, doctors and public health workers condemned traditional birthing practices as superstition and blamed high infant and maternal mortality on “granny” midwives who guided the majority of women through childbirth, particularly women in poor, rural and working-class communities. In the 1890s, British colonial authorities began building midwifery schools to replace traditional midwives with expensive, certified professionals (De Barros 2014, 67-93). In the United States, the 1921 Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Act introduced regulations that drove most midwives underground or out of business (Kobrin 1966, 350-363; Ladd-Taylor 1988, 258-264). At the end of the decade, *Amsterdam News* “Feminist Viewpoint” columnist Thelma Berlack applauded the rapid decline of midwifery in Harlem as “the march of progress.”³

Operating out of private practices, Caribbean Race Men of Medicine devoted much of their daily work to childbirth and gynaecologic surgery (Maynard 1973, 87). Gynaecologists and obstetricians were also among the leaders of the movement against Jim Crow healthcare. Gynaecologic knowledge emerges from intimate and invasive forms of bodily surveillance, Nicole Ivy observes (Ivy 2013, 13-15). In turn, medical knowledge has been a tool of social control. As Dorothy Roberts argues, “regulating black women’s reproductive decisions has been a central aspect of racial oppression” (Roberts 1997, 6).⁴

The transfer of care from traditional women healers to modern, medical doctors enhanced the prestige, power and pocketbooks of Harlem’s emerging medical guild. Segregation and the absence of quality prenatal care and childbirth

services at Harlem Hospital incited demand for private black hospitals by black women who could afford private healthcare. In 1920, the Barbados-born nurse Mabel Keaton Staupers helped open and manage the Booker T. Washington Sanitarium, “the first private hospital operated by Negroes in Harlem.” Born Mabel Doyle on February 27, 1890 in Bridgetown, Staupers moved to New York when she was thirteen years old. Trained at Freedmen’s Hospital in Washington D.C. and the Henry Phipps Institute in Philadelphia, Staupers had a long career as a medical practitioner, social worker and health activist (Staupers 1961; Hine 1994, 179-201).⁵

In August 1922, Staupers assembled the Harlem Committee of the New York Tuberculosis and Health Association. Serving as the Harlem Committee’s executive secretary, Staupers oversaw a range of public health initiatives, including “a physicians’ institute,” a dental clinic and health education programmes. Staupers conscripted several Caribbean health workers into the Harlem Committee—including Godfrey Nurse, one of the wealthiest surgeons of his generation.⁶ In August 1906, one month after his eighteenth birthday, Nurse left Georgetown, British Guiana for New York. Graduating from the Long Island College of Medicine in 1914, Nurse entered the profession at a time when segregationists banned black physicians from public hospitals. After running a lucrative private practice for several years, Nurse chartered the Edgecombe Holding Corporation in 1925 to purchase the Brunor Sanitarium, a facility across the street from Nurse’s home and practice on Edgecombe Avenue. The private, whites-only hospital was the namesake of Dr. Emile Brunor, a gynaecologist who lived with his family in an adjacent residence. Two-dozen black doctors invested fifty thousand dollars in the corporation. Soon after opening, the sanitarium merged with the Booker T. Washington Sanitarium to become the premier private black hospital in New York City (Gamble 1995, 62). Boasting “a modern operating room, and facilities for maternity, medical and surgical cases,” the Edgecombe Sanitarium promised black Harlemites “the scientific and sympathetic treatment and care of the sick according to the latest and approved methods.”⁷

Offering “scientific and sympathetic treatment,” Race Men of Medicine evoked progressive ideologies of modernization, expertise and efficiency to combat Jim Crow medicine and reform the race. Black doctors wanted to end the abusive practices of white doctors that hurt black patients, eroded trust in the profession and discouraged black people from seeking medical attention. Defining manhood through efficiency, expertise and independence, they challenged the authority of white male physicians over black people. Black physicians even quarrelled amongst themselves over who had the right credentials, qualifications and experience to heal and protect the race (Maynard 1978, 87). The growing importance of medical credentials ultimately undermined the health work of black women who traditionally cared for black women.⁸

Legislative attacks on midwives were part of a broader seizure of power over the sexual lives and reproductive choices of women. Starting in 1907, and expanding throughout U.S. states during the interwar period, eugenics laws tried to eradicate poverty, reduce government expenses and promote “better babies” by sterilizing prisoners and paupers, people of colour, immigrants and people designated as “feebleminded” (Ladd-Taylor 1997, 139, 142). Punitive U.S. sterilization campaigns initially targeted people convicted of crimes, incarcerated people and so-called “sex delinquents”: a category that included queer folks, single or otherwise “oversexed” women, victims of sexual abuse and peoples with syphilis. By mid-century, at least 20,000 people were sterilized in California alone. Justifications for the sterilization programmes reflected “deep-seated preoccupations about gender norms and female sexuality,” writes historian Alexandra Minna Stern (Stern 2005, 1131). According to historian Molly Ladd-Taylor, male physicians were “among the most ardent supporters of eugenic sterilization” (Ladd-Taylor 1997, 142).⁹

In the intimate space of the examination room—and in the public sphere—Race Men of Medicine endorsed eugenic reproduction as an antibiotic for social problems like “crime, vice, divorce, pauperism and economic inefficiency.” Concealing black women’s bodies from the eyes of abusive white doctors—and thus a white public—black physicians tried to counteract racist “public opinion”

of black people as sexually promiscuous carriers of contagion. Black private practices protected the privacy of both the patient and the community. "A doctor is supposed to keep all secrets," Dr. E. Elliot Rawlins wrote in his *Amsterdam News* health column "Keeping Fit." But Rawlins's distaste for migrant black bodies, black urban social and cultural life overwhelmed his desires for discretion. An evangelical protestant and pan-Africanist, Rawlins turned to public health education and medical journalism to police moral misdemeanours, actions he considered crimes against the race. The chief offense: sex between "irresponsible" black men and "immoral" black women.¹⁰

Harlem's Health Evangelist

Born in Basseterre, St. Kitts, in 1882, the orphan child Elvin Elliott Rawlins travelled to New York City when he was nine years old to live with his uncle, an ordained Episcopal priest. Rawlins completed his medical degree from Long Island College Hospital in 1906. An elder, mentor and leader of black physicians and surgeons, Rawlins was "the outstanding link between foolishly warring American-born and foreign-born Negroes," lauded the *Amsterdam News* in 1928. Alarmed by health crises, Harlem's cosmopolitan, transnational elite united around Rawlins and his columns, lessons that challenged the traditional moral and political power of clergy like his uncle, as well as the scientific authority of white physicians. Religious leaders discovered sin through confession, but doctors detected contagion through bodily surveillance. A devout protestant and pan-Africanist, Rawlins believed that doctors had a divine mission to regulate morality, sexual practices and that most virulent contagion in the black community of Harlem: young, freedom-loving black women on the move.¹¹

From 1923 to 1928, Rawlins debriefed his surveillance on sex and sin in nearly two hundred columns. In these essays, Rawlins represented mobile black women from the Caribbean and the U.S. South as biohazards and lent scientific credibility to what Hazel Carby has described as a "moral panic" over black women's sexual practices during the Great Migration (Carby 1992, 739-740).

Rawlins alerted readers of the *Amsterdam News* to a frightening sickness that had taken root in migrant black communities: “A mania for pleasure.” Rawlins depicted rural life in the Caribbean and the U.S. South as a contemporary Eden, a world that shielded women from disease and knowledge of sex. Migration to the urban north provoked gender transgression. According to Rawlins, the transgendering of black migrants—men dumbstruck with femininity, women run amok with masculine sexual desire—was a mortal threat to the race. God, Rawlins proclaimed, commanded humans to procreate, as long as they were upwardly mobile members of the black bourgeoisie. But urban life had sterilized middle-class black women, Rawlins wrote, by encouraging the single life, sex for pleasure, sexually transmitted infections and abortions. Rawlins mourned unborn fetuses of educated, “social climbing” New Negro women. “Each infant who dies,” Rawlins asserted, “is a future citizen lost.” Meanwhile, Rawlins condemned “tenement mothers of the poor or ignorant class,” for having children. Echoing white eugenicists and progressive reformers, Rawlins blamed poor, “ignorant” black women for endemic poverty and the diseases that prospered in impoverished conditions. “Too many Negro women and girls have babies when they should not,” the doctor complained, leaving their communities with the responsibility of taking care of “those unfortunate babies whose parents are poor and whose mothers are ignorant.” To conditional birth control advocates like Rawlins, the reproductive oppression of black “tenement mothers” was a way to uplift the race.¹²

“Interested in the progress of the Negro not only in Harlem, but throughout the world,” Rawlins was active in local and transnational organizations for black empowerment and liberation, including the North Harlem Medical Association, Hubert Harrison’s Liberty League and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) (Perry 2010, 316, 319, 338). As Michele Mitchell has detailed, in pursuit of building “one strong, healthy race,” the UNIA “monitored and controlled” the sexual practices of its members, remixed popular eugenicist ideas and promoted racial purity through “reproductive development” (Mitchell 2004, 230-244). Along with Marcus Garvey, UNIA leader Amy Jacques Garvey promoted eugenicist ideas on gender, motherhood and reproduction in her

Negro World column “Our Women and What They Think.” At the UNIA Convention in August 1924, Rawlins debated eugenic reproduction, parenting and the treatment of venereal disease with several other delegates. Appointed to a committee for sex education, Rawlins left the convention with a new title: Knight Commander of the Sublime Order of the Nile (Summers 2004, 98). “Marcus Garvey will always be the leader,” Rawlins wrote in the *Amsterdam News*. Following Garvey’s arrest on charges of mail fraud, Rawlins served as Vice Chairman of the Marcus Garvey Committee on Justice, alongside Amy Jacques Garvey, and gave speeches in defense of the UNIA leader. Rawlins remained loyal to Garvey’s “programme, his teachings, and even his methods (which were always honest).”¹³

United by bonds of race, black patients and doctors shared a “spiritual and mental harmony,” Rawlins argued. UNIA objectives to foster black autonomy by building independent black institutions complemented the efforts of black medical entrepreneurs. Black healers could build economic power, combat maladies and protect black patients from the “radical prejudice and antipathy” of white doctors by owning and operating private facilities, Rawlins argued. “We, as a race, must give it to our needed sick.” But as “the most important hospital to Negroes in Harlem,” Rawlins argued, Harlem Hospital needed the patriarchal protection and care of black doctors, too.¹⁴

Manhood and Medical Rights

During the 1920s and 1930s coalitions of black politicians, journalists and health workers organized against medical discrimination at Harlem Hospital (Gamble 1995, 57-68; Wilson 2009). Demanding quality healthcare for black patients and professional opportunities for black medical professionals, campaigns to end Jim Crow at Harlem Hospital had at the frontlines Caribbean Race Men of Medicine. In 1925, the medical rights movement forced Harlem Hospital to commit to a long-term integration plan. The following year, the Georgia-born surgeon Louis Wright was appointed to the surgical staff. Soon after, several other black

physicians and surgeons were hired as visiting physicians—including Godfrey Nurse, who demanded equal representation on the staff and the integration of the hospital's internship programme. To his colleagues and compatriots, “this well-spoken, well-mannered Negro, of British colonial origin,” personified the ideal Caribbean Race Man of Medicine: “In the thrust to open Harlem Hospital to Negro professionals, he had marched boldly in the vanguard of the shock troops of the community” (Maynard 1978, 58-59).

In 1926, the hospital admitted its first cohort of black interns. It was a “New Harlem Hospital,” heralded E. Elliott Rawlins. One of the first black interns at Harlem Hospital, Aubré Maynard retired as the hospital's Director of Surgery in July 1967 and served as surgical consultant until 1972. In the early years of his retirement, the surgeon emeritus published a “chronicle” of the struggles of black physicians: *Surgeons to the Poor: The Harlem Hospital Story*. Written in the 1970s, a time of “discontent, controversy, and challenge to the established order,” Maynard offers “a positive, constructive history” of black physicians as an antidote for “self-hate,” and sedative for political rebellions under the broad banner of Black Power. The book encourages trust in the expertise and ethics of black physicians at a time when the U.S. medical industry confronted charges of genocide for eugenics programmes that spanned Maynard's career (Maynard 1978, x, 1, 5).¹⁵

Surgeons to the Poor is a “pioneering adventure” that features Maynard as narrator, protagonist and emblem of the “Negro physician,” the “undisputed guardian of the health of the black community.” Through genius, courage and faith in integration, the black physician overcomes the “unrelenting racism” of Jim Crow healthcare, safeguards black New Yorkers and uplifts successive generations of “black physicians into the mainstream of American medicine with respect and dignity” (Maynard 1978, x, 1, 14). Like other stories of “American” pioneers, *Surgeons to the Poor* is an assimilationist narrative of immigrant dreams and upward mobility through hard work and grit. In the only paragraph about his Caribbean childhood in Barbados, Maynard describes British colonial education as his intellectual foundation. His description of the

curriculum—"Latin, Greek, and mathematics"—echoes the Caribbean polymath and revolutionary C.L.R. James, born the same year as Maynard, but in Trinidad (Maynard 1978, 26). Writes James: "I began to study Latin and French, then Greek, and much else. But particularly we learnt, I learnt and obeyed and taught a code." A process of psychological and cultural conditioning — "the British tradition soaked deep into me" — colonial education trained James' generation in "Puritan" morality and gender roles, including manly self-discipline. This code also conditioned his generation to accept British hegemony. "Britain was the source of all light and leading," James writes, "and our business was to admire, wonder, imitate, learn" (James 2013, 24, 26, 39, 66). In Caribbean New York, Maynard's father reinforced colonial pedagogies. Though Conrad Maynard warned his son about the "institutionalized scourge" of racial caste in the United States, he encouraged young Aubré to infiltrate elite white academic worlds and appropriate tools of domination for himself—including medical knowledge and scalpels. A tailor by trade, Conrad Maynard clothed his son in what James describes as the "armour" of respectability, as well as the *twice-as-good* integrationist strategy of the aspiring black bourgeoisie (Maynard 1978, 28-29).¹⁶

"Harder work and superior performance" offered few protections against white supremacists in the United States and their weapons of sabotage and suppression. In 1922, Maynard accepted an offer of admission from Columbia University. Before classes began, administrators admitted that his enrollment would be temporary. The university's affiliated hospitals would not permit a black man to examine white women during clinical training in obstetrics and gynaecology. The paternal "protection" of white women from black men—that inescapable justification for mass murder denounced by Ida B. Wells-Barnett as a "shameless falsehood"—was policy at purportedly integrated teaching hospitals in and out of the Ivy League. In 1922, U.S. newspapers accounted 58 lynchings across the country. That same year, the U.S. Congress abandoned the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill and Maynard enrolled at Bellevue Hospital Medical College. The young medical student was assured that no racist barriers existed

at the school or its affiliates, including Harlem Hospital (Maynard 1978, 29, 33-34).¹⁷

Deemed the “Slaughterhouse on Lenox Avenue,” Harlem Hospital was condemned by the medical rights movement as “a butcher shop where incompetent and second-rate white doctors practice on the emaciated forms of poor Negroes.” Maynard knew it as “a place ‘to go and die’” (Maynard 1978, 18). To Harlem health activists, black women were especially vulnerable to medical carnage. During his internship and residency, Maynard recalls, the majority of the obstetrics staff — “all but one” — were white men from the U.S. South with “unmistakably racial attitudes.” For training and practice, these white surgeons-in-training performed caesarian sections on black women “almost as frequently as normal deliveries.” Complications from “needless” and life-threatening caesarians shuttled patients back into surgery for reparative procedures (42). When black nurses were sick or otherwise in pain, these same young white interns and residents subjected their colleagues to “rarely justified” pelvic examinations—as well as genital and cervical swabs—no matter the symptoms. The exams implied, Maynard writes, “that, as a black girl, she was likely to have a gonorrheal infection” (23). Black doctors condemned discrimination against nurses—“colored women of culture, refinement and demonstrated ability and fitness”—as often as they denounced discrimination against doctors, dentists and surgeons. Indeed, doctors responded to the abuse of black women nurses as assaults on their manhood. During integration struggles at Harlem Hospital, Race Men of Medicine camouflaged paternalism in a grammar of privacy, protection and defense. While Louis Wright was silent and “noncommittal in his best diplomatic manner” about the unnecessary, life-threatening caesarians imposed on poor black women patients, the surgeon denounced the exploitation of black nurses as “an indignity to Negro womanhood” (23, 42). Wright convinced the hospital’s board to transfer supervision over the “girls” to him. By shielding black nurses from the eyes, speculums, scalpels and swabs of white physicians, Wright wanted to enhance the power of black male patriarchs, the respectability of black nurses and the reputation of the race.¹⁸

Race Men of Medicine employed other strategies to subordinate black women who dared to be their equals. With Maynard, two other black doctors enrolled in the internship programme at Harlem Hospital in 1926—Dr. Ira McCown of Ohio State and Dr. May Chinn, the first black woman to graduate Bellevue Hospital Medical College. An accomplished musician with advanced degrees from Columbia and New York University, Chinn personified the ideal educated, cultured New Negro Woman, except that she refused to be anybody's wife or mother. Dedicating her life to medicine and public health, Chinn's "queer" independence challenged the patriarchal worldviews of her father and her colleagues. To escape the ridicule and disrespect of "male interns and doctors," Chinn joined Harlem Hospital's ambulance service, the first woman to do so. It was dangerous work, requiring Chinn to repair traumas on city streets and within the dark caverns of tenement apartments. "I began to like being away from the hospital," Chinn recalled, "and I was glad when my internship was over." Although they were medical school classmates, and despite her fame as a "pioneering" black woman physician, Maynard references his colleague only in passing and writes nothing about the culture of misogyny that drove Chinn into the ambulance and out of the hospital altogether (Maynard 1978, 38, 180).¹⁹

In 1928, the Edgecombe Sanitarium leased the adjacent brownstone to Chinn for her home and office. The top floor of the building—connected to the sanitarium through an excised wall—served as an operating room. After setting up shop, Chinn discovered that Edgecombe's proprietors—including Godfrey Nurse, Louis Wright and dozens of other doctors—expected her to serve as an "unpaid handy woman and resident," on overnight call for their patients. The facility housed seventeen beds. The doctors also pressured Chinn to treat their families for free. "I really had a great deal of trouble with the male doctors in Harlem," Chinn recalled. "On the one hand they were saying that I was not fit to be a doctor, and on the other, they were sending their wives, mothers and children to me."²⁰

Crimes of Omission

"The Negro was always next in line beyond the experimental animal," Maynard writes in the introduction to *Surgeons to the Poor*. "He has sometimes benefited from their efforts, but he has also occupied the role of victim and expendable guinea pig." In these opening pages, Maynard offers a brief summary of involuntary medical experiments on black men—from "the helpless slave" to "the indigent ghetto resident" (Maynard 1978, 3-4). Harriet Washington calls this history "medical apartheid" (Washington 2006, 59, 61-70). Maynard's is a selective account and the "Negro" casualty of medical experimentation is explicitly and unambiguously male. In the narrative of medical progress, black women are expendable. The "positive side" of guinea-pig subjection, Maynard writes, includes gynaecological surgical methods and medical devices developed through experiments on enslaved black women in and around the Montgomery, Alabama clinic of J. Marion Sims. Maynard represents the surgeon and slave captor as benevolent saviour of enslaved black women. "Disabled" by vaginal fistulas and therefore unable to work, these "bondswomen" were "outcasts in their own milieu," Maynard writes, unproductive and meaningless beings in the social caste of the enslaved. Conjuring plantation logics, Maynard praises Sims for attempting to save enslaved black women from worthlessness and put them back to work (Maynard 1978, 3-4). For Anarcha Wescott, Sims's preferred "patient," that meant undergoing over thirty experimental, unanaesthetized surgical operations (Washington 2006, 66).

As Nicole Ivy has argued, "the labor of the gynecological test subject" was work too (Ivy 2016, 15). In the plantation economy, enslaved women's labour included capital creation through rape, forced breeding, childbirth, as well as suffering through surgical procedures to repair damage done to reproductive organs. From plantation prisons to the "carceral space" of antebellum and postbellum clinics, black women's "injurious work of endurance," Ivy notes, profited both the slave economy and the "modern" science of gynaecology (Ivy 2013, 14; Ivy 2016, 13-16). Science and law classified enslaved black women as nongendered nonhuman nonpersons, but surgeons like Sims nevertheless cut,

severed, stitched, dissected, diagrammed and whitewashed their bodies “to produce knowledge about white bodies—knowledge that, in turn, shapes modern health discourse” (Ivy 2013, 9-10, 183). Maynard offers no words of celebration or praise for Anarcha Wescott, or Betsey Harris, or Lucy Zimmerman or the other women and infants whose injuries and agony advanced modern medicine. Gendered male, Maynard’s trope of “the Negro” victim of medical apartheid disappears them (Maynard 1978, 3-4).

In his long career, Maynard specialized in various services and fields, including plastic surgery, assault trauma and cardiovascular surgery. But he first earned acclaim as a gynaecologist and obstetrician on the house staff at Harlem Hospital and as a community educator on women’s sexual health. In recent path-breaking works, black feminist scholars and artists complicate narratives like *Surgeons to the Poor*—“triumphalist proclamations of the transcendent good of the science of gynecology” that reduce black women to an absent or “spectral presence” (Ivy 2013, 7). Nicole Ivy argues that there was nothing “anomalous or exceptional” about Sims or his partner Nathaniel Bozeman, their practices, or their racist excuses about the supernatural durability of black women and black babies (Ivy 2013, 9; Ivy 2016, 16). While Maynard condemns the exploitative practices of his caesarian-addicted white southern colleagues, he fails to recognize them, their logics and their methods as descendants of that white southern surgeon he so reveres. Nor can Maynard recognize himself as their accomplice. After the legal abolition of slavery, modern medicine continued to shore up white supremacist patriarchy through the subjection of black and other women of colour.²¹

Journeying through the “afterlife of slavery” in 21st century medicine, poet Bettina Judd explores the everyday “Ordeal of Medicine” black women confront across time and space. In the poetry collection, *Patient*, Judd excavates entangled “absent” pasts and presents, physical injuries and “psychic traumas produced under the grotesque conditions of slavery”—to borrow from M. Jacqui Alexander—that scientists have distorted, erased or promoted as benevolent: “Now, wasn’t there some good?” (Alexander 2005,

293; Judd 2014, 10). Meditating on the impossibility of historical representation based on available evidence, Judd collaborates with “ghosts” of enslaved black women whose experiences interweave with her own. Judd’s first-person speaker—the “Researcher”—listens to, communes with and is comforted by Wescott, Harris, and Zimmerman, among others. “Why do you mourn me and sing, as if I am the one who has died?” the Researcher asks (Judd 2014, 1, 9). Collapsing borders between historical evidence, archives of haunting and personal and collective memory, *Patient* demonstrates what Alexander calls “the spiritual as epistemological” (Alexander 2005, 293). Borrowing from Christina Sharpe’s formulation of “wake work”—Judd’s “Researcher” rebelliously performs “an unscientific method,” an act of imagination that rejects “fictions of the archive” that erase black women’s presence, pain and labours (Sharpe 2016, 13).

While experiments on black women epitomize the “positive” good of medical subjection, to illustrate “the negative side,” Maynard evokes “a lurid tale of fairly recent events,” Jean Heller’s July 1972 Associated Press story that exposed the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male to world audiences (Maynard 1978, 3). Uncovered six years before the publication of *Surgeons to the Poor*, that immediate and most notorious of medical scandals in the United States required the condemnation of a Race Man of Medicine trying to instill trust in black physicians and their profession. Maynard overlooks other “lurid tales” and contemporary scandals at the intersection of race, ethics and reproductive medicine. In June 1973, less than one year after the Tuskegee study broke, in nearby Montgomery, Alabama, Mary Alice Relf, age 12, and Minnie Lee Relf, age 14, were surgically sterilized without their consent in a U.S. Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) clinic. The Relf sisters exposed rampant sterilization abuse—including the sterilization of children and the intellectually disabled—in clinics and hospitals throughout the United States and in U.S.-sponsored clinics around the world. In 1974, anticolonial activists in Puerto Rico exposed a long-term “plan of genocide” at HEW clinics, both on the island and in New York City, that led to the sterilization of one in three Puerto Rican women aged 20 to 49. In 1975, the American Civil Liberties Union sued North Carolina on

behalf of Nial Ruth Cox, a black woman who had been involuntarily sterilized by doctors who designated her “a mentally deficient Negro girl.” In 1976, based on government reports and her own four-year study, the Choctaw-Cherokee physician Dr. Constance Pinkerton-Uri estimated that at least 25% of Native American women of childbearing age had been involuntarily sterilized, often during caesarian sections while they were unconscious (Lawrence 2000). The sterilization of Native women was the result of “the warped thinking of doctors, who think the solution to poverty is not to allow people to be born,” Dr. Pinkerton-Uri said in a widely syndicated May 1977 interview. In 1978, Maynard published *Surgeons to the Poor*, without a word on eugenics or the sterilization campaigns that spanned his medical career.²²

At the time, Angela Davis observed, “the struggle against sterilization abuse has been waged primarily by Puerto Rican, Black, Chicana and Native American women” (Davis 1983, 221). Women of colour feminists exposed U.S. government-funded sterilization programmes as a form of white supremacist, imperialist social control, a counter-revolutionary weapon directed against colonies of colour in rebellion inside and outside U.S. borders. In 1969, before coercive sterilizations became front-page scandals, Frances Beale traced a global web of U.S. government eugenics initiatives: in India, where millions of men and boys, mostly “ragged, unemployed slum dwellers” according to the *New York Times*, were sterilized by vasectomy in Peace Corps-sponsored and assisted clinics, in the U.S. colony of Puerto Rico and across the expansive network of clinics that sterilized women of colour within the North American borders of the United States. In 1976, Loretta Ross was sterilized due to an infection caused by a Dalkon Shield intrauterine device and the neglect of a white male gynaecologist (Ross 2016, 277n1; Nelson 2010). “Pissed off,” Ross devoted her life to building the movement for Reproductive Justice: “the complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, economic, and social well-being of women and girls” (Ross 2016, 64). Among many women of colour activists and intellectuals, Dr. Constance Pinkerton-Uri, Frances Beale, Toni Cade Bambara, Angela Davis, the Combahee River Collective, Fannie Lou Hamer and Loretta Ross mobilized against mass programmes of coercive sterilization in the 1960s and 1970s, winning lawsuits and

policy reforms without the support or protection of the Race Man of Medicine, the “undisputed guardian of the health of the black community” (Maynard 1978, 1).²³

“We blacks tend to walk the thin line of paranoia,” Georgia Representative Julian Bond said in July 1973, reflecting on the Tuskegee syphilis study, the sterilization of black southern women like Fannie Lou Hamer and black folks’ deep fear of medical healthcare. In an effort to calm that fear and redeem the prestige of “the Negro physician,” Maynard obscures the extent of medical violence on black people. “In my experience over the years in black Harlem,” he reflects, “exploitation of the Negro patient has been color blind” (Maynard 1978, 87). Black medical professionals were implicated in the history of medical apartheid, and not just the black nurses and doctors who worked directly for the Tuskegee Syphilis Study or the Montgomery Family Planning Clinic (Smith 1996, 107-108; Gamble 1997, 1173-1178; Washington 2006, 175-177). As black feminist scholars, artists and filmmakers have explored, in pursuit of “respect and dignity,” as well as black patriarchal power, Race Men have traditionally denied, ignored or concealed assaults against the most vulnerable people in their communities, including queer folks, black women and girls (Riggs 1995; Cohen 2004; Simmons 2006). This silence, Cathy J. Cohen argues, as well as the “paranoia” it helps engender, intensified health crises like the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s (Cohen 1999).²⁴

Relf v. Weinberger exposed the coercive sterilization of an estimated 100,000-150,000 women and girls in federal family planning programmes between the late 1960s and 1974 (Roberts 1997, 93). Contemporary observers compared the number of these procedures to Nazi sterilization campaigns. The comparison obscured the much longer history of forced sterilization in the United States and the transnational, multi-loop ideological circuits that connected apartheid regimes during the interwar period and after. Exclusionary U.S. immigration policies, Jim Crow and eugenics laws in states like California inspired the Nazis. In turn, Nazi sterilization campaigns motivated eugenicists in the United States to boost their efforts at social cleansing (Roberts 1997, 68, 103, 216;

Kühl 2002; Gilmore 2008, 157-200; Whitman 2017). “The number of sterilizations performed in the United States increased in the 1930s,” Molly Ladd-Taylor observes, “despite the declining support for eugenic ideas and negative publicity about the excesses of the Nazi sterilization program” (Ladd-Taylor 1997, 149). Maynard’s career coincided with four decades of fraud and medical neglect at Tuskegee, a period that also saw the proliferation of compulsory sterilization programmes across the United States. In sympathy with the male victims, Maynard compares the syphilis study to “human experimentation of Hitler’s Reich,” but writes nothing on reproductive oppression (Maynard 1978, 4). The omission is at odds with the anti-fascist politics of Caribbean Race Men of Medicine during the interwar period and their campaigns to combat British colonial reproductive policies.

Pan-Africanism and Reproductive Oppression

The 1935 Abyssinia Crisis mobilized pan-Africanists and anti-fascists around the Atlantic world (Scott 1978; Plummer 1996, 37-81). In July 1935, the *Amsterdam News* encouraged “Negroes in America” to aid Ethiopia “by organizing a medical aid service.” Emperor Haile Selassie welcomed “any doctor, graduate nurse, accredited technician, engineer or chemist interested in service in Abyssinia.” In a letter to the editor, Jamaica-born pan-Africanist W.A. Domingo endorsed the proposed “Medical Unit” as “vitally important,” and encouraged the *Amsterdam News* to help organize the venture. The following month Harlem health workers organized the Medical Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia. Caribbean doctors were active in the formation of that group, including P.M.H. Savory, a physician and entrepreneur born in British Guiana. During the 1920s, Savory amassed a diverse portfolio of companies with business partner C.B. Powell, a radiologist from Virginia. In December 1935, two months after Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, the two doctors bought the *Amsterdam News*, and broadened the newspaper’s length, circulation and coverage of movements against colonialism, fascism and Jim Crow.²⁵

At the beginning of 1936, the Medical Committee merged into United Aid for Ethiopia, "a federation of organizations dedicated to support of Emperor Selassie's struggle to preserve his empire." The offices of *Amsterdam News* served as a box office for United Aid fundraising events and as a clearinghouse for donations. Representing black Harlemites with wealth, medical knowledge and political influence, Savory led a small United Aid delegation to Selassie's home in exile in Bath, England in August 1936. "We of African descent in America can be just as loyal to our cousins across the sea as we are to people with whom we live," Savory told Haile Selassie. Warning of Ethiopia's dire need for medical supplies, Selassie urged "people of African blood in the Western Hemisphere" to "bring quick and generous help." Following the visit, United Aid for Ethiopia quietly transformed into the United Aid for Peoples of African Descent. The change reflected a "more comprehensive program of aid and assistance to all Negro peoples," but the organization's philanthropy extended beyond Africa and black diasporas. In 1937, United Aid donated a shipment of medical supplies and equipment to Spanish Republicans embroiled in a war against Francisco Franco. "We do so with the same spirit that impelled us in the case of Ethiopia," United Aid announced. "The barbarism of fascism is the scourge of present-day civilization."²⁶

Soon after the delegation returned to Harlem, Caribbean Race Men confronted "Fascist" reproductive health policies in the British West Indies. In the spring of 1935, rumours that Bermuda's colonial government was considering an "Anti-Negro" programme of compulsory sterilization percolated throughout Caribbean diasporic networks and the grapevine of the transnational black press. During the global economic depression of the 1930s, Bermuda's colonial government confronted a growing population on the small, majority-black island and exclusionary immigration policies in the United States. The 1924 Johnson-Reed Act applied eugenicist ideologies to immigration policy, imposed quotas on crown colonies like Bermuda and constructed a Jim Crow consular system at ports of departure around the world. Designed in part to stop the Great Migration of Caribbean peoples to the United States, the law effectively banned "African (black)" travellers from crossing U.S. borders (Reid 1939, 24-25;

Ngai 2004, 25-29, 37-38).²⁷ A decade after the closure of this important emigration destination, Bermuda's colonial government began mulling possibilities to reduce the island's black population through contraceptives, mandatory sterilizations and deportation to other British colonies. Mimicking laws passed throughout the United States, but repealed in New York, a special committee within Bermuda's House of Assembly recommended the sterilization of "mental defectives," parents of children born out of wedlock and persons convicted of violent crimes. The proposed legislation, warned the *Pittsburgh Courier*, "would ultimately eliminate the impoverished Negro workers who are kept in a degraded social condition." Adele Tucker—a black Bermudan teacher and union leader—denounced the proposals as "Legal lynching." Adele Tucker's nephew—attorney, activist and journalist David Tucker—compared the plan to "Hitlerism, paganism, and every kind of ism."²⁸

Local protests defeated the proposed sterilization programme in Bermuda, but the House of Assembly continued to explore plans for birth control (Bourbonnais 2017, 30-49). In May 1936, General Sir Reginald Hildyard, a veteran commander of the British colonial army in South Africa, was appointed governor of Bermuda. That fall, as United Aid mobilized in defense of Ethiopia, Hildyard gave a series of speeches in defense of racial apartheid on the island. Warning that the growth of the island's majority-black population was a "serious problem," Hildyard proposed a plan to open public birth control clinics for the exclusive use of "coloured women." With the reduction of the black population, Hildyard declared, "children of the white section of the community will be given a better chance in life."²⁹

The governor's proposal revived long-standing fears of genocide. Like the Tuckers in Bermuda, anticolonialists in New York, London and the Caribbean compared the proposals to discriminatory laws in white supremacist settler colonial regimes throughout the Western Hemisphere, Africa and Asia. Parrot schemes could circulate throughout the constellation of colonial legislatures in the British Empire, they warned. British settlers escaping "the hell they have created in their own lands" could evacuate black people from the Caribbean

with compulsory birth control. The bombs, guns and poison gas of European fascists, "starvation and lack of opportunity" in the Caribbean, the noose and flames of lynch mobs in the United States and the reproductive oppression of black women in Bermuda appeared to be interconnected components of a global strategy to annihilate black people. In a paternalistic missive to the *Amsterdam News*, former UNIA official Hubert E. Lee warned of the coming "extinction," and called for an alliance between Bermudan men and Caribbean men living in the United States to stop Hildyard's attempt to "sterilize our women."³⁰

Organizing against empire, Caribbean Race Men of Medicine positioned themselves as responsible protectors of black women around the Atlantic world. In November 1936, Savory and five other Caribbean activists met with Governor Hildyard at the office of the British Consul-General in New York to debate black women's reproductive choices. "Clenched fist in the palm of his hand," Hildyard attempted to intimidate his guests into silence. Comparing the people of Bermuda to breeding livestock, the combative governor lectured on the economic necessity of birth control for black people. The delegates promised to petition the imperial government in London to prevent Hildyard from opening the clinics. Undeterred, Hildyard assured them that the legislation would proceed despite "protests from abroad." Professional, cosmopolitan black men of expertise and efficiency, Hildyard's guests were accustomed to racist bureaucrats. The delegation included the Jamaica-born anticolonial journalist A.M. Wendell Malliett, foreign editor of the *Amsterdam News*, and Dr. Charles Augustin Petioni, a regular contributor to Savory's newspaper.³¹

Born in Trinidad in 1883, Petioni was a prominent journalist and activist before he embarked on a medical career in the United States. Applauded as "an enemy of British imperialism" by C.L.R. James, Petioni was once editor of the *Argos*, a newspaper banned by the colonial government of Trinidad for publishing "revolutionary, seditious, and mischievous literature." Fleeing "colonial tyranny," Petioni moved to Harlem in 1918 and plunged into Caribbean diasporic politics, promoting black unity, self-determination and economic independence "at all

costs" (Watkins-Owens 1996, 49-51, 82, 168-169; James 1998, 51, 83). At the height of integration struggles at Harlem Hospital, Caribbean Race Men of Medicine accused administrators of trying to keep "West Indian doctors off the staff." As secretary of the North Harlem Medical Association, Petioni was one of Harlem Hospital's most unrelenting critics. Petioni denounced the hospital for adopting "the British principle of 'Divide and Rule'" to sabotage collective action among black doctors. Xenophobia, Petioni warned, stripped black people of power.³²

Following the meeting, Savory, Petioni and other Caribbean civic leaders organized a "large gathering of West Indians, Bermudians, and Coloured Americans" to formulate resolutions on the Bermuda plan. Petioni, Savory and other Caribbean doctors appealed to Harlem's black residents to "forget local clannishness" and mobilize against extermination. Publicized around the Atlantic, the mass meeting on black women's reproductive choices included hardly any black women. Dora Hayward, Vice President of the Bermuda Benevolent Association, was the only woman speaker on the agenda. Also absent from the programme were black women health professionals like Mabel Keaton Staupers and May Edward Chinn, supporters of birth control initiatives in Harlem.³³

A month after the mass meeting, the New York branches of the American Birth Control League responded to the allegations out of Bermuda in a statement condemning compulsory birth control and racial discrimination—both the proposed restriction of birth control services to black women in Bermuda and the denial of birth control information to black women in the United States. "Reliable, harmless methods of birth control are not available to thousands of Negro mothers who want them," the group argued, forcing black women to "resort to dangerous, quack methods."³⁴

Many black doctors, nurses and health activists collaborated with Margaret Sanger to open the Harlem Birth Control Research Bureau in 1930. May Chinn and Louis Wright served on the clinic's advisory board, along with several

Caribbean health workers, including Mabel Staupers and Lucien Brown, the Jamaica-born physician and journalist. Successor to E. Elliott Rawlins at the *Amsterdam News*, Brown distanced “Keeping Fit” from his predecessor’s religiosity. Though Brown disputed criticisms of birth control as “harmful and ungodly,” he still held on to eugenicist ideas about class and reproduction, as well as the imperative of contraception for poor, “unfortunate mothers.” Birth control was a tool for racial betterment — “a higher standard of physical fitness, mental capacity and financial stability” — Brown argued, qualities which earned “respect and opportunity from others,” namely white folks. Brown later resisted a proposed venereal disease clinic in Harlem, fearing that it would threaten the jobs and reputations of black women domestic workers by promoting the stereotype that “venereal disease runs rampant among Negroes.” By investing in discourses of patriarchy and middle-class respectability, Harlem’s birth control clinic no longer presented such a threat to Caribbean Race Men of Medicine like Brown. Indeed, they considered birth control a tool for protecting black women’s economic health.³⁵

“Restricted by law,” and under threat of police raids, the Harlem clinic carefully advertised its services to “married women” across race and class lines. U.S. law permitted married women to obtain birth control information for health reasons, but criminalized single women for seeking the same services. According to Sanger, the majority of the clients of the Harlem clinic were moral, married breadwinners whose husbands could not find work in the depression economy. The majority of them were also white. The Harlem clinic attracted the support of Caribbean Race Men and avoided charges of race genocide by marketing its services to “married women who have one child or more.” The sexual practices of their potential clients were contained, presumably, within heterosexual patriarchal marriages. And they had already served the race by reproducing at least one child. By 1932, the *Amsterdam News*’s Thelma Berlack noted that public opinion in Harlem had shifted so dramatically that birth control for “Harlem wives” was no longer controversial, but pragmatic. The problem was that black women were not taking advantage of the Harlem clinic. Brown

condemned black women for their “indifference” and “backwardness” in comparison to white women.³⁶

In May 1937, Margaret Sanger took a “secret” trip to Bermuda to consult colonial officials. Bermuda was the first government to extend an invitation to Sanger and only the second government to legalize “the dissemination of birth control information.” Sanger was impressed. During her visit, Sanger gave two public lectures. At a “colored meeting of over sixty persons” on May 18th, Sanger addressed black clergy, journalists and activists who had opposed eugenics programmes for the past two years. “It was the most alive session I’ve had in a long time,” Sanger wrote to a friend later that day. “Dark complexioned colored gentlemen” dominated the meeting with questions about women’s reproductive health. Sidelined and silenced by the men in the room, a group of black women approached Sanger after. “They were all for it and would gladly help,” Sanger noted. Upon her return to New York, Sanger praised Bermudan officials and heralded the opening of two government-funded clinics on the island, “one for the care of white women, and the other for Negroes.” The colonial government was even sharing the latest birth control methods with midwives, “who deal with the very poorest,” Sanger said, “who in turn need it the most.” Later that year, Bermuda opened a voluntary clinic that offered information, diaphragms and spermicides to black women free of charge (Bourbonnais 2017, 103).³⁷

As labour rebellions swept the Caribbean in the late 1930s, colonial governments in Barbados and Jamaica revived talk of compulsory birth control as a method of political suppression and rumours of Bermudan sterilization programmes resurfaced. In the July 1938 inaugural issue of *International African Opinion*, edited by C.L.R. James, the London-based International African Service Bureau denounced Bermuda’s eugenics schemes as “evidence that the Fascist mentality is not confined to Germany, Italy and South Africa.” The Bureau lobbied its supporters in the House of Commons to investigate the allegations. In a memorandum to the Colonial Office, the International African Service Bureau, the League of Coloured Peoples and the Negro Welfare Association

condemned the “sterilization of individuals as a cure for the illegitimacy problem in Bermuda and other colonies.” Calling for “change in the present social structure in the West Indies,” the future they conjured preserved the concept of “illegitimacy,” parental fitness, and the idea that children born to unmarried mothers were social problems in need of a solution (De Barros 2014, 168; Bourbonnais 2017, 45).³⁸

Alighting in New York in October 1938, C.L.R. James went to the Mount Morris neighborhood of Harlem to meet up with an old friend from Trinidad. For his first few months in the United States, James resided at the brownstone of Dr. Cecil Marquez. A member and sometime leader of the North Harlem Medical Association, and Charles Petioni’s cousin, Marquez was a veteran of the movement against Jim Crow medicine. Marquez introduced James to a broad network of Caribbean health activists whose anticolonial itineraries paralleled his own. From October 1938 to January 1939, James spoke alongside Savory and Petioni at parties, concerts and mass meetings sponsored by United Aid, the Caribbean Union and various Caribbean benevolent associations. Like his comrades in Harlem, James connected British imperialism to technologies of fascist power. “The conflict in Europe is being presented in certain quarters as a conflict between Democracy and Fascism,” James told the *Amsterdam News*, “but for the majority of Negroes in the British Empire, Democracy is only a phrase.” Though he had come to the United States for a lecture tour, James confessed that he had much to learn about “the American people and their civilization.” His first classroom was Caribbean Harlem. Black life and the black freedom struggles underway convinced James of the potential of “the American Negro” to create democracy in the United States and incite socialist revolution worldwide.³⁹

In Harlem, Bermuda and across Caribbean diasporas, black revolutionaries who revolted against racist regimes and imagined transnational utopias often internalized and reproduced antiblack colonial violence. As they combatted white supremacy, Harlem’s Caribbean Race Men of Medicine flirted with social Darwinism, calling for the liberation of the race through the selective

reproduction of the respectable, moral, black professional class. Uplifting themselves, black medical patriarchs competed with white supremacists for authority over black people and their health decisions. Race Men of Medicine affirmed eugenicist ideologies that denounced black pleasure and loving as immoral, black gender expression as criminal, black healing as unscientific, black children as illegitimate and single black women as biohazards.

Long after the integration of Harlem Hospital, tensions between liberatory visions and lived reality, oppression and emancipation continued to simmer and erupt within local and transnational black freedom movements. Across the twentieth century, black revolutionaries who disputed white supremacist fictions about black people often accepted white supremacist constructions of gender, morality and the family. Exposing such contradictions in black politics, Cathy J. Cohen urges scholars and activists to confront the intracommunal forces that silence, exclude, and perpetuate violence against the most vulnerable black people, imprison radical imaginaries and constrain revolutionary possibilities (Cohen 2004). "There can be no liberation for all Black people," the Movement for Black Lives declares, "if we do not center and fight for those who have been marginalized."⁴⁰

References

- Alexander, M. Jacqui. 2005. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bailey, Moya. 2010. "They aren't talking about me..." *Crunk Feminist Collective*, March 14, 2010. <http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2010/03/14/they-arent-talking-about-me/>
- . 2013. "New Terms of Resistance: A Response to Zenzele Isoke." *Souls* 15 (4): 341-43.
- Beale, Frances. 2005. "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female." In *The Black Woman*, edited by Toni Cade Bambara, 109-122. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Bourbonnais, Nicole C. 2017. *Birth Control in the Decolonizing Caribbean: Reproductive Politics and Practice on Four Islands, 1930-1970*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Briggs, Laura. 2002. *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Carby, Hazel V. 1992. "Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context." *Critical Inquiry* 18(4): 738-55.
- . 2000. *Race Men*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Chinn, May Edward. 1979. Interview by *Black Women Oral History Project*. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, New York, New York, United States.
- Cohen, Cathy J. 1999. *Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2004. "Deviance as Resistance: A New Research Agenda for the Study of Black Politics." *Du Bois Review* 1(1): 27-45.
- Combahee River Collective. 2000. "The Combahee River Collective Statement." In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, edited by Barbara Smith, 264-74. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Davidson, Arthur T. 1957. "A History of Harlem Hospital." *Journal of the National Medical Association* 56(NC5): 373-92.
- Davis, Angela Y. 1983. *Women, Race and Class*. New York: Random House.
- De Barros, Juanita. 2014. *Reproducing the British Caribbean: Sex, Gender, and Population Politics After Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Gaines, Kevin K. 1996. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Gamble, Vanessa Northington. 1995. *Making a Place for Ourselves: The Black Hospital Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gates Jr., Henry Louis. 1988. "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black." *Representations*, no. 24 (Autumn): 129-55.
- Gilmore, Glenda Elizabeth. 1996. *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- . 2008. *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950*. New York: Norton.
- . 1997. "Under the Shadow of Tuskegee: African Americans and Health Care." *American Journal of Public Health* 87 (11): 1773-78.

- Hamer, Fannie Lou. 2011. "Testimony Before a Select Panel on Mississippi and Civil Rights." In *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is*, edited by Maegan Parker Brooks and Davis W. Houk, 36-41. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. 1994. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hill, Robert. A., ed. 1986. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume V*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1989. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume VI*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hine, Darlene Clark. 1994. *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ivy, Nicole. 2013. "Materia Medica: Black Women, White Doctors and Spectacular Gynecology in the Nineteenth-Century U.S." PhD diss., Yale University.
- . 2016. "Bodies of Work: A Meditation on Medical Imaginaries and Enslaved Women." *Souls* 18 (1): 11-31.
- James, C.L.R. 2013. *Beyond a Boundary*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- James, C.L.R. N.D. "Draft Chapter III: USA." Box 14, Folder 311. C.L.R. James Collection, Alma Jordan Library, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.
- James, Winston. 1998. *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America*. London: Verso.
- Johnson, Charles S. 1999. "Public Opinion and the Negro." In *The Opportunity Reader: Stories, Poetry, and Essays from the Urban League's Opportunity Magazine*, edited by Sondra Kathryn Wilson, 430-443. New York: Modern Library.
- Judd, Bettina. 2014. *Patient: Poems*. New York: Black Lawrence Press.
- Katz, Esther, ed. 2016. *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger, Volume 4: 'Round the World for Birth Control, 1920-1966*. Chicago: University of Illinois. Kindle edition.
- Kobrin, Frances E. 1966. "The American Midwife Controversy: A Crisis of Professionalization." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 40(4): 350-63.
- Kühl, Stefan. 2002. *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ladd-Taylor, Molly. 1988. "'Grannies' and 'Spinsters': Midwife Education Under the Sheppard-Towner Act." *Journal of Social History* 22(2): 255-74.
- Ladd-Taylor, Molly. 1997. "Saving Babies and Sterilizing Mothers: Eugenics and Welfare Politics in the Interwar United States." *Social Politics* 4(1): 136-53.
- Lawrence, Jane. 2000. "The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women." *American Indian Quarterly* 24(3): 400-19.
- Mariash, A. David and Aubre de L. Maynard. 1961. "Stab Wounds of the Heart: Two Unusual Cases in Management." *American Journal of Surgery* 101(3): 385-89.
- Martin, Tony. 1983. *The Pan-African Connection: From Slavery to Garvey and Beyond*. Wellesley, MA: Majority Press.
- Maynard, Aubre de L. 1937. "Technique of Skin Grafting." *American Journal of Surgery* 37(1): 92-105.
- . 1978. *Surgeons to the Poor: The Harlem Hospital Story*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

- ., Harold A. Brooks and Cleo J.L. Froix. 1965. "Penetrating Wounds of the Heart: Report on a New Series." *Arch Surg* 90(5): 680-86.
- Mitchell, Michele. 2004. *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Movement for Black Lives. 2016. *A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom & Justice*. <https://policy.m4bl.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/20160726-m4bl-Vision-Booklet-V3.pdf>
- Nelson, Alondra. 2011. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nelson, Jennifer. 2010. "'All This That Has Happened to Me Shouldn't Happen to Nobody Else': Loretta Ross and the Women of Color Reproductive Freedom Movement of the 1980s." *Journal of Women's History* 22(3): 136-60.
- Ngai, Mae M. 2004. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- "Nurse, Dr. Godfrey." 1969. In *Journal of the National Medical Association*. 61 (2): 203-4
- Parker, Jeffrey W. 2016. "Sex at a Crossroads: The Gender Politics of Racial Uplift and Afro-Caribbean Activism in Panama, 1918-1932." *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 4(2): 196-221.
- Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, 1897-1957*. Microfilm Publication T715. Washington, D.C.: National Archives of the United States.
- Perry, Jeffrey B. 2010. *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- "Petioni, Charles Augustin." 1942. In *Who's Who in Colored America*, 6th ed. Brooklyn: Thomas Yenser.
- Plummer, Brenda Gayle. 1996. *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Presser, Harriet B. 1969. "The Role of Sterilization in Controlling Puerto Rican Fertility." *Population Studies* 23(3): 343-61.
- Reid, Ira de Augustine. 1939. *The Negro Immigrant: His Background, Characteristics, and Social Adjustment, 1899-1937*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Riggs, Marlon, dir. *Black Is...Black Ain't*. 1995. San Francisco, CA: Independent Television Service/California Newsreel, 2004, DVD.
- Roberts, Dorothy. 1997. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Vintage.
- Ross, Loretta. 1994. "Why Women of Color Can't Talk About Population." *Amicus Journal* 15(4): 27.
- . 2004. Interview by Joyce Follet. In *Voices of Feminism Oral History Project*. Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, North Hampton, Massachusetts, United States.
- . 2016. "The Color of Choice: White Supremacy and Reproductive Justice." In *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology*, edited by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, 53-65. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Scott, William R. 1978. "Black Nationalism and the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict 1934-1936." *Journal of Negro History* 63(2): 118-34
- Sharpe, Christina. 2016. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Silliman, Jael, Marlene Gerber Fried, Loretta Ross and Elena R. Gutiérrez. 2004. *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organizing for Reproductive Justice*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket.
- Simmons, Aishah Shahidah, dir. *No! The Rape Documentary*. 2006. Philadelphia: AfroLez Productions, 2015. DVD.
- Smith, Susan L. 1996. "Neither Victim nor Villain: Nurse Eunice Rivers, the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, and Public Health Work." *Journal of Women's History* 8(1): 95-113.
- Stanley, Jenn, Kristyn Brandi. 2017. "Loretta Ross on the Dalkon Shield Disaster." Produced by Rewire. *CHOICE/LESS: The Backstory*, Episode 2, Podcast. 7 June 2017. <https://rewire.news/multimedia/podcast/choiceless-backstory-episode-2-loretta-ross-dalkon-shield-disaster/>
- Staupers, Mabel Keaton. 1961. *No Time for Prejudice: A Story of the Integration of Negroes in Nursing in the United States*. New York: Macmillan.
- Stern, Alexandra Minna. 2005. *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2005. "Sterilized in the Name of Public Health: Race, Immigration, and Reproductive Control in California." *American Journal of Public Health* 95(7): 1128-38.
- Summers, Martin. 2004. *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- U.S. General Accounting Office. 1976. *Investigation of Allegations Concerning Indian Health Services*. B-164031(5), HRD-77-3. Washington, D.C.: Government Accounting Office.
- Ward Jr., Thomas J. 2003. *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
- Washington, Harriet A. 2006. *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present*. New York: Doubleday.
- Watkins-Owens, Irma. 1996. *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Wells-Barnett, Ida B. 2006. "This Awful Slaughter." In *Great Speeches by African Americans*, edited by James Daley, 98-101. Mineola, NY: Dover.
- Whitman, James Q. 2017. *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Wilson, Jamie J. 2009. *Building a Healthy Black Harlem: Health Politics in Harlem, New York, from the Jazz Age to the Great Depression*. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press.

¹ On misogynoir see Moya Bailey, "They aren't talking about me..." *Crunk Feminist Collective*, 14 March 2010, <http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2010/03/14/they-arent-talking-about-me/>; and Bailey, "New Terms of Resistance: A Response to Zenzele Isoke," *Souls* 15, no. 4 (2013), 341-343; Edgar M. Grey, "Harlem—Negro Melting Pot," *Amsterdam News*, April 20, 1927, 16; Alondra Nelson outlines three areas of health activism in "the long medical civil rights movement": "institution building, integrationism (or anti-segregationism), and the 'politics of knowledge,'" in Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 17.

² "Dr. Wiley M. Wilson Sounds Progressive Keynote in Speech to North Harlem Association," *Amsterdam News*, February 3, 1926, 16; on gendered discourses embedded in ideologies of racial uplift, see Hazel V. Carby, "Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (Summer 1992): 738-755; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Jeffrey W. Parker, "Sex at a Crossroads: The Gender Politics of Racial Uplift and Afro-Caribbean Activism in Panama, 1918-1932," *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 196-221.

³ Thelma E. Berlack, "The Feminist Viewpoint: The Disappearing Midwife," *Amsterdam News*, November 6, 1929, 7.

⁴ "Politics Seen in Harlem Hospital Shakeup," *Amsterdam News*, February 19, 1930, 2; "NY Doctors See Trick in Hospital Probe," *Amsterdam News*, February 4, 1933, 1-2.

⁵ Mabel D. Keaton, "Private Hospitals," *Amsterdam News*, November 19, 1930, 20.

⁶ New York Tuberculosis Association, "More Health Education," *New York Times*, June 23, 1923, XX8; "Work of Harlem Tuberculosis Committee Praised by Hopkins," *Amsterdam News*, November 4, 1925, 9; Thelma E. Berlack, "Fighting Your Health Battles," *Amsterdam News*, December 1, 1926, 20.

⁷ "18 Physicians Interested in New Sanitarium," *Amsterdam News*, October 7, 1925, 9; "Edgecombe Sanitarium Open for Inspection Sunday," *Amsterdam News*, December 9, 1925, 3; "Edgecombe Sanitarium Open to Public Dec. 13," *Chicago Defender*, December 12, 1925, A5; "Harlem Sanitarium Treats 249 in 1929," *Amsterdam News*, January 8, 1930, 4. "Godfrey Nurse, Surgeon, 80, Dies," *New York Times*, December 23, 1968, 39; "Dr. Godfrey Nurse," *Journal of the National Medical Association* 61, no. 2 (March 1969): 203-204.

⁸ "Politics Seen in Harlem Hospital Shakeup," *Amsterdam News*, February 19, 1930, 2.

⁹ See also Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁰ On stereotypes about black women as sexually immoral and infectious see Charles S. Johnson, "Public Opinion and the Negro," from *Opportunity* 1, no. 7, in Sondra Kathryn Wilson, ed., *The Opportunity Reader: Stories, Poetry, and Essays from the Urban League's Opportunity Magazine* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 430-443; and Carby, "Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context," 739; E. Elliott Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: Increasing Sterility in Negro Women," *Amsterdam News*, June 6, 1923, 12; Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: A Needed Institution," *Amsterdam News*, June 3, 1925, 16; Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: Is Your Child 'Running Wild?'," *Amsterdam News*, August 19, 1925, 16; Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: Health Education Among Negroes in New York City," *Amsterdam News*, June 15, 1927, 13; Rawlins, "Fire! Fire!" *Amsterdam News*, April 4, 1928, p. 13; "He Kept Harlem Fit," *Amsterdam News*, September 19, 1928, 16.

¹¹ L. Baynard Whitney, "Final Rites Held Over Remains of E. Elliott Rawlins," *Amsterdam News*, September 19, 1928, 2-3; "Dr. Rawlins, Outstanding Race Man, Succumbs to Pneumonia in New York," *Negro World*, September 22, 1928, 2; Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: A Needed Institution," *Amsterdam News*, June 3, 1925, 16; Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: Increasing Sterility in Negro Women," *Amsterdam News*, June 6, 1923, 12; Rawlins, "Fire! Fire!" April 4, 1928, *Amsterdam News*, p. 13; Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: Is Your Child 'Running Wild?'," *Amsterdam News*, 19 August 1925, 16; "He Kept Harlem Fit," *Amsterdam News*, 19 September 1928, 16.

¹² Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: Nervous Influences," *Amsterdam News*, October 21, 1925, 16; Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: The Peril of Venereal Diseases," *Amsterdam News*, April 14, 1926, 16; republished as "Keeping Fit: Social Diseases," *Amsterdam News*, May 11, 1927, 23; Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: Increasing Sterility in Negro Women," *Amsterdam News*, June 6, 1923, 12; Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: A 'Crushed Flower'," *Amsterdam News*, February 3, 1926, 16, republished as "Keeping Fit: Damaged Goods," *Amsterdam News*, May 18, 1927, 24; Rawlins, "'Keeping Fit: Save the Babies'," *Amsterdam News*, June 13, 1923, 12; Rawlins, "The Infant and Summertime," *Amsterdam News*, June 22, 1927, 13.

¹³ Convention Reports in Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume V*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 720-721, 762; Rawlins, "Dr. Rawlins Answers 'A West Indian'," *Amsterdam News*, February 18, 1925, 16; Marcus Garvey to Prof. D.H. Kyle, Chairman, Marcus Garvey Committee on Justice, February 6, 1926, in Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume VI* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 322; "In the Cause of Justice To Marcus Garvey," and "Program for Week Ending December 11, 1926 at Liberty Hall," *Negro World*, December 11, 1926, 1,3; L. Baynard Whitney, "Harlem Mourns Passing of Beloved Pioneer Physician," *Amsterdam News*, September 19, 1928, 3.

¹⁴ Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: The 'New' Harlem Hospital," *Amsterdam News*, August 4, 1926, 20.

¹⁵ "Hospital Fight Renewed," *Amsterdam News*, May 27, 1925, 1; Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: The Mecca of 'New' Negroes," *Amsterdam News*, May 27, 1925, 16; "Admit Prejudice Against Negro Internes," *Amsterdam News*, June 3, 1925, 1; "Negroes to Run Harlem Hospital," *New York Times*, June 24, 1925, 10; "Promotion is Won by Colored Doctors," *Washington Post*, June 25, 1925, 10; "New York Sets the Pace," *New Journal and Guide*, July 4, 1925, 12; "Budget Director Buckley in Speech," *Amsterdam News*, July 15, 1925, 8; Rawlins, "Keeping Fit: The 'New' Harlem Hospital," *Amsterdam News*, August 4, 1926, 20; "Dr. Wright on Hospital Staff," *Chicago Defender*, August 28, 1926, 1; "Chicago Doctors Get Real Facts on Harlem Hospital," *Chicago Defender*, December 31, 1927, A9.

¹⁶ Conrad Percival Maynard, S.S. *Tintoretto Passenger Manifest*, May 7, 1906; p. 109, line 3; *Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, 1897-1957*, microfilm publication T715 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives of the United States), roll 0705.

¹⁷ Ida B. Wells-Barnett, "This Awful Slaughter," in James Daley, ed., *Great Speeches by African Americans* (Mineola: Dover, 2006), 99; Thomas J. Ward Jr. *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 50; "Record of 1921 Lynchings," *New Journal and Guide*, 31 December 1921, 1; Charles Frederick Carter, "The Lynching Infamy," *The New York Times Current History* (March 1922), 897-902; Norman M. Kastler, "The Control of Race Relations in the Community," *Opportunity* (July 1929), 207-209.

¹⁸ "Investigate Harlem Hospital," *Amsterdam News*, December 21, 1932, 6; "Appeal to Public in Hospital Fight," *Amsterdam News*, February 1, 1933, 1; "Nurses Segregated in Hospital Dining Room," *Amsterdam News*, September 6, 1933, 1; Simon Anekwe, "Harlem Hospital—Once Called 'Slaughterhouse on Lenox Avenue' Stands Today on Threshold of Excellence," *Amsterdam News*, March 26, 1977, A3.

¹⁹ Arthur T. Davidson, "A History of Harlem Hospital," *Journal of the National Medical Association* 56, no. 5 (September 1957): 374; Thelma E. Berlack, "May E. Chinn Given Degree in Medicine," *Amsterdam News*, June 16, 1926, 11; "Young Woman Doctor on Harlem Hospital Staff," *New Journal and Guide*, September 1, 1926, 3; George Davis, "A Healing Hand in Harlem," *New York Times Magazine*, April 22, 1979, 54; Interview with May Edward Chinn, *Black Women Oral History Project*, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, June 27, 1979, transcript, 23, 30.

²⁰ Thelma E. Berlack, "May E. Chinn Given Degree in Medicine," *Amsterdam News*, June 16, 1926, 11; "Young Woman Doctor on Harlem Hospital Staff," *New Journal and Guide*, September 1, 1926, 3; Davis, "A Healing Hand in Harlem," 54; Chinn, *Black Women Oral History Project*, 13 July 1979, transcript, 49-51.

²¹ Aubre de L. Maynard, "Technique of Skin Grafting," *American Journal of Surgery* 37, no. 1 (July 1937): 92-105; A. David Mariash, Aubre de L. Maynard, "Stab Wounds of the Heart: Two Unusual Cases in Management," *American Journal of Surgery* 101, no. 3 (March 1961): 385-389; Aubre de L. Maynard, Harold A. Brooks, Cleo J.L. Froix, "Penetrating Wounds of the Heart: Report on a New Series," *Arch Surg* 90, no. 5 (1965): 680-686. "Dr. Maynard Opens Office," *Amsterdam News*, January 11, 1928, 2; "To Give Lectures for Young Ladies," *Amsterdam News*, December 5, 1928, 9; "To Give Free Health Lectures to Women," *Amsterdam News*, October 16, 1929, 19; "Diseases of Women," *Amsterdam News*, January 15, 1930, 11; "Maynard to Discuss Sex," *Amsterdam News*, February 19, 1930, 6.

²² Jean Heller, "Syphilis Victims in U.S. Study Went Untreated for 40 Years," *New York Times*, July 26, 1972, 1, 8; Loretta Ross, "Why Women of Color Can't Talk About Population," *Amicus Journal* 15, no. 4 (1994), 27; B. Drummond Ayres Jr., "Exploring Motives and Methods: The Nation Sterilizing the Poor," *New York Times*, July 8, 1973, 154; "Daryl Alexander, 'A Montgomery Tragedy,'" *Essence* (September 1973), 43; Bill Kovach, "H.E.W. Head Curbs Sterilization Aid," *New York Times*, July 6, 1973, 54; Harriet B. Presser, "The Role of Sterilization in Controlling Puerto Rican Fertility," *Population Studies* 23, no. 3 (November 1969): 344; "Puerto Rico Aims to Cut Birth Rate," *New York Times*, November 4, 1974, 19; Peter Kihss, "A Puerto Rican Sees 'Genocide'," *New York Times*, October 31, 1974, 8; Pamela Smith, "Sterilization Abuse: Black, Puerto Rican, Indian Women Are Most Likely to Be Sterilized," *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 28, 1978, 5; Pamela Smith, "Puerto Rico has Highest Incidence of Sterilization in the World," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 7, 1978, 7; Joseph Treen, "Sterilization in the Ghetto," *Newsday*, April 23, 1976, 3A; Edward Hudson, "Suit Seeks to Void Sterilization Law," *New York Times*, July 3, 1973, 43; U.S. General Accounting Office, *Investigation of Allegations Concerning Indian Health Services B-164031(5)*, HRD-77-3 (Washington, D.C.: Government Accounting Office, 1976), 4; James Robison, "U.S. Sterilizes 25% of Indian Women: Study," *Chicago Tribune*, May 22, 1977, 36; "Doctor Raps Sterilization of Indian Women," *Los Angeles Times*, May 22, 1977, A3; "'Cultural Genocide' is Charged," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 23, 1977, 1C; Gail Marks Jarvis, "The Fate of the Indian," *National Catholic Reporter*, May 27, 1977, 4.

²³ Frances Beale, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," in Toni Cade Bambara ed., *The Black Woman* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2005), 116-119; Joseph Lelyved, "Many Bombay Men Being Sterilized," *New York Times*, August 20, 1967, 10; Loretta Ross, interview by Joyce Follet, *Voices of Feminism Oral History Project*, Tape 4, November 4, 2004, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, transcript, 76-79; Jenn Stanley, Kristyn Brandi, "Loretta Ross on the Dalkon Shield Disaster," 7 June 2017, produced by Rewire, CHOICE/LESS: The Backstory, Episode 2, podcast, <https://rewire.news/multimedia/podcast/choiceless-backstory-episode-2-loretta-ross-dalkon-shield-disaster/>; Fannie Lou Hamer, "Testimony Before a Select Panel on Mississippi and Civil Rights," in Maegan Parker Brooks and Davis W. Houk, ed., *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell it Like it Is* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2011), 41; Combahee River Collective, "The Combahee River Collective Statement," in Barbara Smith, ed., *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 271, 273.

²⁴ Alexander, "A Montgomery Tragedy," 43.

²⁵ "Aid for Ethiopia," *Amsterdam News*, July 13, 1935, 12; "Ethiopia Seeks Negro Doctors," *Amsterdam News*, July 20, 1935, 1, 2; W.A. Domingo, "How to Help Ethiopia," *Amsterdam News*, July 20, 1935, 12; "Amsterdam News is Sold; Strikers Back," *Amsterdam News*, January 4, 1936, 4; "Medicos Purchase Amsterdam News," *Amsterdam News*, January 11, 1936, 1; "Damon and Pythias of the Business World," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 10, 1943, 12; "Amsterdam News in Journalistic Boom Up in Harlem," *Amsterdam News*, December 2, 1936, 2.

²⁶ "Harlem Doctors to Aid Ethiopia," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 10, 1935, A10; "United Ethiopia Council Formed," *Amsterdam News*, February 1, 1936, 1, 3; "Robinson Plane Fund Increases," *Amsterdam News*, June 13, 1936, 4; "Sailing of United Ethiopian Aid Heads Recalls Contest," *New Journal and Guide*, August 15, 1936, 4; Crusader News Agency, "'Cause of Ethiopia is Not Lost'," *Chicago Defender*, October 3, 1936, 4; "Selassie's Cousin Jim-Crowed," *Amsterdam News*, September 26, 1936, 1, 20; "Ethiopia Will Never Surrender, Selassie's Cousin Declares Here as 2,000 Cheer Him," *Amsterdam News*, October 3, 1936, 1, 18; "West Indians to Celebrate With Affair," *Amsterdam News*, July 31, 1937, 5; "Ethiop Gifts Go to Spain," *Amsterdam News*, March 13, 1937, 2.

²⁷ Senate, *Congressional Record*, April 3, 1924, 5474; Senate, *Congressional Record*, April 9, 1924, 5945; David A. Reed, "America of the Melting Pot Comes to End," *New York Times*, April 27, 1924, XX3; "To Stop Influx of West Indians," *New Journal and Guide*, July 12, 1924, 1; "Some Confusion," *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, July 30, 1924, 10; W.E.B. Du Bois, "West Indian Immigration," *Crisis* 29, no. 2 (1924), 57.

²⁸ "Mrs. Sanger Hails Bermuda Birth Control," *New York Herald Tribune*, June 2, 1937, 23; "Birth Control in Bermuda Planned to Bar Crowding," *New York Times*, June 15, 1934, 10; "Limit on Movies Urged," *New York Times*, February 7, 1935, 22; Harry Hamilton Laughlin, *Eugenic Sterilization in the United States* (Chicago: Psychopathic Laboratory of the Municipal Court of Chicago, 1922), 26; "The World This Week," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 8, 1935, 4; "Bermuda May Get Anti-Negro Bill," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 22, 1935, A1; "Sterilization Plan Perturbs Bermuda," *New York Times*, May 29, 1935, 2; Bermuda Report on Sterilization Angers Citizens," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 29, 1935, 9; "Fight Birth Control in Bermuda," *New York Times*, May 30, 1935, 2; "Bermuda Drops Program to Reduce the Population," *New York Times*, June 7, 1935, 1.

²⁹ "Bermuda Assembly Drops Sterilization," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 20, 1935, 23. "Sterilization—Bermuda Defeats Law," *Chicago Defender*, December 14, 1935, 24; "Bermuda Birth Control to Limit Negro Families," *New York Times*, September 28, 1936, 2; "West Indians Open Battle Against Bias," *Amsterdam News*, November 28, 1936, 18; Bourbonnais, *Birth Control in the Decolonizing Caribbean*, 44; "West Indians Open Battle Against Bias," *Amsterdam News*, November 28, 1936, 18.

³⁰ "Too Many Negroes," *Amsterdam News*, October 31, 1936, 14; J.A. Rogers, Bermuda's Governor Seeks To Enforce Birth Control For Race," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 7, 1936, 12; "Bermuda Governor Denied Automobile; He Quits," *Amsterdam News*, April 15, 1939, 2; Charles Alexander, "Bermuda Government Plans to Sterilize Negroes," *Negro Worker* 7, no. 2 (February 1937), 9; "Sterilization to Cure Unemployment," in *The Watchman*, "Politics and the Negro," *International African Opinion* 1, no. 1 (1937), 9; Hubert E. Lees, "British Viciousness," letter to the editor, *Amsterdam News*, November 14, 1936, 14; Universal Publishing House advertisement, *Negro World*, September 20, 1924, 9.

³¹ "War on Bermuda Birth Plan," *Amsterdam News*, November 7, 1936, 13; "Bermuda Governor Denied Automobile; He Quits," *Amsterdam News*, April 15, 1939, 2.

³² "Politics Seen in Harlem Hospital Shakeup," *Amsterdam News*, February 19, 1930, 2; "Resigns Hospital Post," *New York Times*, February 25, 1930, 28; "Dr. Petioni Quits Post Under Fire," *Amsterdam News*, February 26, 1930, 1; "Demand Harlem Hospital Jim-Crow Investigation," December 21, 1932, 2; "Appeal to Public in Hospital Fight," *Amsterdam News*, February 1, 1933, 1-2; "Broun to Address Hospital Meeting," *Amsterdam News*, February 22, 1933, 1, 3. "Charles Augustin Petioni," *Who's Who in Colored America*, sixth edition (Brooklyn: Thomas Yenser, 1942), 407; J.R. Johnson (C.L.R. James), "The Negro Question," *Socialist Appeal*, October 10, 1939, 3; Sara Rimer, "Where the World Was New," *New York Times*, September 9, 1990, 36; "West Indians Hold Mass Meet," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 4, 1928, 8; articles authored by Charles A. Petioni include: "Gifts from Abroad," *Amsterdam News*, December 22, 1934, 6, 27, 31; "Better Times in the West Indies," *Amsterdam News*, September 28, 1935, 2-3; "Black Man's Paradise," *Amsterdam News*, October 5, 1935, 2; "Haiti Seems What It Really Isn't," *Amsterdam News*, October 12, 1935, 2; "Urges Closer Link Between Negro Groups," *Amsterdam News*, August 29, 1936, 2; "Not for Sale!" *Amsterdam News*, May 20, 1939, 10.

³³ "Gird to Fight Island Birth Control Unit," *Amsterdam News*, November 14, 1936, 18; "Jamaicans at Birth Control Mass Meeting," *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, January 9, 1937, 34.

³⁴ "Hit Bermuda Birth Curbs, Rap America," *Amsterdam News*, December 19, 1936, 13.

³⁵ "Mrs. Margaret Sanger's Move Assures Birth Control Clinic for Harlemites," *Amsterdam News*, October 16, 1929, 3; "Open Birth Control Clinic Bureau in Harlem," *Amsterdam News*, April 16, 1930, 9; "Research Bureau has 'Open House'," *Amsterdam News*, November 26, 1930, 11; "Harlem Physicians Study Birth Control," *Amsterdam News*, January 23, 1931, 11; "Fad Demands Few in Family Today," *Amsterdam News*, October 5, 1932, 5; "Margaret Sanger Airs Her Theories," *Amsterdam News*, December 14, 1932, 5; "Fad Demands Few in Family Today," *Amsterdam News*, October 5, 1932, 5; Lucien Brown, "Keeping Fit: Birth Control," *Amsterdam News*, November 23, 1932, 6.; Brown, "Keeping Fit: The Proposed Venereal Disease Clinic," *Amsterdam News*, March 29, 1933, 6.

³⁶ "Open Birth Control Clinic Bureau in Harlem," *Amsterdam News*, April 16, 1930, 9; "Doctors are Freed in Birth Control Raid," *New York Times*, May 15, 1929, 20; "Research Bureau has 'Open House'," *Amsterdam News*, November 26, 1930, 11; Thelma E. Berlack, "Feminist Viewpoint: Harlem Not Interested," *Amsterdam News*, October 5, 1932, 4; Brown, "Keeping Fit: Birth Control," November 23, 1932, 6; Berlack, "The Feminist Viewpoint: Pass Along the Word," *Amsterdam News*, October 11, 1933, 5.

³⁷ "Mrs. Sanger Hails Bermuda Birth Control," *New York Herald Tribune*, June 2, 1937, 23; Document 128, Margaret Sanger to Katherine Blondel, May 18, 1937, in Esther Katz, ed. *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger, Volume 4: 'Round the World for Birth Control, 1920-1966* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2016), Kindle.

³⁸ "Protest Sterilization Threat in Bermuda," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 10, 1937, 15; "Sterilization to Cure Unemployment," *International African Opinion*, 9; "England Plans Sterilization of Bermudese," *Chicago Defender*, January 1, 1938, 24; "Isles Plight Aired in House of Commons," *Chicago Defender*, January 15, 1938, 24.

³⁹ "Dr. Cecil Marquez, Half Century of Dedicated Service," *Amsterdam News*, May 2, 1987, 28; "Introduce Two Young Doctors," *Amsterdam News*, July 8, 1939, 13; "Predicts Destruction of World Order In," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 17, 1938, 4; "Democracy is just a phrase to Britishers," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 5, 1938, 17; C.L.R. James, "Draft Chapter III: USA," autobiographical manuscript, C.L.R. James Collection, Alma Jordan Library, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, Box 14, Folder 311, 3.

⁴⁰ The Movement for Black Lives, *A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom & Justice*, <https://policy.m4bl.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/20160726-m4bl-Vision-Booklet-V3.pdf>



More than Auxiliary: Caribbean Women and Social Organizations in the Interwar Period

[Tyesha Maddox](#)

Assistant Professor
Department of African and African American Studies
Fordham University

Abstract: The interwar period witnessed the formation of a large number of Caribbean American benevolent associations and mutual aid societies, which served as forums to discuss Caribbean American affairs, hosted cultural activities, helped members find employment and provided charity assistance. Through an examination of female participation in these organizations, this article challenges the historiography of Caribbean immigration that tends to normalize the male experience. These associations empowered Caribbean women to become involved in political activism and served as training grounds for female leaders. Through relief efforts, charity work and collaboration with Caribbean organizations, female members created diasporic networks that kept them abreast of events in the islands and connected to their West Indian identities. This article reveals that an examination of Caribbean women's involvement in social organizations is essential in shaping complex and diverse immigrant narratives, which place women at the centre of diasporic formation and highlight their role as indispensable agents in forging transnational connections.

Keywords: Caribbean women, mutual aid societies, immigration, transnational networks

How to cite

Maddox, Tyesha. 2018. "More than Auxiliary: Caribbean Women and Social Organizations in the Interwar Period." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12: 67-94

Following a female-led chain of migration typical of Caribbean immigrants in the twentieth century, Elizabeth Hendrickson immigrated to New York City at the age of 12 to live with her aunt, Rosaline Fredricks. Hendrickson was born on December 13, 1884, in Frederiksted, St. Croix, in the Danish Virgin Islands (now the U.S. Virgin Islands).¹ At the age of 24, she moved out of her aunt's Harlem home and into a boarding house, where she lived with several other young immigrants from the Caribbean (Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910).² Throughout her life, Hendricks was actively involved with Caribbean immigrant mutual aid societies and benevolent associations.

In 1915, Hendrickson along with several other Virgin Island women founded the American West Indian Ladies Aid Society (AWILAS) to establish camaraderie among Caribbean American women, as well as to address their concerns as immigrant and minority women. Hendrickson served as president of the AWILAS from 1923-1928 and in various other executive-board positions throughout her life. Hendrickson's involvement with social organizations in New York did not end with the AWILAS. She also served as the secretary of both the Virgin Islands Congressional Council and the Virgin Island Catholic Relief Committee. She helped to establish the Benevolent Societies of the American Virgin Islands, the Virgin Islands Protective League, and the Harlem Tenants' League, which advocated on behalf of Harlem tenants against oppressive rent hikes and unsanitary conditions.³ Hendrickson was also an active member of the Communist Party of the United States of America, which was enthusiastically recruiting both Caribbean and African American women in the 1920s and 1930s (Boyce Davies 2007; McDuffie 2011; Stevens 2017).

Hendrickson became well-known as a passionate street corner speaker in Harlem and quickly made a name for herself among the black community in New York City. As a result, she was frequently asked to speak at organizational meetings and banquets for the New York Colored Democratic Association, the National Joint Conference Committee and many other groups. Through her involvement with Caribbean immigrant social organizations, such as the AWILAS, Hendrickson collaborated with numerous influential black leaders and regularly

used her platform to advocate for women's issues. Caribbean and African American women's rights were a major priority for her and she frequently encouraged black women to become involved in political and social justice movements to ensure that their voices were heard and concerns addressed.⁴

At the turn of the twentieth century, there were not many spaces in which women, especially black foreign women, could hold leadership positions and voice their political beliefs. American women could not take part in elective politics at the federal level, and although not prohibited by the United States Constitution, few women held public office. It was not until the passage and ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 that women were granted the right to vote. Hendrickson's story demonstrates the role that Caribbean immigrant benevolent associations and mutual aid societies played in allowing Caribbean women to take on leadership roles that they might not have normally. These social organizations opened a door for Caribbean women and became rare training grounds for female leadership.

The early twentieth century witnessed the formation of a large number of Caribbean American benevolent associations and mutual aid societies. These social organizations, much like the AWILAS, served as forums to discuss Caribbean American affairs, hosted cultural activities, helped members find employment and provided charity and welfare assistance, especially for newly-arrived immigrants. This article examines the 52 West Indian mutual aid societies and benevolent associations that were founded in New York City between 1884 and 1940, arguing that these prevalent early twentieth-century social organizations and their predominantly female membership challenge the historiography of Caribbean immigration that tends to normalize the male experience of immigrants: frameworks which emphasize "the mobility of masculine subjects as the primary agents of diasporic formation and perpetuate a more general masculinism in the conceptualization of diasporic community" (Campt and Thomas 2008, 2). Illustrated through their leadership roles in immigrant social organizations is the fact that Caribbean women were active and influential participants in the immigration experience, not just passive

bystanders. As this article reveals, the examination of Caribbean women's involvement in social organizations is essential in shaping complex and diverse immigrant narratives, which place women in the centre of diasporic formation and highlight their role as indispensable agents in forging transnational connections.

This article analyzes the ways in which mutual aid societies and benevolent associations helped immigrant women in New York to create formal and informal networks. In examining the proliferation of these organizations, their membership and the functions they served, this article demonstrates that these associations not only heightened a sense of West Indian ethnic identity among islanders in the United States, but also strengthened kinship networks among immigrants both in the United States and back home in the Caribbean. The formation of Caribbean social organizations was a direct result of Caribbean immigrants' desire to form social connections and kinship networks. Particularly important to this process were Caribbean women, who I argue were the key proponents of Caribbean culture in the United States and played an important role in the formation of ethnically distinct Caribbean communities.

Through relief efforts, charity work and collaboration with organizations in the Caribbean, female members of immigrant social organizations in New York created transnational networks that helped to keep them abreast of events occurring in the Caribbean. Caribbean women, through their membership in mutual aid societies and benevolent associations, demonstrated a strong interest in staying connected to their communities' back home by providing aid to Caribbean islands hit with natural disasters and founding various scholarships to sponsor students in the region. They created new communities for themselves and their families within the larger American community, while remaining closely connected to their West Indian identities. They utilized these associations to honour their ethnic identities in the United States through programming that celebrated their heritage. In this way, Caribbean women's roles in associations were vital in the formation of a Caribbean American transnational identity.

Further, this article posits that Caribbean women's involvement with these social organizations demonstrated their belief that their own fate was closely intertwined with the social, economic and political welfare of the international black community. Association members launched various initiatives to help people of African descent globally, demonstrating their deep concern for black peoples throughout the world. This article suggests that an examination of Caribbean immigrant women's roles in mutual aid societies and benevolent associations provides a more nuanced understanding of the way in which Caribbean immigrants were able to conceptualize their multiple identities as people of colour in the United States, as "West Indians," and as a transnational group connected to other people of African descent across the world. Examining women's roles in immigrant societies provides an important voice to an often-neglected aspect of the Caribbean immigrant experience and highlights the inextricable links between notions of gender, race and class in shaping the lived experiences of newcomers in interwar New York. Thus, by employing a gendered analysis, we can better understand how diasporic communities are made and how diasporic politics emerge.

Historiography

The historiography of Caribbean immigration to the United States features a significant amount of literature on immigration post-1965. Historians of Caribbean immigration tend to focus on the period after World War II because the largest wave of Caribbean immigrants came to the United States during that period. In comparison, there are only a few historians, such as Irma Watkins-Owens, Winston James and Lara Putnam, who examine Caribbean migration to the US in the early twentieth century, prior to World War I (Watkins-Owens 1996; James 1998; Putnam 2013). Moreover, there are even fewer works that examine Anglophone Caribbean social organizations in detail, despite the large number of organizations that emerged in the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, there is only a small body of literature that discusses African American social and cultural organizations as a whole (see Mjagkij 2001; Dunbar 2012;

Beito 2000; Summers 2004). This is surprising given the fact that in the early twentieth century participation in voluntary associations was at an all-time high, with one in every three Americans participating in a secret society, sick and funeral benefit society or life insurance society (Beito 2000, 1-2). Nevertheless, the historians who do examine African American social organizations in the early twentieth century rarely discuss the Caribbean immigrants who were members and often held leadership positions. Such is the case with Nina Baym's encyclopedic work *Organizing Black America* (2001), which provides a detailed look at over five hundred historical and contemporary African American organizations, yet does not include a single Caribbean association, with the exception of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).

To date, scholars of early Caribbean immigration to the United States have only given passing attention to the proliferation of Caribbean social organizations in this period, often making brief reference to Marcus Garvey's UNIA. Very few scholars thoroughly examine the significance of these organizations to the immigrant experience (see De Reid 1939). While the UNIA was unarguably the largest and one of the most successful organizations of Caribbean immigrants in the United States, I contend that historians of Caribbean immigration often focus on the UNIA to the detriment of comparatively smaller associations that also held significance. By highlighting these smaller organizations, it is possible to draw attention to grassroots participation in Caribbean immigrant groups and to illuminate women's involvement in these overlooked organizations.

Irma Watkins-Owens, in her influential book *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930*, has a chapter dedicated to immigrant participation in social organizations. She argues that benevolent associations were significant because they gave women opportunities to hold leadership positions, served as a training ground for potential leaders and provided the basic skills needed for community building (Watkins-Owens 1996, 68, 70, 73-74). This article expands on Watkins-Owens' groundbreaking scholarship by highlighting the process in which Caribbean immigrants developed a pan-Caribbean identity through immigrant social organizations.

One of the ways in which these organizations achieved this pan-Caribbean identity was through cross-cooperation with other associations from different islands in the late 1920s and 1930s. An important goal of many of these organizations in this period was fostering collaboration and unity among Caribbean immigrants as a whole, with female members often leading the charge. As a result, we see the founding of pan-Caribbean associations like the Sons and Daughters of the West Indies and the United Brothers and Sisters of the United Islands.

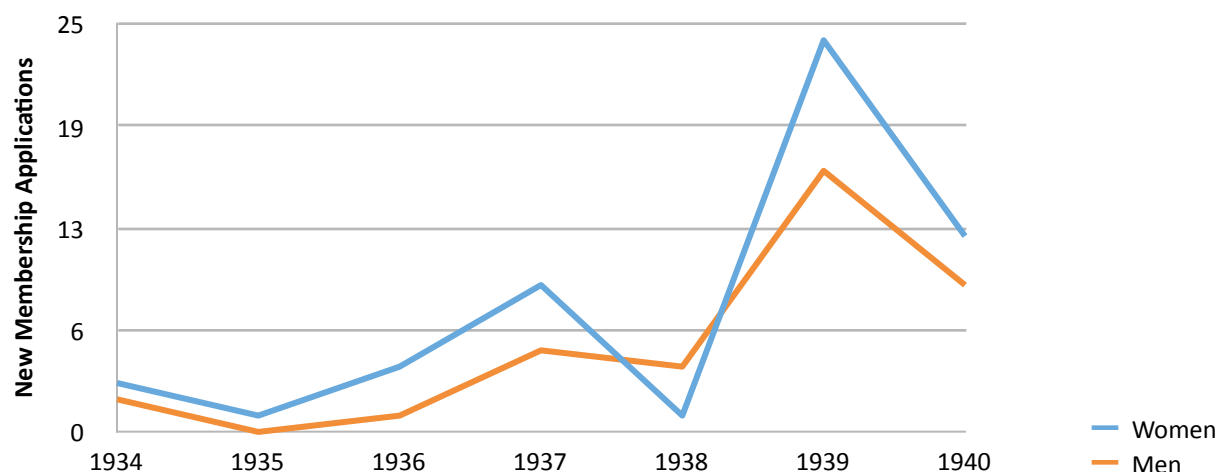
Scholars such as Watkins-Owens and James tend to define Caribbean immigrants as a cohesive group in their examinations, missing the opportunity to explore the process it took for immigrants to develop this shared identity. Alternatively, I contend that Caribbean immigrants did not arrive in the United States as a unified group; instead social organizations were instrumental in helping newcomers create kinship networks and ultimately communities. By investigating the unique experience of Caribbean immigrant women within immigrant social organizations, this article adds dimension and complexity to the historiography on American immigration and seeks to change our understanding of politics, identity and the role of women in the immigration process.

Mutual Aid Societies and Benevolent Associations: Origins and Membership

Caribbean immigrants poured into New York City at the turn of the century looking for ways in which to provide support to each other, as the United States government had very few programmes set up for immigrant groups, least of all for those who were non-white and English-speaking.⁵ Having arrived in an unfamiliar city, often with very few networks, islanders relied on the familiar structure of Caribbean friendly societies to provide kinship and mutual aid. Caribbean immigrants took the basic principles of the Caribbean friendly society and applied them to their new realities in the United States. These associations helped immigrants to become acclimated to their new

environments by supplying members with ready-made social networks, teaching them the ways of the city and “how to be good Americans,” as well as providing them with a way to stay connected to their cultural identities.⁶

Between 1884 and 1940, 52 mutual aid societies and benevolent associations were established in New York City alone. These organizations represented the entire spectrum of the Anglophone Caribbean from the smallest islands to the largest. Membership in Caribbean mutual aid societies varied greatly with some associations, like the Bermuda Benevolent Association (BBA), having as many as three hundred members in the 1940s and less than twenty in 1998. It is hard to establish definitive membership figures for each society, as the organizations did not leave behind logs with their annual membership numbers. However, organizations such as the AWILAS and the Antigua Progressive Society (APS) did keep annual records of new applicants. The pattern of new membership applications presented in Table 1 can be taken as representative of membership applications as a whole. This table is helpful for two reasons. First, while we do not know the total number of members in the organization at the time, we do know how many members were joining the group during this period. The table also highlights the fact that women joined associations at higher rates than male immigrants in many cases. In fact, more women applied to join the APS than men every year, with the exception of 1938.

Table 1. Antigua Progressive Society New Membership Applicants, 1934-1940

Source: Antigua Progressive Society Membership Records, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division (MARBD), Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (SCRBC).

By examining the membership records of mutual aid societies and benevolent associations, we are allowed a microscopic look into the types of people who were involved in immigrant social organizations during the interwar period. For instance, the membership records of the AWILAS show that the society's applicants ranged in age from 18 years old to 46 years old. However, most potential members were in their late twenties and thirties. In terms of socio-economic standing, associations had a variety of members from all class levels coming together to form social networks. Examining fourteen AWILAS membership applications from the 1920s, half of the potential applicants held occupations as domestics, two were housewives, one was a student and one applicant was a self-employed hairdresser. More than half of the women were married and five were unmarried.⁷ While the membership records of the AWILAS are just a tiny cross-section of all potential members of Caribbean social organizations, they do provide an important sampling of the makeup of benevolent associations and demonstrate that membership in mutual aid societies and benevolent associations appealed to islanders from various socio-economic backgrounds. Associations did not have criteria in terms of income

requirements or job specifications for membership. Instead, they envisioned the organizations to be places in which all Caribbean immigrants, regardless of social standing, could come together in fellowship.

Originally founded for adult immigrants, mutual aid societies and benevolent associations eventually expanded their functions to adapt to the growing needs of their members. As the twentieth century progressed, Caribbean immigrants began to reunite with their families and start new families in the United States and social organizations saw the need to create auxiliary groups for minors. In 1923, nine years after the founding of the original association, the MPS formed a juvenile group called the Montserrat Progressive Society Juvenile. The youth group was supervised by three members of the MPS parent body. Two of these members regularly attended MPS juvenile monthly meetings and reported back to the parent body. Juvenile members were allowed to attend at least one meeting of the parent body each quarter.⁸ By having junior members attend parent body meetings, the MPS parent group was essentially preparing younger members for transition into the parent association when they turned 18 years old.

Juvenile auxiliary groups were important because they provided a model for immigrant youth, as well as the second generation of Caribbean immigrants, to continue the tradition of mutual aid societies and benevolent associations in the United States. Additionally, they served as a way to teach children about their West Indian heritage. Children born in the United States could connect to a West Indian identity through the different programmes hosted for youth. Transnational identities could be fostered even if children had never visited the Caribbean. Through social organizations, the children of Caribbean immigrants cultivated kinship networks that were essential to the survival of islanders in the United States.

Functions

Caribbean immigrant benevolent associations and mutual aid societies served many purposes for islanders living in New York City. The most common of those functions were sick and death benefits. Almost every immigrant association provided some form of death benefits for its members. When a MPS financial member of one full year or more passed away, the society paid the member's beneficiary the sum of one hundred and twenty-five dollars. In addition, the association provided a funeral wreath and members were expected to attend the funeral service.⁹ Death benefits served as a form of insurance to association members and their families. They also provided association members with a network of emotional and spiritual support.

The benefit, however, that members most regularly took advantage of were sick benefits. Once members became ill and could no longer work, they were entitled to a weekly stipend. Associations made sick visits to their members and provided them with financial support. In the MPS, members were given six dollars a week for five weeks and then four dollars a week for five additional weeks if they were still sick and unable to work.¹⁰ The West Indian Benevolent Association of New York City established a visiting committee in order to make hospital and home visits to check in on members who fell ill. Additionally, during this period association members took up a voluntary collection at meetings for sick members.¹¹

Sick and death benefits were highly valued by association members and they regularly took advantage of this financial assistance. This is evidenced by the large number of thank you cards and letters found in each association's records. In one letter to the AWILAS, dated September 12, 1933, member Rose Thomas writes how grateful she was to the association for having given her a sick benefit:

Through this medium, I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your kind and sympathetic letter also your generous gift of \$20.00... I wish therefore to express my sincere gratitude for this assistance given

me during my time of distress. I appreciate your noble act of kindness and wish to thank you from the bottom of my heart, and to add with few feeble words the grateful appreciation of my entire family. Your assistance has been a source of cheer to us; it has given us courage and hope in the midst of our troubles and difficulties.¹²

Thomas' letter is one of many similar letters from members thanking their organizations for making home visits, sending flowers and providing monetary gifts. This practice of financial assistance provided immigrants with a sense of security that they could not receive elsewhere as worker's compensation and other disability benefits did not exist at the time. It also comforted members and helped them feel less alienated, giving them a sense of community. This type of kinship was very important and powerful for an immigrant who might have lived alone in New York City. Associations in many ways became families to their members.

Associations also offered their members educational workshops and forums, supplying them with information on a wide array of subjects including: child rearing, job placement, the naturalization process and even how to use voting machines. These forums aimed to be informative and educational by providing assistance to members in obtaining United States citizenship and helping members resolve immigration problems.¹³ Social organizations wanted their members to be active participants in their new communities and they believed hosting educational forums would help them to achieve that objective.

Charitable causes were also of great concern for association members. The most common were scholarship funds set up for members' children.¹⁴ However, charitable efforts were not limited only to members. Associations often donated to local organizations, such as public schools, churches, hospitals and organizations for the disabled. Education was very important to these associations, as can be witnessed by the numerous academic scholarship funds they established. The Virgin Islands Alliance held various fundraisers in order to raise capital to provide scholarships to students. They also held an annual Christmas drive for students at Hampton University, a historically black university,

Figure 1. Bermuda Benevolent Association House Committee



Source: Bermuda Benevolent Association Records, 1898-1969. MARBD, SCRBC.

to which groups like the AWILAS donated.¹⁵ Associations' charitable efforts also extended to schools within the Caribbean. The British Virgin Islands Benevolent Society, for example, donated money and books to various local schools in Tortola.¹⁶

Another significant function of Caribbean immigrant mutual aid societies and benevolent associations was financial investment. Separate from their monthly association dues, some groups such as the Jamaican Associates offered their members rotating lines of credit, or *susus*, which worked as a collective savings plan in which a group of people could pool their money and distribute it among themselves periodically. *Susus* were utilized to start businesses, to put a down payment on a new home, or even to provide passage for a relative to the United States. Additionally, groups like the BBA offered a bond fund, where members paid money to a bond and were promised a four or five per cent return on their investment, which at the time was more than what was offered in a standard savings account. This bond allowed both members and the association a chance to profit.¹⁷

Figure 2. Bermuda Benevolent Association Ways and Means Committee



Source: Bermuda Benevolent Association Records, 1898-1969. MARBD, SCRBC.

Caribbean immigrant women played a vital role as the founders and participants of mutual aid societies and benevolent associations in the twentieth century. Although not reflected as much in the leadership of some Caribbean social organizations, women made up a large percentage of the general membership. Caribbean women's participation in immigrant social organizations was oftentimes equal to or surpassed that of male membership. As is illustrated in Table 1, many groups like the APS had higher female membership enrollment numbers on a yearly basis. Pictures of the BBA's various committees in the 1920s and 1930s also highlight this fact. In a photograph of the association's House Committee (Fig. 1), there are seventeen members pictured and more than half of them are women. Similarly, a photograph of the BBA's Ways and Means Committee (Fig. 2) shows that 75 per cent of committee members pictured are women. "Women were always there, especially unmarried women. They [women] were always more active in these groups," states former Jamaican Associates President Dr. Doreen Wilkinson.¹⁸ Women were the backbone of many Caribbean immigrant social and cultural organizations. They made up a disproportionate number of associations'

planning and organizing committees, responsible for the daily operations of the associations.

In addition, women were an integral part of the founding of many twentieth-century Caribbean social organizations. For instance, Ernestine McNeil-Rogers was one of the two original founders of the Jamaican Associates, Inc. of Boston established in 1934.¹⁹ Approximately half of the original members of the APS in 1934 were women.²⁰ In organizations not founded by women, male founders were often cognizant of including women in the language of their organization's constitution, a progressive move given the time period. The authors of the 1911 constitution of the British Virgin Islands Benevolent Association (BVIBA) made it clear that although the language of the association's bylaws used male pronouns, the association openly welcomed women to join, "the masculine term used in this constitution and by-laws applies to both sexes."²¹ The MPS's constitution and bylaws also explicitly stated that one of their goals as a society was to unite "our brothers and sisters," highlighting the desire of these immigrant organizations to include female membership.²² This desire for female inclusion was also reflected in the policies that mutual aid societies and benevolent associations enacted. The APS, for example, formed a special committee appointed by the Antiguan government for the improvement of conditions on the island. They made sure to advocate for Antiguan women's rights, including a minimum wage for women employed in agricultural or manual labour in the government or public service.²³

There are several explanations for the large rate of female participation in Caribbean mutual aid societies and benevolent associations. Statistically, there were simply more female Caribbean immigrants in the United States than male immigrants in the early twentieth century.²⁴ The sheer number of female Caribbean immigrants present in the United States during the early twentieth century is certainly one of the reasons that their participation in social organizations was high. However, this was not the only factor. Significantly, Caribbean women were largely responsible for creating chains of migration that brought groups of new immigrants from the islands, especially other women, to

the United States. They often set up housing arrangements or boarded other immigrants and introduced them to their social networks. These social networks generally included participation in social organizations.

In an interview with Ivy Simons, former president of the BBA, she states that she had two aunts who immigrated to New York for a better life. The two women lived together on 116th Street in Harlem; one worked as a midwife and the other as a domestic servant. Simons states that her aunts were indispensable when she first arrived in New York in the 1930s. They helped her establish herself in the city and found her housing. More importantly, they introduced her to the BBA and their networks of other Caribbean immigrants in New York. "I joined the BBA soon after I came here [New York] because that was just automatic; you had to be in the association. My aunts and uncles were all members...."²⁵ Simons credits her membership in the BBA with helping her establish herself in New York. "It was hard to get adjusted from Bermudian life to American life," she states, but her membership in a benevolent association gave her a built-in social network of other Caribbean immigrants, many of whom had been in the United States for varying years. These organizations connected more established immigrants, who had already been in the United States for several years with newly arrived immigrants, allowing them the opportunity to exchange information about their experiences and advice for navigating their new city. This type of social networking effectively created a sense of community for Caribbean immigrants in New York. Social organizations appealed to Caribbean women like Simons because they were one of the few spaces in which they could address the issues they faced as black female immigrants.

American West Indian Ladies Aid Society

In heavily male-dominated associations, women frequently organized their own auxiliary groups; they took on important executive positions and ran their own programmes, ensuring that their views and interests were addressed (The West Indian Social Club, Inc. 2011). In this capacity, women were able to wield full

control and take on positions that they might not have otherwise. However, in addition to joining auxiliary and integrated groups, Caribbean women formed their own social organizations that catered specifically to their needs as immigrant women. One of the most successful women's organizations, spanning more than half a century, was the AWILAS. Founded in 1915 and remaining active well into the 1960s, the AWILAS was a benevolent society that later served as an umbrella organization for numerous Caribbean American women's organizations. The society's purpose was to establish camaraderie among Caribbean immigrant women, offering its members sick and death benefits, mutual assistance and a meeting place in which to discuss their opinions and find their way in their new country. The association organized various social events such as teas, dances and bid whist parties and it also offered programmes on child rearing and the naturalization process. Most importantly, the AWILAS served as a home away from home for Caribbean women, where they could discuss issues that arose being both immigrant and minority women in an unfamiliar city.

The AWILAS served as a resourceful tool for Caribbean women to navigate their new environment in New York. It functioned as an important community for its members, connecting a wide array of Caribbean women. As was mentioned previously, a sampling of the organization's membership records demonstrates that women of various ages and socio-economic standing participated in the association, reflecting the organization's widespread appeal and relevance. Through their membership in the AWILAS, Caribbean women formed very close relationships with one another and created intimate kinship networks. Many early Caribbean women immigrants travelled to the United States by themselves, leaving behind their support system of family and friends. Once in the United States, they usually had one relative or close family friend who served as their guide and helped them settle into their new homes, similar to the experiences of Ivy Simons and Elizabeth Hendrickson.

The AWILAS also served as a gateway for its members to connect with other associations, both Caribbean and African American. In the records of the

AWILAS, there is a significant amount of correspondence between the association and other groups like the United Brothers and Sisters of the United Islands and the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters and its Ladies Auxiliary. These organizations sought to work with Caribbean immigrant women both socially and politically. They invited Caribbean women to their organizational meetings as well as social activities.²⁶ This kind of collaboration among Caribbean women's groups was very common. African American women's groups also worked extensively with the AWILAS and other Caribbean women's social organizations. Groups like the Eton Benevolence Society and the Saint Benedict Ladies' Auxiliary No. 204 sought out the AWILAS in order to forge connections between the different groups of black women. For instance, in 1933, the Eton Benevolence Society wrote to the women of the AWILAS stating: "[We are] seeking to establish a bond of unity and friendship between your organisation and ours, [Through this medium we] ask your permission to send a representative at your next meeting, who will make the request and as we hope establish soon."²⁷ Letters like these illustrate the value African American women saw in working with Caribbean women's associations, with immigrant associations serving as a point of connection between the two groups of black women.

Establishing Networks

Mutual aid societies and benevolent associations were essential in creating vital kinship networks among Caribbean immigrants in the United States and they provided many benefits to their members. However, at their core they were social organizations, with an emphasis on fellowship. Thus associations held various social events for their members, which served as spaces in which immigrants could network with people from their home islands and all over the Caribbean. Dances, holiday parties and group trips were just some of the events associations sponsored for their members. Organizations like the BVIBA and the APS had dedicated entertainment committees responsible for planning and coordinating events. The BBA had a community social and recreation club that

held events such as Bermuda Week, which celebrated the history and culture of the island.²⁸

In an effort to expand their social networks and create larger ties to the Caribbean immigrant community in the United States, social organizations frequently collaborated with one another. The AWILAS, for instance, held receptions and dances open to other Caribbean organizations. Associations regularly sent invitations to attend each other's meetings, workshops and social events, such as in 1934 when the BVIBA invited members of the AWILAS to attend their eighth anniversary church service in "the spirit of cooperation and unity... among our sister Benevolence organizations."²⁹ Associations also sent monetary and material donations to one another and frequently took out paid advertisements in other groups' programme booklets.³⁰

However, relations among West Indian social organizations were not perfect, nor without dissent over how groups could achieve their goals. In the records of the AWILAS, Ashely L. Totten writes that he and members of the Virgin Islands Civic and Industrial Association had been accused repeatedly of being unwilling to work with other Virgin Island leaders. He states that "Nothing is farther from the truth than that." He goes on to say:

We want to be helpful to our native people... We do not feel that it is fair to be accused of blocking the cooperation or unification of the natives when we are and have always been ready and willing to cooperate. If unity of action is the solution to the masses of unorganized Virgin Islanders, then we are prepared to do the logical thing—a meeting of minds of all leaders.³¹

Totten's letter highlights that although his organization may have had the intention of collaborating with other immigrant groups, tensions among the leadership still existed. This letter illustrates that cooperation among Caribbean immigrant groups was not a given, nor was it an easy process.

The emphasis that Caribbean associations placed on cooperation among groups in the 1920s and 1930s marked a shift from previous organizational

practices. In the late nineteenth century, Caribbean social organizations generally did not have island-specific requirements for where their members originated. Their only stipulation was that association members had to hail from the Caribbean. The relatively small number of Caribbean immigrants in the United States in this period may have been one reason for these early pan-Caribbean associations. During the early decades of the twentieth century, however, there was a substantial increase in the number of Caribbean immigrants in the United States. Consequently, many of the already established immigrant social organizations began to cater to people from specific islands and implemented strict membership requirements, requiring that potential members be from the island associated with the organization.

In the decade following 1924, there was a huge decline in Caribbean immigration to the United States due to the passage of the restrictive Johnson-Reed Act. The Johnson-Reed Act set a national quota of two per cent of immigrants from the total of any nation's residents in the United States, drastically limiting the number of Caribbean immigrants during this period. As a result, many mutual aid societies and benevolent associations began to see forming a community with other Caribbean immigrant groups as an important objective. Island affiliation and strict membership requirements became less important as the number of arriving immigrants dwindled. Many societies changed their objectives to become more inclusive. Building fully transnational communities concerned with the welfare of those in the Caribbean became another important goal. Consequently, groups like the Jamaica Unity Club, Incorporated, which allowed any person, regardless of nationality, to apply for membership became more prevalent.

As Caribbean immigrant social organizations became more established in the United States, their objectives shifted to adapt to the concerns of their members, which now leaned toward keeping intimate connections with other West Indians in the United States as well as back home. Subsequently, many associations began to allow any person aligned with their objectives, regardless of island origin, to apply for membership. They also endeavoured to keep immigrants in

New York connected to the Caribbean by updating them on Caribbean news and informing them about social and political affairs affecting the region.

Diasporic Leanings

The welfare of people of African descent throughout the world became a clear and pressing concern for Caribbean mutual aid societies and benevolent associations during the interwar period. Often referred to as the “nadir” of American race relations, the early twentieth century witnessed the eruption of violent and deadly race riots in cities across the United States. Lynchings and Jim Crow segregation laws remained dominant in this period. Internationally, the wellbeing of people of African descent was also in constant danger. Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935 and commenced the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, labour unrest erupted across the British Caribbean between 1934 and 1939, and anti-colonial unrest and African nationalism were expressed in strikes throughout West Africa.

Consequently, New York City became a hotbed of black radical politics with groups such as Marcus Garvey's UNIA, Hubert Harrison's Liberty League and Cyril Briggs' African Blood Brotherhood leading the call for black self-determination and political equality (Watkins-Owens 1996; James 1998; Stevens 2017). These groups undoubtedly influenced the objectives of social organizations, which began to take a more diasporic approach in response to the social injustices facing black people throughout the world. This fact is best demonstrated in the goals of organizations such as the APS, which affirmed that “we in America should help those in the islands to obtain and enjoy the same privileges which we have and enjoy here... we should fight for better conditions in the islands through the frame-work of the British Constitution.”³² The group demonstrated such a strong commitment to Antiguan affairs that it was asked by the West Indies Royal Commission in 1938 to make recommendations for the improvement of conditions on the island.³³

In 1928, the APS sent a representative to the Pan-American Nations Conference in Havana, Cuba. They thought that it was vital to send representatives to this conference, as they believed “our fate is hanging in the balance, and it is most important to demonstrate our unity and strength” and to “demand for the right [to] self-determination” for black people in the circum-Caribbean.³⁴ APS members drew a strong connection between themselves and people of the African Diaspora. They believed that it was their duty to fight for the rights and freedom of all black people throughout the world. This recurring sense of diasporic concern is observed in many of the records of Caribbean immigrant mutual aid societies and benevolent associations.

Members of the BVIBA were also active in creating transnational social fields. They had representatives throughout the Caribbean including in St. Thomas, Tortola and Anegada in order to keep abreast of current events on the islands. In 1949, the BVIBA was commissioned to work in conjunction with the Commissioner of the British Virgin Islands on an Economic Sub-Committee in order to develop a reconstruction plan to alleviate the depressed economic condition of the islands (BBA Records 1949). Members of the St. Lucian United Association also forged transnational connections with Lucians throughout the world in order to provide support to their island home. They founded the Union of Overseas Associations, which served to link St. Lucian associations in Barbados, Canada, London, St. Croix, St. Lucia and the United States in order to combine their efforts to provide aid to St. Lucia.³⁵

In 1938, the BBA participated in a mass meeting hosted by the Jamaican Progressive League. The meeting was called in response to a massive workers' demonstration that ended in the brutal shooting of Jamaican protesters by the police. Four people were killed, while dozens were wounded and 103 jailed.³⁶ This event was the culmination of labour unrest taking place all over the Caribbean during the period between 1934 and 1939.³⁷ By participating in the British-Jamaican Benevolent Association's mass meeting, members of the BBA demonstrated their solidarity with the pan-West Indian movement calling for fair wages and decent working conditions in the Caribbean.

Another area of great concern in the 1930s for the BBA and many Caribbean immigrant benevolent associations and mutual aid societies was the Italian-Ethiopian War of 1935. Associations joined together to host mass meetings to discuss actions they could take in support of the Ethiopian army. To do their part, the BBA was active in collecting money to purchase surgical supplies for wounded Ethiopian soldiers. Other groups sent monetary donations to support the Ethiopian army, further highlighting the very real sense of diasporic connection Caribbean immigrants felt to other communities of African descent in the interwar years.³⁸

Conclusion

Highlighting Caribbean women's roles in immigrant mutual aid societies and benevolent associations is essential in order to move beyond scholarly frameworks that normalize the male experience of immigration. As the founders and often largest participants in these associations, immigrant women like Elizabeth Hendrickson and Ivy Simons were the primary proponents of Caribbean culture in the United States. They played an important role in the formation of ethnically distinct Caribbean communities and provided immigrants with a way in which to conceptualize themselves as Caribbean. Participation in these organizations provided Caribbean women with frequent opportunities to collaborate and draw parallels in their experiences. Additionally, associations strengthened kinship networks among immigrants in the United States and those back in the Caribbean, illustrating members' deep concern with staying intimately connected to communities in the islands.

Immigrant women also established collectives through these associations that helped family members immigrate to the United States by raising money to pay for their passage, while also helping to care for family members back home through remittance sending. Without women's involvement in these organizations, Caribbean immigrants would not have had community and kinship networks available to them as they arrived in the United States. Through

their involvement with social organizations, Caribbean women helped pave the way for Caribbean immigration to the United States through their system of networks—both formal and informal. Immigrant women created new communities for themselves and their families within the larger American community, through these organizations, filling a void for the black immigrant population. Finally, I argue that placing women at the centre of our studies of diasporic formation during the interwar period reveals their indispensable role in forging diasporic connections and enriches the historiography on Caribbean immigration.

References

Primary Sources

- 80th Anniversary of the Jamaican Associates, Inc. 2014 programme booklet.
- American West Indian Ladies Aid Society Records (AWILAS), 1915-1965. Papers. Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division (MARBD), Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (SCRBC), New York, NY.
- Antigua and Barbuda Progressive Society Records, 1934-1984. Papers. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- Beach-Thomas Family Records, 1888-1973. Papers. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- Bermuda Benevolent Association Records, 1898-1969. Papers. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- British Virgin Islands Benevolent Association Records, 1926-1989. Papers. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- Hendrickson, A. Elizabeth. 1930. "The Man in the Street." *New York Amsterdam News*, January 8, 1930.
- Montserrat Progressive Society of New York, Inc., Constitution and By-Laws. 1952. Irma Watkins-Owens' private collection.
- New York Age*, "New Harlem Tenants League to Sponsor Great Mass Meeting," March 20, 1943.
- New York Age*, "Working Women Asked to Attend Celebration," April 7, 1928.
- Chicago Defender*, "Plan Preventions to Increase Rents," May 5, 1925.
- Record Group 85—Entry 30 Box 187. National Archives at College Park, MD.
- Sampson, Danette O. 2011. Email correspondence with author. Brooklyn, NY. May 7, 2011.
- Simons, Ivy. 2014. Interview by author. New York, NY. September 2014.
- U.S. Census of Population, 1930 and 17th Census of the United States, 1950 Population Volume IV Special Reports.
- West Indian Benevolent Association. Records, 1891. New York Historical Society. New York, NY.
- Wilkinson, Doreen. 2016. Interview by author. Boston, MA. April 1.

Secondary Sources

- Beito, David T. 2000. *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Boyce Davies, Carole. 2007. *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Campt, Tina and Deborah A. Thomas. 2008. "Gendering Diaspora: Transnational Feminism, Diaspora and Its Hegemonies." *Feminist Review* 90(1): 1-8.
- De Reid, Ira. 1939. *The Negro Immigrant: His Background, Characteristics and Social Adjustments, 1899-1937*. New York: AMS Press.
- Dunbar, Paul Lawrence. 2012. "Hidden in Plain Sight: African American Secret Societies and Black Freemasonry." *Journal of African American Studies* 16(4): 622-637.
- James, Winston. 1998. *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America*. London: Verso.

- McDuffie, Erik. 2011. *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mjagkij, Nina. 2001. *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations*. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Putnam, Lara. 2013. *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Stevens, Margaret. 2017. *Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919-1939*. London: Pluto Press.
- Summers, Martin. 2004. *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910 (NARA microfilm publication T624, 1,178 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- Watkins-Owens, Irma. 1996. *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- The West Indian Social Club, Inc. 2011. "History." Accessed April 13, 2011.
<http://www.westindiansocialclubinc.org/history.html>.

¹ Hendrickson's exact year of birth is unknown. It is reported between 1883-1886 in multiple U.S. Census Records.

² "New Harlem Tenants League to Sponsor Great Mass Meeting," *New York Age*, March 20, 1943.

³ "Plan Preventions to Increase Rents," *Chicago Defender*, May 5, 1925; A. Elizabeth Hendrickson, "The Man in the Street," *New York Amsterdam News*, Jan. 8, 1930.

⁴ "Working Women Asked to Attend Celebration," *New York Age*, April 7, 1928.

⁵ File# 27671/17681, "Revision of Suggestions for Americanization Work among Foreign Born Women"; File# 27671/4720, "The Woman Citizen," Record Group 85—Entry 30 Box 187. National Archives at College Park, MD. In the 1920s, the United States began setting up "Americanization" programmes for female immigrants. They believed that women were the key to having productive and successful immigrant groups. Many of the programmes centred on preparing women for U.S. citizenship, however none of the programmes were for English-speaking immigrants, which effectively shut out Anglophone Caribbean immigrants and dismissed their needs as an immigrant group.

⁶ "How to be a Good American Booklet," Beach-Thomas Family Records, 1888-1973, Box 1, Folder 14. Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division (MARBD), Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (SCRBC), New York, NY.

⁷ Membership Applications, American West Indian Ladies Aid Society Records (AWILAS), 1915-1965, Box 1, Folder 12. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.

⁸ Montserrat Progressive Society of New York, Inc., Constitution and By-Laws. 1952. Irma Watkins Owens' private collection, 25-26.

⁹ Ibid, 21.

¹⁰ Ibid, 3, 20.

¹¹ West Indian Benevolent Association. Records, 1891. New York Historical Society. New York, NY.

¹² AWILAS General Correspondence 1933-1935, AWILAS Records, 1915-1965, Box 1, Folder 4. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.

¹³ "Letters dated May 19, 1939; 1947," Bermuda Benevolent Association (BBA) Records, 1898-1969, Boxes 2, 8; "October 24, 1933 Letter," The Virgin Islands Civic and Industrial Association, AWILAS Records 1915-1965, Box 1, Folder 9. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.

-
- ¹⁴ British Virgin Islands Benevolent Association (BVIBA) Records, 1926-1989, Box 8, Folder 10. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ¹⁵ AWILAS General Correspondence, 1928-1936, AWILAS Records 1915-1965, Box 1, Folders 2 & 4. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ¹⁶ "Letter dated—September 5, 1938," BVIBA Records, 1926-1989, Box 9, Folder 1. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ¹⁷ "Letter dated—September 1, 1936 BBA Joint Committee," BBA Records, 1898-1969, Box 8. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ¹⁸ Dr. Doreen Wilkinson, interview by author, April 1, 2016.
- ¹⁹ 80th Anniversary of the Jamaican Associates, Inc., 2014 programme booklet, donated by member and former president Dr. Doreen Wilkinson.
- ²⁰ ABPS Membership Records, Antigua and Barbuda Progressive Society Records, 1934-1984, Box 8, Folder 1. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ²¹ "1911 Constitution Book," BVIBA Records, 1926-1989, Box 1, Folder 1. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ²² Montserrat Progressive Society of New York, Inc., Constitution and By-Laws. 1952. Irma Watkins Owens' private collection, 5.
- ²³ "Pamphlet—December 12, 1938," Admin Correspondence Political Concerns, ABPS Records, 1934-1984. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ²⁴ Between 1915 and 1919, Caribbean women made up 17.6 per cent of arriving immigrants with Caribbean men making up 16.8 per cent. Between 1920 and 1924, Caribbean women made up 29 per cent of arriving immigrants with Caribbean men making up 23.1 per cent. In 1925, Caribbean women were 7.8 per cent of arriving immigrants with Caribbean men making up 6.6 per cent. Data taken from the US Census of Population, 1930 and 17th Census of the United States, 1950 Population Volume IV Special Reports.
- ²⁵ Ivy Simons, interview by author, September 2014.
- ²⁶ "November 27, 1934," Minutes AWILAS and Related Correspondence, 1928-1936, AWILAS Records 1915-1965, Box 1, Folder 1. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ²⁷ "Letter dated—December 10, 1933," AWILAS General Correspondence 1933-1935, AWILAS Records 1915-1965, Box 1, Folder 4. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ²⁸ "Letter dated—1947," BBA Records, 1898-1969; Box 8. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ²⁹ "Letter dated—1934," AWILAS General Correspondence 1933-1935, AWILAS Records 1915, Box 1, Folder 4. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ³⁰ AWILAS American Virgin Island Correspondence 1925-1935, AWILAS Records 1915-1965, Box 1, Folder 6. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ³¹ "October 24, 1933 Letter," from Ashely L. Totten, The Virgin Islands Civic and Industrial Association, AWILAS Records 1915-1965, Box 1, Folder 9. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ³² "Meeting notes—dated May 28, 1939," ABPS Records 1934-1984, Box 1, Folder 3. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ³³ Membership Correspondence 1935-1970, ABPS Records 1934-1984, MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ³⁴ "Admin Correspondence Political Concerns," ABPS Records 1934-1984, MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ³⁵ Danette O. Sampson, email correspondence with author, May 7, 2011.
- ³⁶ "May 16th, 1938—Letter from the British Jamaican Progressive League," Bermuda Benevolent Association Records, 1898-1969, Box 2. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ³⁷ "May 16th, 1938—Letter from the British Jamaican Progressive League," BBA Records 1898-1969, Box 2. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.
- ³⁸ "November Notes 1937," BBA Records, 1898-1969, Box 8. MARBD, SCRBC, New York, NY.



A Section for Women: Journalism and Gendered Promises of Anti-Colonial Progress in Interwar Panama

Kaysha Corinealdi

Assistant Professor of History
Institute for Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies
Emerson College

Abstract: In 1929 the Panamanian newsweekly, the *Panama Tribune*, inaugurated its "Of Interest to Women" section. Through an examination of the work of the first editor of this section, Amy Denniston, this article highlights the gendered nature of progress work in interwar Panama, and the double standard placed on women to brilliantly serve while also remaining at the background of communal change. The article likewise explores how women like Denniston used active self-making to challenge confining definitions of womanhood while also presenting women as full actors in the intellectual and visionary work required in promoting a vibrant isthmian community. The difficulty of advancing this work, even in mediums created to promote communal solidarity, is at the core of this article.

Keywords: International black press; black women; women editors; xenophobia; imperialism

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Tao Leigh Goffe, Elizabeth Son, and the two anonymous CRGS reviewers for their helpful and thorough feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

How to cite

Corinealdi, Kaysha. 2018. "A Section for Women: Journalism and Gendered Promises of Anti-Colonial Progress in Interwar Panama." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12: 95-120

On January 20, 1929, the *Panama Tribune* debuted its first installment of the “Of Interest to Women” section. Included in this first issue was a brief biography of the section’s editor, Amy Denniston, as well as her first editorial contribution. Her piece, entitled, “Finding Time,” described women as “naturally progressive and adaptable” and offered counsel on how women could carry out various “duties so necessary to happiness and well-being” while also fulfilling their desires. Denniston described this balance as akin to playing a game where the ultimate prize included doing “those things which keep our hearts alive and our minds active.”² Denniston would undertake this very task during her eighteen-month tenure as section editor. Through an examination of Denniston’s editorials, this article illuminates her optimism and caution at the idea of a paper that sought to reach out to its female readers and the difficulty of embracing this agenda given fixed assumptions regarding “women’s work” and “men’s work” in race-conscious visions of anti-colonial communal progress.

In assessing Denniston’s editorials, I herein do not offer a biographical account of Denniston’s life, but instead, focus on the full complexity of her words. This decision is partly based on limits in the available biographical information, but is also rooted in my interest in Denniston as someone involved in active self-making. Denniston was the sole female editor employed by the *Tribune*. Her words, purposefully and subconsciously, opened up debates about the extent to which women could “become conscious subject[s] through narration,” and the manner in which their subjecthood would inform anti-colonial progress (Carby 2009, 630). Through her editorial work, Denniston indeed sought to affirm the role of black women as knowledgeable community members who had the capacity to educate and lead precisely due to their “progressive” attitudes and “adaptability.”

Promoting specific visions of “adaptability” and anti-colonial communal progress had particular significance in late 1920s Panama. Those reading and writing for the *Tribune*, largely Afro-Caribbean Panamanians with ancestry in the Anglophone West Indies, formed part of a migrant descendant community that was increasingly under attack. Most were the descendants of the Panama

Canal builders (as well as those employed in related economies), and by the first three decades of the twentieth century numbered over fifty-thousand, making them the largest migrant descendant group in the country (Conniff 1985). They furthermore represented sizable parts of the population in two of the Republic's largest and most economically viable provinces, Colón and Panamá. By 1930, they formed the majority in Colón (Corinealdi 2011). More so than in any other country in Central and South America, Afro-Caribbean migrants and their descendants demographically transformed Panama.³ These very numbers, however, made white and light-skinned mestizo Panamanian officials and intellectuals wary of an *antillano* or Afro-Caribbean takeover and spurred the creation of immigration and citizenship laws that sought to stop Afro-Caribbean migration and curtail citizenship access among their descendants (Conniff 1987; O'Reggio 2007).

Such laws, in effect, represented a form of internal colonialism aimed at taking back key areas of the country by pushing out or marginalizing a supposedly incompatible or "undesirable" population. Repatriation discourse, unfair housing practices and discrimination in public and private establishments all added to the symbolic and material powers of these laws (Westerman 1980). The *Tribune*, located in the Republic's capital, Panamá, and headed by an all Afro-Caribbean Panamanian leadership and writing staff, challenged this colonizing impetus. The newsweekly likewise pointed to communal progress, as manifested through its pages, as the best means to challenge ongoing threats and limits to Afro-Caribbean Panamanian rights on the isthmus.

In using the press to defend against exclusionism and racist attacks, those writing for the *Tribune*, which by 1929 had a circulation of over twenty-four hundred copies⁴, joined a vibrant black internationalist press desirous to celebrate black thoughts and achievements around the world. Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and the United States represented key hubs in the Americas, with cities like Paris, London and Cape Town also buttressing the readership and geographical scope of this press (Edmondson 2009; Edwards 2003; Gregg 2007; Putnam 2016). One commonality shared across these newspapers and spaces was the rarity of

women as editors, staff writers or newspaper owners. This did not mean that women readers were not envisioned; in fact, catering to a female audience led to the creation of select “lady columns” and “women pages,” but thinking of women as actual authors and press leaders remained a rarity (Edmondson 2009; Taylor 2002).

As an editor for the *Panama Tribune*, Denniston joined the ranks of a small group of other women in the interwar period, including Amy Jacques Garvey (the *Negro World*), Jessie Fauset (the *Crisis*), Una Marson (*Cosmopolitan*), Pauline Nardal (founder, *La Revue du monde noir*) and Maymie Leona Turpeau de Mena (founder, *The World Echo*) who also held leadership positions in the black international press.⁵ Each in key ways embraced this responsibility while also juggling internal and external fixations about the mode and goal of their contributions. These fixations included a focus on maternalism as racial progress, explicit and unconscious assumptions about “women’s work,” the role of structure versus nature and balancing “respectability,” “professionalism,” and the promises of a modern age (Adler 1992; Cooper 2017; Edwards 2003; Edmondson 2009; Morris 2016; Reddock 1990; Taylor 2002).

Amy Denniston, born in Jamaica and raised in Panama, and the select other Afro-Caribbean Panamanian women who contributed to the *Tribune*, I argue, like so many of their upwardly mobile female peers in the interwar Caribbean, held both optimism and caution regarding the work of gender-inclusive communal progress. Indeed, they shared the desire for female-led professional training in commercial and administrative fields that emanated from the pages of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, and to an extent, like Una Marson, also debated the role of “proper vocations” and “respectability” in the pursuit of professional goals (Altink 2011; Edmondson 2009; Jarrett-Macauley 2010). They did not, however, like Amy Jacques Garvey and other Pan-Africanist women, view a return to Africa as the kind of anti-colonialism that would best work in the Panamanian context, although they too embraced a race-conscious discourse (Taylor 2002). Instead, for most Afro-Caribbean Panamanian women, the isthmus

served as the grounds for enacting modernity and progress through, at least in theory, the vision and writing of men and women alike.

Advocating for a kind of anti-colonial progress that would recognize the opportunity to start fully anew, outside of the restrictions of patriarchal order and against growing exclusionist mandates, nonetheless remained a challenge for women writing for and reading the *Tribune*. In her study of Garveyism in early twentieth-century Costa Rica, historian Asia Leeds documents the inordinate pressure placed on women in the enclave of Limón to properly represent the progress of Afro-Caribbean communities (Leeds 2013). This kind of policing likewise happened on the isthmus, but because Afro-Caribbean Panamanians lived in central parts of the Republic, highlighting the presence of an already evolved group of women proved more imperative.

Denniston through her editorial leadership thus, was to convey the seniority and richness of the community. She was to join her male peers in advocating for and celebrating a community with deep roots in the Panamanian isthmus. As the only female editor in the newspaper, and through the “Of Interest to Women” section, moreover, her voice alone would need to advocate for women while also expressing clear solidarity with journalistic and communal agendas largely led by men. In this way, Denniston faced the expectation of serving as a model, partial guide and educator of half of the community, all without taking or expecting credit for this work. This all happened as she, and other pioneering Afro-Caribbean Panamanian women, also sought out models for the active self-making and inclusive anti-colonial progress they hoped to engender.

In what follows, I assess the salience of “progress” narratives in the creation of the *Panama Tribune*, including in the inauguration of the newsweekly’s women’s section. I then explore the mandate of the “Of Interest to Women” page and the dualities found in Amy Denniston’s first editorials regarding the section’s supposed focus on women speaking to and for women, and the proverbial shadow of men and their interests in these discussions. The article next focuses on Denniston’s approach to self-making, paying particular attention to how she

outlined the role of women in society, both in conversation with the commentaries raised by her male and female peers, but also in her attempts to articulate the equality of women, married women in particular, to their married male peers.

I end the article with an examination of how Denniston sought to use the women's section to promote structural change, specifically in the realm of education. With this approach, she joined other black women in the Americas who also promoted education as a central means of ensuring the overall advancement of black people (Broadwater 2003; Gregg 2007; Jarrett-Macauley 2013). Denniston, however, offered a forceful critique of educational approaches touted by her male counterparts, pointing to her own transnational investigative work, as well as her "common sense knowledge" to defend her claims. This willingness to critique and assert new ideas underscored the full evolution of active self-making as a tool of empowerment. Denniston's departure as section editor shortly after this coverage, I contend, nonetheless exposed the assumed limits of the "Of Interest to Women" section and the gendered boundaries present in conversations regarding anti-colonial progress in Panama.

Birth of a Paper, Creating A Women's Section

As part of its inaugural issue on November 11, 1928, the *Panama Tribune* featured letters from readers sharing their excitement about the promise of a new community paper. One such letter writer, Mrs. St. Hill, equated the emergence of the paper to the joys and challenges experienced by new parents. "Here we are again...bursting our brains wondering if the new 'Baby Tribune' will develop into manhood. We had better say, womanhood, as we are aware that father means life-giver, and Papa Sid says he is expecting to have a real fine heir, whether it be a boy or a girl."⁶ St. Hill with this statement alluded to a longer history of journalistic endeavours among Afro-Caribbean Panamanians on the isthmus, and likewise affirmed that this development need not be

imagined solely as a male enterprise, but rather as the domain of men and women alike. In this regard, St. Hill called on the newsweekly to differentiate itself, in content and approach, from its predecessors.

Prior to the *Tribune's* inauguration, the *Workman* (1916-1930), a newsweekly owned and operated by Barbadian-born Hubert N. Walrond, and "West Indian Sections" in U.S. citizen-owned English-language dailies had served as the main journalistic options available to English-speaking Afro-Caribbean Panamanians. The *Workman*, as its name denoted, focused extensively on matters concerning male workers, particularly Canal Zone workers, although other community happenings also made their way into the newspaper (Burnett 2004; Parker 2016). The "West Indian Sections" offered a wider thematic scope, but were limited to the boundaries of a discreet section in newspapers dominated by the perspective of white male U.S. citizens. Sidney Young, prior to publishing and serving as chief editor of the *Tribune*, had inaugurated one such "West Indian Section" in the *Panama American*, making him the first Afro-Caribbean Panamanian to serve as editor for this paper (Corinealdi 2011). As editor, he helped to bring the writings of Afro-Caribbean men, and a handful of women, to a broader isthmian audience.

Also significant about Young's tenure at the *Panama American* was that it coincided with a shifting terrain in national and international policies as it pertained to the movement and citizenship of people of colour. Between 1926 and 1928, the Panamanian National Assembly passed laws that banned almost all non-white immigration into the Republic, introduced restrictive passport requirements and added a petition criterion to birth-based citizenship for all those born of foreign parentage (Conniff 1985; Durling Arango 1999). These laws echoed similar policies throughout Central America and in the United States. British officials likewise increasingly curtailed access to colonial citizenship to the children of Afro-Caribbean migrants born on the isthmus (Putnam 2013).

Exclusion thus came to typify colonialism as experienced by Afro-Caribbean Panamanians on the isthmus. Although Panama was not a colony by name, not

discounting the neocolonial presence of the United States, the hemispheric policies of exclusion targeting Afro-Caribbean descendants enforced a colonialism of marginalization and expulsion. As suspected outsiders, in the isthmus and in the world, Afro-Caribbean Panamanians remained constantly under “review” as citizens. This inability to presume inalienable citizenship rights made Afro-Caribbean Panamanians vulnerable to a system of hyper-colonialism willing to use the culture, labour and entrepreneurship of their “potential citizens” or “non-citizens” while offering few civic and political protections.

Young’s decision to form the *Tribune* came in response to this incongruity. Young and the writers he recruited for the paper were all born before the 1926-1928 legislative changes seeking to “retake” Panama. As such, they embraced the responsibility of portraying a Panamanian isthmus that had a rich and established Afro-Caribbean migrant descendant presence — a presence that had every potential for continued growth notwithstanding discriminatory attacks. Borrowing capital and using the connections forged during his tenure as chief section editor at the *Panama American*, Young launched the *Tribune*. The newsweekly, Young noted in his inaugural editorial, would serve as a “civic instrument” for Afro-Caribbean descendants in Panama. The work of the paper, he further declared, would be “concentered in the one word - Service. We bring light to help our struggling people find their way on the universal road to progress.” In fulfilling this goal, Young also recognized that the paper would need to secure the “unstinted support and enthusiastic cooperation” of the community.⁷

One logical way to garner this support included ensuring that all members of the community, men and women alike, felt that the paper addressed their particular realities and interests. By the late 1920s, black women throughout the circum-Caribbean matched their black male peers in literacy. This was especially the case in cities like Panamá and Colón where Afro-Caribbean Panamanian literacy surpassed the national average (Putnam 2013).⁸ Women, however, with the exception of their work as teachers, church auxiliary leaders

and tutors, rarely had the opportunity to make a career of this literacy (Altink 2011). In the case of Panama, select Afro-Caribbean descended women nonetheless found opportunities to contribute to “West Indian Sections” in English-language dailies (Young 1928). Some women also contributed to the *Workman*, which in 1928 and following letter-writing campaigns led by women, introduced its own, albeit short-lived, women’s section (Parker 2016).

Unlike the *Workman*’s twelve-year delay, the *Tribune*’s women’s section debuted one and a half months after the initial inauguration of the paper. It bears noting, however, that a number of sections including sports, news in the West Indies, news in Colón, Canal Zone town news, and views and opinions, all preceded the inauguration of a women’s section. Men, moreover, served as editors for all of these sections and would continue to do so for the fifty-year tenure of the paper. The women’s section, which would include editorials, recipes, fashion trends, reader’s letters and household and beauty tips, a coverage pattern similar to other papers in the black international press, would be the only part of the paper edited by a woman (Edmondson 2009; Taylor 2002). In the specific case of the *Tribune*, moreover, editorials by the section editor would at times occupy half of the allocated space, making it distinctive from all other parts of the section.

In introducing the “Of Interest to Women” section, and particularly the section editor, Young did not comment on questions of delay, the factors shaping the eventual decision to include a women’s section, or Denniston’s unprecedented role in the newspaper. Instead, the introduction read as follows, “The Tribune takes pleasure in introducing Mrs. Amy Denniston who has taken charge of our page which is dedicated to matters of interest to women. Mrs. Denniston is well known on both sides of the Isthmus, and will be glad to receive communications from women of the various communities.”⁹ This introduction served a dual purpose. First, it offered no fanfare about the creation of the section but rather briefly made note of who would “take charge” on the newspaper’s behalf. Denniston’s main credential, moreover, was presented as her social standing in Panamá and Colón. Indeed, Denniston and Young occupied a similar social

milieu on the isthmus. Both had been born in Jamaica and migrated to Panama as children, were literate, married, and particularly active in community organizations created by Afro-Caribbean Panamanians (Parker 2016; Putnam 2013). Young did not elaborate on this social and communal connection, but instead assumed that his readers, and Denniston's future readers, would benefit from Denniston's social position.

The second and unstated purpose of the introduction was to affirm both the reach and limits envisioned for the section. Young called on women from all over the isthmus to communicate their thoughts and ideas to Denniston. In this way, the paper not only increased in readership but also in occasional contributions. However, possible contributors would need to focus their writing on "matters of interest to women." What these matters would entail and how and why they differed from matters discussed in other parts of the paper remained unclear. The section, in this way, embraced women and their potential, but also distanced this contribution from the wider work of the paper.

In introducing herself as editor of the women's section, Denniston affirmed this separation but also offered a link between her work and the general goals of the paper.

I have been requested by the Editor and Publisher of the TRIBUNE to assume the heavy responsibility of editing a section of his paper that will be devoted to the interests of our women. In making a timorous first appearance, I have done so with the hope of getting the whole-hearted cooperation of the large number of women who read this interesting paper. I shall endeavor to present articles which will convey a message of thought and helpfulness to our women and will be amply rewarded if my humble services tend in the slightest to urge us a little further on the road to progress.¹⁰

This introduction pointed to Denniston's awareness of who was ultimately in charge of the paper in addition to the relationship between her goals and those of the overall paper. Her appointment, she noted, was based on Young's personal selection. As with Young's introduction, she did not list previous journalistic experience. Acquiring such experience in the male-dominated world

of journalism would have been difficult. By noting the “heavy responsibility” of the position, however, Denniston nonetheless affirmed her commitment to promoting the paper as a “civic instrument.” As an editor, she too would offer careful and thoughtful advice and commentary regarding the community’s fight against exclusion, albeit her focus would be on promoting anti-colonial progress among the newsweekly’s “large” female readership. Distinguishing between what women had to undertake for this said progress and the responsibilities of the wider community in this struggle would, however, prove difficult.

Beyond the Eternal Feminine: Women as Men’s Peers?

Denniston’s first editorials for the section offered advice directed to women, but also had to attend to fixed understandings of the role of women in a society supposedly moving towards intellectual and entrepreneurial progress. As noted earlier, for her first editorial piece, Denniston counseled women on finding time to fulfill their duties and desires, reminding them of their immense ability to adapt. For her second contribution, Denniston focused on the very unprecedented nature of women reading about themselves as full human beings. This editorial especially showcased Denniston’s invocation of self-making and the extent to which this process entailed questioning fixed gender ideals while also advocating for women’s ability for self-discovery and growth.

“It must be strange,” Denniston began her editorial, “for women to see themselves written about not merely as they used to be - sphinxes or ideals, ‘one half woman and one half dream,’ but as a branch of humanity, as creatures in an active state of evolution, still in process of becoming possibly something else, or something very different from what they are.” Denniston further went on to explain that men were not written about in this manner because there was “less room for change for man, as he has always been comparatively free to expand and express himself.”¹¹ With these statements Denniston noted the duality of her column. While invigorated by the prospect of writing about women in new ways,

and mapping their path toward a full claiming of the isthmus, she remained aware that such conversations were not happening among men. As women continued to grow, men somehow remained in a post-evolutionary stage.

Denniston in this piece likewise connected this post-evolutionary assumption to men's erroneous "obsess[ion] with the idea that women were made to be in a state of subservience to the master mind of men." Such opinions, she affirmed, ignored the various ways in which women "[we]re filling positions of importance equally with men in the various arts and sciences." As examples, she noted the work of English feminist Emmeline (Lydia) Pankhurst, John Keats biographer Amy Lowell and Red Cross founder Florence Nightingale. These women, she reminded her readers, did not acquiesce to men but rather held visions that went beyond the goals envisioned by their male contemporaries. Yet, Denniston's choice of examples denoted the challenges that still remained for women's anti-colonial progress on the isthmus. After all, she had to draw from the experiences of white women in Europe and the United States to make her case.¹²

Women and gender studies scholar Brittney Cooper has examined "listing" practices among African American women intellectuals starting in the late nineteenth century. This "listing," she posits, created "genealogies of Black women thinkers" reaching back to the colonial era (Cooper 2017, 26). The absence of a similar list in Denniston's editorial pointed to the lonely nature of her work, notwithstanding the presence of women like St. Hill, and further alluded to the "heavy responsibility" Denniston had emphasized in her first editorial for the section. Denniston thus ended her second editorial with sober yet enthusiastic words, "if we are to make a mark in life we must study hard, we cannot in overnight spring into the literary or scientific world full blown, like a Venus from the sea, but it must be gradual development and perseverance."¹³ Women, even if they imagined themselves as enormously powerful figures (with the white Venus as one example of this power), would need to harness patience and fortitude on their road to progress.

As Denniston called on women to steadfastly pursue self-progress, male contributors to the paper, at times purporting to defend women, reproduced fixed notions of women's roles in society. L.C. Joliffe, one such letter writer, focused on the ultimate value of motherhood and the debt all men owed women for this gift. Unlike St. Hill's first contribution to the paper, which used parenthood as a motif for the gender-inclusive and communally-fostered growth of the newsweekly, Joliffe presented motherhood as a fixed and ideal role for all women, which ultimately benefited men and humanity at large.

There is no loftier thought, no thought more consoling to the human mind, than the thought of a mother...Let us take a retrospective glance to the days of our infancy, when that Mother took us in her arms but a mere babe, and shielded us with her maternal protection, until we finally attained the age of manhood. Consequently we should never conceive the thought of being ungrateful to a mother who has borne and suffered so much for us. Women, on the whole, should be respected by every well-thinking, ambitious, and intelligent young man: because they are the persons who are inspired by that great title. The title of 'Mother.'¹⁴

In writing this letter Joliffe quite possibly thought that he was being progressive. Here he acknowledged that women had a capacity that men did not have (to be mothers) and he likewise lectured young men on not appreciating their mothers, and possibly the future mothers of their children. Yet, the capitalization of Mother, and the focus on mothers as protectors and nurturers ushering young babes into manhood, ignored female aspirations that went beyond a desire to care for others. As noted by feminist scholar Kimberly Juanita Brown, this kind of focus formed part of a "collective request that black women participate in repetitions of maternal sacrifice" (Brown 2015, 15). Joliffe, like so many of his contemporaries, focused solely on the heroic sacrifices and supposed joys and gifts of motherhood, not recognizing other gifts and others joys that women sought to bestow onto themselves.

The power of this discourse of women as caregivers rested precisely in its ability to subvert other means of discussing womanhood. Indeed, even critics like Denniston, who invested in emphasizing the equality of the sexes and engaged

in self-making work, had to at times work through these assumptions to critique inequities or propose new models. One such example included an October 20, 1929 editorial entitled “Women are Men’s Peers.” The motivation behind this editorial, Denniston explained, was a question regarding “whether women los[t] the power to think earlier than men.” It was in answering this question that Denniston affirmed the equality of men and women, doing so, however, by first pointing to the differences in experiences that shaped how women and men navigated in the world. She conceded that in fulfilling their duties at home (as wives and mothers) some women became less informed about outside events. Yet she pointed to all of the skills learned in childrearing, including “patience, quick-wittedness, tact, ingenuity, and executive ability,” which only added to women’s intelligence once they were ready to focus on events outside the home.¹⁵ Here she embraced the professionalizing of motherhood and communal welfare that also typified the language used by midwives, nurses and social workers in the wider Caribbean. Women could be both mothers and professional caregivers for the community at large. Curiously, Denniston did not, as was common in this discourse, focus on women as inherently caring, gentle or sensitive (Altink 2011; De Barros 2014; Macpherson 2003; Reddock 1990).

Denniston’s editorial also pushed against the stereotype of women’s supposed lack of intellectualism. In challenging this idea, however, she presented a view of gender equality that was predicated on age and status qualifications.

The real women over twenty-five care far more for their intellectual and higher development than they do for their clothes, amusements and social position... Women are discussing today international relations, politics, aviation, athletics, and other matters of general interest. While they still enjoy bridge and home parties they are a serious-minded group, eager to assist in all educational activities. They are up to date - in fact they are the peers of their husbands in almost every phase of life.¹⁶

Denniston with her editorial pointed out that “real women” could be both socially and intellectually engaged people. Certainly some young women did gather to discuss fashion and social events, but women over twenty-five took

greater interest in local, national and international socio-political events. Making this age distinction was a crucial one for Denniston, and one very much connected to ongoing debates within the newspaper regarding the morality and intellectual development of young women.¹⁷ However, even in making this age distinction, Denniston was also clear about how a social life need not distract from a married woman's intellectual growth. Married women could gather and "play bridge" while also making time to discuss the world of sports, educational opportunities and politics. Left to their devices, married women could indeed equal "their husbands in almost every phase of life."

But what about unmarried women? Were they equal to the men around them? Was this something that they should aspire to? While not explicitly addressing this question, in future editorials Denniston nonetheless focused on avenues for self-improvement available to a broader set of women. One such avenue included selecting a vocation that coincided with their "natural aptitude." As Denniston proposed to her readers,

Finding our right vocation and fitting ourselves into the niche nature intended for us, is a vitally important matter to every woman who desires to gain any degree of success... If we are to get out of our time and efforts what they are really worth, we must select a career in which we can use our natural talents, our inherent ability... In Nature's great scheme of progress each of us has been considered, we are allotted a place, and made a unit of the world's affairs. Regardless of our humble position, we are important in the place where we belong.¹⁸

While Denniston's words offered women reassurance, they also affirmed that only select power rested in their hands. She encouraged women to pursue vocations that connected to their strengths and allowed them to enjoy success, but also presented Nature, not necessarily structural policies, as a determinant to the kind of career women could have. Nature in this way held a dual role: as regulator and as hope giver. Nature would not give women more than they could comfortably handle but it also held the promise of as yet untapped potential.

As Denniston's future editorials would detail, however, she held her own doubts regarding Nature's ultimate power to both empower women and facilitate the kind of structural changes needed for the anti-colonial communal progress promised by the Tribune. This recognition pointed to a crucial component of Denniston's approach to active self-making. Self-making included the ability to both embrace one's full potential and the willingness to promote new ideas, even if said ideas challenged accepted structural norms.

Women Promoting Structural Change

Shortly after her one-year anniversary as editor of the "Of Interest to Women" section, Denniston targeted one particular kind of structural change: educational instruction. Specifically, through contributions by female educators and with her editorials, Denniston offered concrete critiques and suggestions regarding the educational options available to Afro-Caribbean Panamanians. This focus on education placed Denniston in alignment with women in the Caribbean described by sociologist Rhoda Reddock as "middle class nationalists" for whom "education in general, and for women in particular, was to be the key to enlightenment and modernization" (Reddock, 1990, 63). Denniston differed, however, by challenging accepted understandings, even those held by her peers, regarding the approaches to, and the ultimate uses of, education.

Debates over access to education, quality of education, and securing vocational opportunities dominated the pages of the Tribune from its earliest issues. However, although young female students would at times be mentioned in these stories, rarely did these pieces focus on the opinions of women as educators or as advocates with particular visions of progress.¹⁹ By giving central space to the question of education in the women's section, and including the thoughts of other women invested in educational advancement, Denniston directly challenged this practice.

Leonor Jump, one of the contributors featured in the education discussion, served as a crucial reminder of the increasing role played by women in formal education. Jump was a teacher in the co-educational Canal Zone Colored Schools, located in the U.S.-controlled Panama Canal Zone, and a graduate of the Escuela Normal de Institutoras (a teacher training school for women) in Panamá. Jump, unlike some of the other writers and contributors to the paper, had been born in Panama and was likewise a proponent of bilingual (English-Spanish) instruction (Corinealdi 2011). At the time of her editorial contribution Jump was also unmarried and twenty-years old. These factors nicely pushed beyond the idea of married women, particularly those over the age of twenty-five, leading the charge for equality on the isthmus.

In her piece for the women's section Jump emphasized the importance of looking beyond elementary education and focusing on avenues for higher education. "In this age of specialists and efficiency," she affirmed, "higher education becomes a necessity."²⁰ For Jump, however, higher education was not simply a matter of economic survival, but instead also entailed providing the needed socio-cultural framework for communal progress. As she insisted in her contribution to the section, institutions of higher learning instilled valuable lessons about ethical and cultural survival. "Due importance," she averred, "is given to the things that bear most directly on the preservation of life and health, on our moral relations and duties, on the cultivation of the taste and imagination which derive pleasure from music, painting, poetry, and good works of fiction. We are composed of what we know, what we feel and what we believe. In response to these things we act, in respect to ourselves and to others."²¹ Jump's focus as an educator was not only on the knowledge she imparted to her students in the classroom, but also on how they would share this knowledge with the world, and how this knowledge in turn would shape the kind of person, and the kind of leaders, that they could become.

Jump likewise urged parents and others in the community to encourage children to think of their personal growth as part of a long history of communal

progress. "There is a time," she emphasized, "when every boy and girl feels admiration for those who have triumphed and the desire to also fight and conquer. Your duty it is, to meet him on the ground, stirring the desire to be something, leading him in the field of commerce, industry and science, selecting achievements of our own people who fought greater battles with fewer instruments as inspirations toward his goal."²² Jump's words suggested that the readers of the Tribune, and the readers of the women's section in particular, had a rich knowledge of history. This history, if taught and remembered correctly, could empower the actions of future generations for decades to come. Curiously, Jump here also made use of the plural "him," a practice typical of the time, but also one that highlighted the work that remained in moving beyond accepted narratives of male-centered universalism and progress.

Denniston followed Jump's contribution with two editorials that addressed both the rich histories that formed part of Afro-Caribbean Panamanian experiences, while also seeking to affirm gender inclusivity in ongoing discussions of educational and communal progress. The first editorial focused on "commercial teaching" — or technical training in Jamaica — and its possible applicability in Panama. Denniston wrote the editorial following a one-month visit to Jamaica. This was her first trip to Jamaica since leaving the island as a young child.²³ In referencing Jamaica, Denniston drew on a regional history familiar to most readers of the Tribune. Jamaican descendants formed a large part of the Afro-Caribbean Panamanian community. Furthermore, many acknowledged the availability and rigor of the island's secondary education training.²⁴

Regarding commercial teaching in Jamaica, Denniston expressed deep admiration for both the work and the promotion of equality within these schools. "It was very refreshing to see boys and girls, young men and women attending these schools. They are opened from 7am until 8pm for the convenience of students who work during the days. Typewriting, shorthand, bookkeeping, business correspondence and Spanish are taught. The young people are very enthusiastic over their lessons and as a result are very efficient."²⁵ Rather than

not gendering the pupils at these schools, Denniston was quite explicit about their gender. Boys and girls, young men and young women, she emphasized, were benefiting from the skills being acquired in these schools. This she contrasted with what was taking place in Panama. Few students on the isthmus, she posited, were taking advantage of this type of technical training.

As noted by historian Henrice Altink, in early 1930s Jamaica possessing these technical skills did not guarantee jobs or economic mobility for young professionals, especially black women (Altink 2011). Denniston nonetheless saw promise in this training and in the economic options available in the Panamanian Republic. The one obstacle she recognized was the need for fluent bilingualism, in Spanish and English, but saw this as a challenge that young Afro-Caribbean Panamanians could, with a “high standard of efficiency,” successfully surmount.²⁶

While Denniston’s first editorial focused on technical training and the skills to be learned by a new generation of students, in her second editorial she addressed the failings in private education options available to Afro-Caribbean Panamanian youth. Denniston’s main criticism focused on the qualifications and long-term applicability of Afro-Caribbean or West Indian private schools on the isthmus. According to Denniston, the majority of the teachers in these schools “should be pupils instead of teachers.” Indeed, unlike their counterparts in Jamaica, these “teachers” and the “schools” they operated were failing in the two central aims of education: “transmit[ting] to each subsequent generation the best knowledge gained from the previous generation,” and providing pupils with sufficient knowledge to face “the battles of life and to contribute worthily to [their] heritage.”²⁷ These private schools, instead, reproduced the very bondage that allowed a repressive colonial condition to thrive: an undereducated, unmotivated, and unresponsive generation ignorant of the work involved in affirming continued claims to the isthmus while upholding communal growth.

As a partial solution to the inadequate and repressive training offered in these private schools, Denniston suggested that parents send their children to public

schools in the Republic. Here, in addition to attaining a formal education, they would further strengthen their Spanish language skills, a skill that would prove invaluable for commercial or any other form of professional success.²⁸ In the early 1930s, most Afro-Caribbean Panamanian children attended public schools, mainly in the Republic, and to a lesser degree in the Canal Zone. Select parents and guardians interested in imparting a younger generation with a British colonial education nonetheless opted for West Indian private schools (Westerman 1980). With this and her previous editorial, Denniston called into question whether this focus on British colonial instruction, rather than taking selectively from this model, ultimately hampered the community's growth. Would the community really fall apart, her editorial suggested, if the principal language of education for most students became Spanish and if said education more cohesively included professional development for male and female pupils alike?

Denniston's piece on private schools would be her last contribution as editor of the "Of Interest to Women" section. In criticizing West Indian private schools Denniston not only went beyond the assumed parameters of the women's section, at least as presented by Young during the section's debut, but also directly challenged a communal project led by her male counterparts. Prior to this July editorial Denniston had asserted her stance on matters such as the need for modesty and self-respect, ways to inspire younger generations, and men's responsibilities as providers and husbands.²⁹ In contrast to these earlier pieces, her editorial on private schools challenged a still male-dominated industry poised to shape the question of anti-colonial progress in Panama. Educators like Leonor Jump marked the shifting nature of this dominance, but in July of 1930, when Denniston wrote her editorial, both women were outliers in their fields. Denniston, moreover, in critiquing West Indian private schools extended her mantle as editor of the women's section. Not only was she offering reflections and advice on shifting gender roles, but here she also sought to demarcate a matter of interest to the entire Afro-Caribbean Panamanian community – the need for pluralistic approaches to progress and the role of women in calling for institutional change.

Communal Progress as the Return of the “Eternal Feminine?”

The “Of Interest to Women” section continued after Denniston's departure, with a greater number of beauty, fashion, and cooking tips dominating much of the section. Furthermore, rather than finding another editor to speak to and for the interests of women, other members of the Tribune team took on the role of “speaking at” women. Almost a year after Denniston's final contribution to the newsweekly, Sidney Young wrote an editorial which enforced the fixed notions of womanhood that Denniston both explored and struggled against in her earliest editorials. In it he asked women to inspire and support the men in their lives, to take greater interest in the happenings around them and to discuss these matters with their “husbands, fathers, sons and brothers.” He likewise urged them “to be equally if not more resolved, to make any sacrifices required and carry out any program adopted for our common protection and welfare.”³⁰ The women invoked by Young functioned as human beings and as inspirations. They were, to borrow Denniston's framing, “half sphinxes and half humans” expected to willingly self-sacrifice while also learning from their male counterparts on the requirements for communal progress. Women, per this articulation, could not narrate their progress into being, regardless of their skills and ideas, and instead had to remain in the service of men.

What do we make then of the very existence of the “Of Interest to Women” section? If the end goal of the paper was to ultimately have men lecture everyone in the community about the tasks needed for progress, why even create such a section? Women were avid consumers of the paper and their money and continued engagement bolstered the newspaper's overall popularity. Young was likewise adamant on the fundamental role played by women, at least in theory, in the work of civilization. As he explained in the editorial noted above, “where women do not inspire their men to great deeds, there is no human progress.”³¹ Such a view of women's roles in society, however,

prevented an actual engagement with flesh-and-bone, educated, vocal, and complex women.

Amy Denniston, notwithstanding her own deep immersion in male-centered narratives of progress, sought to be understood in her own terms. Through the Tribune's women's section she tested her voice, invited other women to share their voice, imagined future opportunities and, effectively, attempted to be fully human. This quest directly went against the view of women as appendages, as side actors, in larger histories and movements of progress and change. Instead it embraced the work of women as producers, thinkers, critics and visionaries. Afro-Caribbean Panamanians in interwar Panama, faced with the challenge of a colonialism of marginalization and exclusion, had much to learn from women in their community fighting these very struggles from within.

References

- Adler, Karen S. 1992. "'Always Leading Our Men in Service and Sacrifice': Amy Jacques Garvey, Feminist Black Nationalist." *Gender and Society* 6(3): 346–75.
- Altink, Henrice. 2011. *Destined for a Life of Service: Defining African-Jamaican Womanhood, 1865-1938*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Broadwater, Andrea. 2003. *Mary McLeod Bethune: Educator and Activist*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers.
- Brown, Kimberly Juanita. 2015. *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Burnett, Carla. 2004. "'Are we Slaves or Free Men?': Labor, Race, Garveyism, and the 1920 Panama Canal Strike." Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Chicago.
- Carby, Hazel V. 2009. "Becoming Modern Racialized Subjects." *Cultural Studies* 23(4):624–57.
- Chambers, Glenn A. 2010. *Race, Nation and West Indian Immigration to Honduras, 1890-1940*. Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press.
- Conniff, Michael L. 1985. *Black Labor on a White Canal: Panama, 1904-1981*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Cooper, Brittney C. 2017. *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Corinealdi, Kaysha. 2011. "Redefining Home: West Indian Panamanians and Transnational Politics of Race, Citizenship, and Diaspora, 1928-1970." Ph.D. diss., Yale University.
- De Barros, Juanita. 2014. *Reproducing the British Caribbean: Sex, Gender and Population Politics after Slavery*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Durling Arango, Virginia. 1999. *La Inmigración Prohibida*. Panamá: Publicaciones Jurídicas de Panamá.
- Edmondson, Belinda. 2009. *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Edwards, Brent Hayes. 2003. *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Giovannetti, Jorge L. 2006. "The Elusive Organization of 'Identity': Race, Religion, and Empire Among Caribbean Migrants in Cuba." *Small Axe*, 19: 1–27.
- Gregg, Veronica Marie. 2007. "'How with this Rage Shall Beauty Hold a Plea': The Writings of Miss Amy Beckford Bailey as Moral Education in the Era of Jamaican Nation Building." *Small Axe*, 23: 16–33.
- Harpelle, Ronald. 2001. *The West Indians of Costa Rica: Race, Class and the Integration of an Ethnic Minority*. London: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Jarrett-Macauley, Delia. 2010. *The Life of Una Marson, 1905-65*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Leeds, Asia. 2013. "Toward the 'Higher Type of Womanhood': The Gendered Contours of Garveyism and the Making of Redemptive Geographies in Costa Rica, 1922-1941." *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 2(1): 1–27.
- Macpherson, Anne. 2003. "Colonial Matriarchs: Garveyism, Maternalism, and Belize's Black Cross Nurses, 1920-1952." *Gender & History* 15(3): 507–27.

- Morris, Courtney Desiree. 2016. "Becoming Creole, Becoming Black: Migration, Diasporic Self-Making, and the Many Lives of Madame Maymie Leona Turpeau de Mena." *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 4(2): 171–95.
- Newton, Velma. 1984. *The Silver Men: West Indian Labour Migration to Panama, 1850-1914*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Opie, Frederick Douglass. 2009. *Black Labor Migration in Caribbean Guatemala, 1882-1923*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
- Parker, Jeffrey W. 2016. "Sex at the Crossroads: The Gender Politics of Racial Uplift and Afro-Caribbean Activism in Panama, 1918-1932." *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 4(2): 196–221.
- Putnam, Lara. 2016. "Circum-Atlantic Print Circuits and Internationalism from the Peripheries in the Interwar Era." In *Print Culture Histories Beyond the Metropolis*, edited by James J. Connolly, Patrick Collier, Frank Felsenstein, Kenneth R. Hall and Robert G. Hall, 215–39. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- 2013. *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Reddock, Rhoda. 1990. "Feminism, Nationalism, and the Early Women's Movement in the English-Speaking Caribbean (with Special Reference to Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago)." In *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, edited by Selwyn R. Cudjoe, 61–81. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Taylor, Ula Yvette. 2002. *Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Westerman, George W. 1980. *Los Inmigrantes Antillanos en Panamá*. Panamá: La Impresora de la Nación (INAC).
- Young, Sidney A. 1928. *Isthmian Echoes: A Selection of the Literary Endeavors of the West Indian Colony in the Republic of Panama*. Panamá: Benedetti Hnos.

¹ Amy Denniston, "Finding Time," *The Panama Tribune*, January 20, 1929.

² Denniston, "Finding Time."

³ Other countries that had comparably smaller Anglophone Afro-Caribbean descendant populations included Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, Cuba, and Venezuela (Chambers 2010; Giovannetti 2006; Harpelle 2001; Opie 2009; Putnam 2013).

⁴ Sidney A. Young, "Our Steady Growth," *The Panama Tribune*, March 10, 1929.

⁵ This list does not account for the women who served as regular columnists. Some included Amy Beckford Bailey for *Public Opinion* and the *Jamaica Standard* (both based in Jamaica), Paulette Nardal for *Le Soir* and *La Dépêche Africaine* (France), Linda Smart Chubb for the *Workman* (Panama), and Philomena for the *Limón Searchlight* (Costa Rica) (Edwards 2003; Gregg 2007; Leeds 2013; Parker 2016).

⁶ St. Hill, *The Panama Tribune*, "Views Section," November 11, 1928.

⁷ Sidney Young, "Making Our Bow," *The Panama Tribune*, November 11, 1928.

⁸ This trend was initially a legacy of labour recruitment policies in the British Caribbean during the U.S.-financed Canal construction project, whereby those seeking to migrate increasingly had to prove financial soundness. Those able to migrate were quite often both financially sound and among the most educated in their places of birth (Newton 1984).

⁹ Sidney Young, "Editor of Woman's Page," *The Panama Tribune*, January 20, 1929.

¹⁰ Denniston, "Finding Time."

¹¹ Amy Denniston, "The Eternal Feminine," *The Panama Tribune*, February 3, 1929.

¹² Denniston, "The Eternal Feminine."

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ L.C. Joliffe, "Motherhood," *The Panama Tribune*, August 18, 1929.

¹⁵ Amy Denniston, "Women Are Men's Peers," *The Panama Tribune*, October 20, 1929.

¹⁶ Denniston, "Women are Men's Peers."

¹⁷ Amy Denniston, "Modern Literature and the Girl," *The Panama Tribune*, February 10, 1929; Everett, "Are the Women of Today Degenerating?," *The Panama Tribune*, May 19, 1929.

¹⁸ Amy Denniston, "Finding Our Vocation," *The Panama Tribune*, December 15, 1929.

¹⁹ Sidney Young, "Commencement," *The Panama Tribune*, July 7, 1929; "Young Teacher Making Splendid Record," *The Panama Tribune*, August 18, 1929.

²⁰ Leonor Jump, "Higher Education," *The Panama Tribune*, April 13, 1930.

²¹ Jump, "Higher Education."

²² Ibid.

²³ Amy Denniston, "Au Revoir to Our Readers," *The Panama Tribune*, March 2, 1930.

²⁴ Sidney Young, "Panamanian Students in Jamaica," *The Panama Tribune*, January 26, 1930. Jamaica at this time had the largest number of secondary schools throughout the region. Schooling options for girls and women, however, came much later than those for their male peers and in some areas remained confined to domestic arts training (Altink 2011).

²⁵ Amy Denniston, "Commercial Teaching in Jamaica," *The Panama Tribune*, June 1, 1930.

²⁶ Denniston, "Commercial Teaching."

²⁷ Amy Denniston, "Quarks in Our Private Schools," *The Panama Tribune*, July 13, 1930.

²⁸ Denniston, "Quarks."

²⁹ Denniston, "Modern Literature and the Girl"; Denniston, "The Decline of Modesty," *The Panama Tribune*, November 10, 1929; Denniston, "Self-Respect," *The Panama Tribune*, November 24, 1929; Denniston, "Love After Marriage," June 15, 1930; Denniston, "Life Insurance as a Protection," *The Panama Tribune*, June 29, 1930.

³⁰ Sidney Young, "A Task for Our Women," July 19, 1931.

³¹ Young, "A Task."



Burial Rites, Women's Rights: Death and Feminism in Haiti, 1925-1938

Grace Sanders Johnson

Assistant Professor of Africana Studies
University of Pennsylvania

The cemeteries stand as the most permanent expression of the solidarity between members of kin groups of various sizes.

– Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain (1937)

The subterranean history of death and discontinuity informs everyday practices in myriad ways.

– Sadiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (1997)

Abstract: This article uses Haitian anthropologist Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain's study of burial practices and kinship networks in the rural town of Kenscoff to consider the relationship between rituals for the dead and women's rights activism following the United States occupation (1915-1934). Observing her 1937-1938 field notes and unpublished writings on family cemeteries and ceremonies, alongside her publications in the feminist journal *La Voix des Femmes* during the interwar period, I argue that in Comhaire-Sylvain's navigation of the tactile and ephemeral space of the dead she articulated the values of a nascent Haitian feminism. Understanding the spaces of death and political organizing as locations to establish and refashion culture and gendered meanings, I consider Comhaire-Sylvain's research practice and production as a site of public mourning and an entry point for understanding elite women's early twentieth-century intellectual thought in Haiti.

Keywords: Haiti, feminism, Comhaire-Sylvain, death, women's rights

How to cite

Johnson, Grace Sanders. 2018. "Burial Rites, Women's Rights: Death and Feminism in Haiti, 1925-1938." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12:121-142

This essay explores how Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain's personal loss and scholarship on death uniquely intertwined with the discursive performance of early women's rights organizing in Haiti. I maintain that Comhaire-Sylvain's work, as evidenced in her notes and in her publications in *La Voix des Femmes*, revived women-centred narratives of Haitian authenticity, family and land through a public pronouncement for communion and redress. Scholars have defined Haitian feminism by legislative achievements regarding women's rights, including voting, wage and marriage laws. However, the contours of Haitian feminism were also exercised, experimented with and crafted in relation to deeply personal and familial aspirations, conflicts, negotiations and losses.¹ In this regard, I argue that Comhaire-Sylvain's work pointed her contemporary reader toward a return to Haitian origins in order to document the contradictions of modernity and barriers to women's citizenship rights, while also inviting the historical productivity of considering Comhaire-Sylvain's attention to death as a methodological impulse resonated from her own experience of familial loss. To this end, the article concludes by returning to Comhaire-Sylvain's personal negotiation of death during the interwar period. I contemplate how her family's death under occupation informed her historical and intellectual practice and contend that her writing and rapidity of her articles in *La Voix des Femmes* during her fieldwork reveal the primacy of the affective pull of mourning in this moment of feminist construction.

Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain was repeatedly drawn home by death. Born in Haiti at the turn of the twentieth century, the country's first woman anthropologist lived much of her life abroad studying in Parisian primary and secondary schools and conducting research on cultural continuities between Africa and the Caribbean. In 1924, she returned to her home country to find the nation and her family deeply entrenched in anti-United States occupation organizing. Her father, George Sylvain, was the founder of the *Union Patriotique* (UP), the leading anti-occupation political organization and her mother, Eugene Malbranche-Sylvain, helped advance the women's coalition of the UP (Johnson 1920; Sylvain 1925, 92; Schmidt 1995, 121; Sanders 2013, 60-61). Together they petitioned Haitians to denounce the "Yankee" presence in the country while

arguing for the nation's sovereignty (Sylvain 1925). Months after Comhaire-Sylvain's return to her family home, George Sylvain died. On August 3, 1925, in an open-air caravan flanked on either side by her brothers and famed "Sylvain sisters,"² Suzanne processed behind her father's body (Sylvain 1925, xvi). Moving through the centre of occupied Port-au-Prince, Comhaire-Sylvain's loss was matched by hundreds of grief-stricken city residents mourning the poet and the fallen leader who, according to his son-in-law, died "fighting the U.S. occupation" (Comhaire 1984, 104).

As her father's encased body pushed through the crowds and neared the cemetery, Comhaire-Sylvain's familiarity with the rituals of death and burial may have provided some comfort. A sickly child whose illnesses brought her close to her own mortality, Comhaire-Sylvain was comforted by folklore that her caregiver Amise told her while nursing her back to health. Enchanted by the tales, a young Comhaire-Sylvain voluntarily attended the end-of-life ceremonies—wakes, funerals and burials—of those she knew and did not know in order to hear loved ones narrate the life of the deceased (Comhaire 1984, 103). She was particularly drawn to the provocative performance of the wake, the pre-funeral ritual of sitting with or dancing around the body of the deceased while family, friends and elders told stories over the dead. According to her family, these rituals soothed Comhaire-Sylvain's physical ailments and charged her curiosity (Comhaire 1984, 103; Woodson 1937, 369-370). Comhaire-Sylvain's familiarity and comfort with the sounds and sites of celebrating the dead, did not, however, guard her from falling into a period of deep sorrow following her father's death, beginning a "long eight years" in which her eldest brother and mother also died (Comhaire 1984, 104). After her mother's death in 1931, Comhaire-Sylvain left Haiti to complete her doctoral degree at the Sorbonne.

When Comhaire-Sylvain returned to Haiti in the wake of the U.S. occupation, she, again, found herself at the site of death. A decade after her father's transition, Comhaire-Sylvain's first post-graduate research project was in the mountains above Port-au-Prince at cemeteries and burial ceremonies in Kenscoff. Recorded in several tattered journals, her field notes reflect a detailed

study of kinship networks and customs through sketches of cemetery maps, drawings of individual burial plots and ledgers of family names and land ownership. In her notes, she provided little commentary on her documentary process. However, during her time in Kenscoff, Comhaire-Sylvain published essays about her fieldwork in the feminist journal *La Voix des Femmes*. In a series of four articles published between 1937 and 1938, Comhaire-Sylvain exposed the periodical's readership to the intimate world of death in Haiti. The editors of the periodical, who were also the leadership of the first women's rights organization *La Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale*, welcomed Comhaire-Sylvain's narration of rural Haitian culture that highlighted kinship epistemologies centring women.

Coupled with *La Voix des Femmes*, Comhaire-Sylvain's methodologies and conclusions regarding family, memory and history became representative and instructive for what feminist scholarship looked like in the first half-decade of the movement. In April 1937, an ad in *La Voix des Femmes* read:

The LFAS welcomes Mme. Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, who returns to us—her home country—after several years away. She is our one distinguished and eminent doctor of letters (Ph.D.) who, in her thesis, illustrates the brilliant intellectual capacity of men and women.[...] LFAS expresses the hope that Mme. Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain becomes the pivot point around which Haitian feminism will definitely evolve (*La Voix des Femmes* 1937, 4).

The movement hinged their feminist praxis to Comhaire-Sylvain's work. Thus, in the nascent years of the women's movement, what did it mean that Comhaire-Sylvain's essays about death and rural Haiti were the prototype for intellectual presentation in the feminist journal?

Subterranean History of Kenscoff

In 1937 Comhaire-Sylvain characterized Kenscoff as a “dead city.”³ Fifteen miles outside of Port-au-Prince, the town's proximity to the nation's capital was

evident in its shared county jurisdiction with Pétionville, a suburb of Port-au-Prince.⁴ The mountains established a lacuna between the rural and urban spaces that made the cities aesthetically, economically and culturally foreign to one another. In contrast to the growing population of over 120,000 people in Port-au-Prince, Kenscoff had a population of approximately 7,500 and was comprised of small houses spaced throughout a sea of “pine and eucalyptus trees.”⁵

In Comhaire-Sylvain's assessment the military conflict and intranational migration that overpopulated Port-au-Prince during the occupation was irrelevant in Kenscoff. She surmised, “The peasant of Kenscoff did not see a big difference [during the occupation]. If the reason given for the occupation was that Haiti needed peace and stability, this could not apply to Kenscoff where the conditions of peace and stability have rarely been troubled by revolutions almost always run by the urbanites.”⁶ Comhaire-Sylvain's depiction of the rural-urban relationship during the U.S. occupation was unique to Kenscoff and to her perspective as a member of an anti-occupation activist urban family. Throughout the nation rural geography was not a guarantor of peace. In northern and central Haiti the greatest conflict during the occupation years, including physical combat and changes to the landscape and infrastructure, occurred in rural regions like Hinche, Milot and Gonaïves (Schmidt 1995; Alexis 2011).

If Kenscoff experienced any change from the occupation, according to Comhaire-Sylvain, it was the slight increase in the tourist industry facilitated by new roads built in the last years of the invasion. During Haiti's hottest months Kenscoff's altitude and close proximity to Port-au-Prince invited a small number of urbanites for vacation. The year before her mother died a new road was paved to Kenscoff; however, the journey remained laborious so the city remained relatively isolated. In her notes Comhaire-Sylvain also observed that foreigners' and wealthy urban residents' inability to penetrate the Kenscoff region was attributed to limited access to purchasable land as a result of vast peasant land ownership. Economically, the town was home to a “peasant elite”

who owned land in kinship groups and maintained cultural continuity as the descendants of approximately two to three families.⁷ The transfer of lands was further complicated because property was not owned by individuals, but by family collectives. These family lineages were valued above any foreign or national titles. As Comhaire-Sylvain explained, "An accumulation of state and church honors may impress some, but it does not bring a *mun vini* [*moune vini*/newcomer] up to the level of a resident of older standing."⁸ Under foreign invasion or elite desire peasant family ownership could be dissolved; however, Comhaire-Sylvain noted an additional obstacle to the outsider in Kenscoff—the collective plots of land were bound together by expansive cemeteries. Unable or unwilling to disturb the dead, visitors were deterred; thus, "the cemeteries [stood] as the most permanent expression of the solidarity between members of kin groups of various sizes."⁹ The memorialization for the dead and high regard for family lineage established continuity in land ownership. Thus, apart from a few scorching weeks, the city could have appeared to be dead.

Comhaire-Sylvain's haunted characterization of the city was, then, in reference to the public activity and population size, but her rendering was also buttressed by the landscape. In her description of the various entrances into the city she wrote that walking along the Kenscoff River, "On a slope overhanging the spring itself, this strategic spot is also covered with about one hundred gravestones, spread without any apparent order. Such disorderly appearance discourages strangers from exploring the cemetery but the peasants know their way to the tombs of their ancestors."¹⁰ Atop the mountain of tombs rested peasant homes that watched over their deceased family. Comhaire-Sylvain continued, "it is not necessary to insist on exploring the cemetery. To those who want to know about [Kenscoff's] past, and so to understand its present better, Kenscoff has plenty of living witnesses to offer. All Kenscoff, in fact, stands as a faithful witness to what the ancestors did."¹¹ As evidenced through the folktales and dates on the tombstones, the verbal and material witnessing revealed that the ancestors lived through revolution and retained and developed cultural capital in rituals of the dead. It was the connection between the faithful witnessing and the rituals of death that elicited Comhaire-Sylvain's attention.

In his work on circum-Atlantic black performance, Joseph Roach asserts that, "Cities of the dead are primarily for the living. They exist not only as artifacts, such as cemeteries and commemorative landmarks, but also as behaviors. They endure in other words, as occasions for memory and invention" (Roach 1996, xi). He continues stating that, "The social processes of memory and forgetting, familiarly known as culture, may be carried out by a variety of performance events from stage plays to sacred rites, from carnivals to the invisible rituals of everyday life. To perform in this sense means to bring forth, to make manifest and to transmit. To perform also means, though often more secretly, to reinvent" (Roach 1996, xi). In the cemeteries of Kenscoff, Comhaire-Sylvain documented the death space and landscape as a behaviour and even an entity to be communed with and consulted in the daily negotiations of rural life that unsettled urban class and cultural hierarchies. She documented how residents' actions were informed by this relationship, and she also crafted her own practice of culture through intellectual intervention. She located the cemetery as the nexus of kinship networks and the interlocutor between knowledge, land and family. Thus she returned to the cemetery again and again to map its parameters and to sketch the contours of the grave markers.

Comhaire-Sylvain's engagement with the tombs was intimate. She mapped each cemetery by plot and name. In her notebook she drew individual tombs. She wrote the names and sketched the designs on the tombs. She also measured. The detailed measurements suggest that she had to observe, but also face and touch these small monuments. Of the tombs she chose to draw in detail, rather than dictate their messaging in her notes, the majority were for women like "Marie Soufrie," who died on "20 Mars 1886 age 99." These women were born during the late-eighteenth-century Haitian Revolution and lived through the transition from French colony to independent nation. Their tombs claimed physical and historical space for women who witnessed the foundations of the nation. As Comhaire-Sylvain crafted a cartography of rural death equipped with a ledger, topographic key and stories that she heard about the deceased, she also listened at the foot of these graves where the

descendants held ceremonies. Some of these stories returned the listeners to the Haitian Revolution, but many of the stories also recalled a pre-colonial African past. These narratives and the materiality of tombs that Comhaire-Sylvain drew, emphasizing the markers of "Africain" in her notes, provided evidence of a Haitian past in which women were represented and a part of the national landscape.

Burial Rites and Women's Rights

Comhaire-Sylvain was not the first to identify Kenscoff as a research site for studying rituals for the dead. In the 1920s anthropologist, statesman and *indiginist* thinker Jean Price-Mars also studied in Kenscoff. He was known to ride his horse up the mountain from his home in Pétionville to conduct ethnographic research for days at a time. These trips became the basis for his iconic text about peasant culture and spirituality *Ainsi parla Oncle* (So Spoke the Uncle). As Comhaire-Sylvain's predecessor in research, Price-Mars understood anthropology as a patriotic act countering the racist and paternalistic hyperbole about Haiti that proliferated before and after the U.S. occupation (Renda 2001, 22, 54-55, 86; Magloire and Yelvington 2005). In his celebration of rural culture, he also scolded the elite class, admonishing them for their "collective Bovarism," obsession with European culture and negative valuation of Haitians' African past (Dash 1981).

He was particularly trenchant towards elite women. In a collection of essays titled *La Vocation d'élite*, Price-Mars argued that elite women were disconnected from their African heritage, but that through relationships with peasant women "still in the primitivity of African traditions," they could mend this divide and reclaim an authentic Haitian womanhood (Price-Mars 1919, 99). Although Price-Mars's suggestion that rural women serve as the vessels for elite women's cultural maturation is puzzling, his charge reflected an impulse shared by Comhaire-Sylvain. Comhaire-Sylvain and Jean Price-Mars were challenged by the *indiginist* charge to mend the cleavages between the class and cultures

of elite, working and peasant women. The two scholars studied similar dynamics and produced work from a similar epistemological framing that privileged the peasant voice and perspective. However, Comhaire-Sylvain's 1937 research expanded the framework and revealed the practice and product of anthropology as both patriotic and feminist. In this regard the significance of Comhaire-Sylvain's 1937-38 scholarship was not just that she documented women's lives—other intellectuals including Price-Mars and Jacques Roumain had done this—but also that her research was explicitly extended to a feminist audience as a performance of women's intellectual agility.

In 1938, the *Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale* (LFAS) was only in its third year of social service and political activism, but the members were enthusiastic about incorporating Comhaire-Sylvain's work into the organizational platform. As LFAS president Madeleine Sylvain recalled, the organization's "progress [was] still hardly perceptible" in the first several years (Sylvain 1939, 321). When the founders of the LFAS set out to liberate and educate Haitian women, they knew their mission was prodigious. Madeleine Sylvain remarked several years into their work that, "This program may seem ambitious, but the members of the *Ligue* have faith in the potentialities of Haitian women, believing that they can work together in a friendly spirit, sustained by their devotion to their ideal" (Sylvain 1939, 10). In addition to faith, Madeleine also drew her confidence from the historical record of women's political organizing during the U.S. occupation. In her study of women and the law, historian and legal scholar Mirlande Manigat contends that women's participation in public protests and clandestine anti-occupation initiatives was a civic rebirth for women on behalf of their country and themselves (Manigat 2002, 282; Sylvain 1957). Likewise in her trailblazing text, *Haiti et ses femmes*, Madeleine Sylvain explains that women were instrumental in the nationalist movement to oust the U.S. government and as a result gained new knowledge about local and international organizing that ignited questions about women's citizenship in Haiti. Yet in the early years, with many interests, the organization used their sentient knowledge as their compass by seeking to "solve the problems nearest [to] their hearts" (Sylvain-Bouchereau 1939, 321). *La Voix des Femmes* provided a platform for wading through the intellectual,

sentient and action-oriented work and activist identity that the organization sought to cultivate. In this way, Comhaire-Sylvain found an ideal platform for the concerns of her simultaneously weighted and questioning heart and her study of the death space.

The content of *La Voix des Femmes* ranged from editorials on politics to articles about international affairs. As a monthly publication, a small portion of the pages were concerned with advertisements and social activities, but the majority of the periodical included historical and sociological essays about women. Additionally, the ethnographic research printed in the newspaper (almost exclusively conducted by Comhaire-Sylvain) provided unprecedented documentation of working-class and peasant women. The editors, Alice Garoute, Madeleine Sylvain, Jeanne Perez and Cléante Desgraves Valcin, characterized the paper as a microphone for the oppressed: "*La Voix des Femmes* will denounce injustices and abuses and will unite all Haitians in a common love for the country" (Sylvain 1947, 1). Situating themselves as social justice brokers Sylvain explained, "*La Voix des Femmes* wants to be the trade union between all Haitians who do not know enough. [*La Voix des Femmes*] will try to connect with all women throughout the world, free or oppressed, to work for women's emancipation" (Sylvain 1947, 1). In this regard, the editors and contributors to *La Voix des Femmes* were not just women journalists. Instead, they were critical thinkers on topics that concerned them and the nation.

La Voix des Femmes reflected the identity formation of the early twentieth-century feminists.¹² Here, there was a distinct difference in form and aesthetics of the paper before and after World War II. In the early years of the periodical there was an informed stream of consciousness that included opinion editorials, scholarly research, obituaries, short stories and event announcements. After World War II, *La Voix des Femmes* was more focused on legislative debates and constitutional amendments that supported women's rights. The paper's pre-war format allowed for creativity and expression that supported Comhaire-Sylvain's research and writing process. That is, as Comhaire-Sylvain navigated the tactile and ephemeral space of the dead she had a platform to perform her

relationship to a nascent feminist culture. In this context, she produced four articles in February and March of 1938 that were published in *La Voix des Femmes*.

Translating Death

Writing while still in the field, Comhaire-Sylvain put the sounds of the cemetery and death ceremonies into her first *La Voix des Femmes* publication, "Vocabulaire des croyances paysannes" (Comhaire-Sylvain 1938, 6-7). After a brief introduction to the four-page spread, Comhaire-Sylvain provides a glossary of words she heard at ceremonies coupled with words of similar diction and meaning from Dahomey (Benin) in West Africa. She begins with "ABOBO"—the expression of agreement, affirmation and invocation heard during Vodun dances and ceremonies. She explains that when saying "ABOBO", "certain individuals tap their mouth with two fingers at the same time." She then pairs the Haitian "ABOBO" with the Dahomanian expression, "BOBOBO," "a noise that one makes when tapping an open mouth with two fingers." After providing over fifty examples of words with similar linguistic structure and meaning in Haiti and West Africa, she explains that in Kenscoff and other rural areas of Haiti, "we find the strongest contingency of words with African origins. In the cult of vodou we see some of these same expression[s]." She further reports that many of the expressions she translated are derived from "an invocation to the God [Iwa] of graves and death for help with a task" (Comhaire-Sylvain 1938, 6). Drawing linguistic parallels between Haiti and Dahomey she engages her readers in the vindication of Haiti's African past, revealing the continuity of linguistic technologies and meanings between the cultures.

What did it mean for her to translate and transmit these words in a feminist newspaper? After acknowledging that only initiates understood certain words she continued to translate, pulling the reader into sacred and private communication. The presentation in the newspaper borders on an element of sacrilege. In her tone and willingness to reveal what she admits is secret, and in

some cases untranslatable, Comhaire-Sylvain appears to wander into her own "anthropological imagination" of an exotic Haiti that needs translation (Magloire and Yelvington 2005, 2). Yet placing Comhaire-Sylvain's glossary in conversation with her following three *La Voix des Femmes* articles an alternative reading comes into focus. Situating Comhaire-Sylvain's 1938 publication in the context of both her research and her personal relationship with death, she provides the readership of *La Voix des Femmes* with a lens into her own introspection and a lexicon for her grief.

Her audience was unlikely to travel to the sites of death that soothed Comhaire-Sylvain. Thus, her articles reveal the cemetery as a space for translation and for redress. In her work on raising and reading the dead and death, Sharon Patricia Holland submits that attending to the dead is "to discover in culture and its intellectual property opportunities for not only uncovering silences but also transforming inarticulate places into conversational territories" (Holland 2000, 3). In the early days of LFAS and indeed throughout their organizational history members wrestled with the inability to translate feminist desires across class and cultural lines. In this way the "inarticulate places" of women's rights organizing were also places of deep national hurt and disproportionate distribution of power exchange and wealth among women. For example, it is important to note that Comhaire-Sylvain first discovered her admiration for folktales in the arms of a working-class woman and that the space and study of death was also a fragile space for exchange and connectivity that highlighted gendered distinctions of labour and class.

This generative and fragile space of death in women's rights work become more evident in Comhaire-Sylvain's second publication, "Notre Paysanne: Adelsia." In a short story format, "Notre paysanne," harkens back to Price-Mars' title *Ainsi parla l'Oncle* as a narrative practice in centring the peasant. With her "notre" Comhaire-Sylvain asserts both camaraderie and ownership. In the narrative the reader discovers that Adelsia and Suzanne know each other from childhood. As a young girl, Adelsia accompanied her grandmother on the journey from Kenscoff to Port-au-Prince to sell their produce. Suzanne

remembered her peaches and artichokes. The young women were over a decade apart in age, but Suzanne took note of Adelsia's "smooth skin," "reddish black color," and kind disposition. Perhaps they would have been friends or she would have taken her under her wing as a "little-sister" if their worlds had not been so geographically and socially distant. But the extent of their early relationship was only in labour-fiscal exchange.

When Comhaire-Sylvain arrived in Kenscoff she was looking for Adelsia, if not in direct intention, in theory. She wanted to understand the connection between Africa and Haiti. And when she heard Adelsia's name, Comhaire-Sylvain remarked that the young peasant girl "responds to the sweet name with a French prefix and a Dahomain suffix," embodying the Atlantic resonances that animated her research (Comhaire-Sylvain 1939, 1). When she was reintroduced to Adelsia in Kenscoff she first recognizes her as an accomplished dancer at "Mardi Gras" and Rara celebrations. In her short biography of Adelsia in *La Voix des Femmes* Comhaire-Sylvain explains that Adelsia was not interested in partnered dances, two-by-two, rather "what pleases her is the footwork performed alone under the tree while the drums roar and the lwas ride over the faithful" (Comhaire-Sylvain 1939, 2-3). Here, Comhaire-Sylvain points her audience to spiritual practices in Kenscoff as Adelsia escorts Comhaire-Sylvain to the burial sites of the province.

What did Adelsia and Comhaire-Sylvain's time in the cemetery look like? Did Comhaire-Sylvain stand back and observe Adelsia? Or did they dance, sing and share stories together? Was there a moment when Adelsia and Comhaire-Sylvain touched, perhaps Adelsia reaching out her hand to escort Comhaire-Sylvain through the markers of ancestral presence? Comhaire-Sylvain's notes do not provide any direct answers in this regard, but her narration discursively bridged her life to Adelsia's and, by extension, the *La Voix des Femmes* readership. In her practice and public telling Comhaire-Sylvain drew her life closer to peasant life and in turn pronounced a closer intellectual immediacy to African origins embodied in Adelsia. Drawing her audience into the details of Adelsia's rural existence, into spaces that would otherwise only be witnessed by

family, fellow mourners and those communing with the ancestors, Comhaire-Sylvain wrote that there was an aspect of the rituals that was familiar (Comhaire-Sylvain 1939, 2-4).

Although Comhaire-Sylvain was taken with Adelsia because of their shared past and her artistic and business acuity as a dancer and vendor, noting that although she never attended school “her mental calculations are remarkable,” Comhaire-Sylvain’s analysis of Adelsia’s life revealed gaps in translating women’s experiences. For example, as Comhaire-Sylvain praised Adelsia’s business skills and parenting ethos, she questioned Adelsia’s role as a second wife to her husband. She expressed regret that Adelsia would never hold the title “Madame.” “She will one day be ‘Manzè Adelsia,’ ‘Sor Adelsia,’ and even ‘Grann Adelsia’ but she will not carry the title ‘Madame’” (Comhaire-Sylvain 1939, 3). At the same time, in her unpublished writing about marriage she wrote that *plasaj*—a common law relationship that may or may not be monogamous—was a “relatively stable union.”¹³

Within the context of the feminist newspaper Comhaire-Sylvain’s reservations regarding legal and monogamous marriage reflected an early and ongoing discord in feminist discourse. On the one hand, legal marriage provided an avenue for social mobility that blurred class, cultural and colour divisions (Trouillot 1994, 159). On the other hand, legal marriage constrained women’s social and economic freedom. For example, married women were barred from primary access to their financial earnings and land ownership, as well as mobility, since, as legal minors, women had to obtain their spouse’s permission to travel (Manigat 2002; Charles 2003; Sanders 2013). Moreover, as Carolle Charles has shown in her study of poor and working-class women in Haiti, some women viewed their unmarried status as a “counter-power” against the state that allowed them to maintain control over their material resources (Charles 2003, 45). By the beginning of World War II, however, elite feminist discourse was more closely aligned with narratives of respectability. Women within LFAS encouraged legal marriage, campaigning for and winning, for example, the suspension of

the marriage tax as an encouragement to women and men of limited economic means to legally marry.¹⁴

While her adherence to markers of respectability are at play within Comhaire-Sylvain's interwar period delineation of Adelsia's access to social mobility through naming, her concern also reveals her preoccupation and even anxiety regarding women and death. In particular, she ruminates on material assets and the distribution of wealth and status. For over half of the bio-narrative, Comhaire-Sylvain calculates Adelsia's assets and relationships as she fixates on the precariousness of family, social status and property ownership for women upon their death or the death of a family member. These concerns mirrored one of LFAS's first legislative initiatives. In the 1940s the women's organization made their first legislative campaign about women's rights to hold their wages and property within marriage. Comhaire-Sylvain understood and documented that the moments during and directly after death were periods of power brokering, where traditional gender hierarchies yielded to the supernatural and sacred. Comhaire-Sylvain framed her retelling of Adelsia's life through death, relationship to land, ancestry and relationship to other women. In her closing statements Comhaire-Sylvain acknowledges her preoccupation with Adelsia's material assets and attention to death when she concludes, "But she [Adelsia] is young and so she is not thinking about death" (Comhaire-Sylvain 1939, 6). Adelsia was, in fact, reflective about death and assets, but not in the ways that resonated with Comhaire-Sylvain. Adelsia's concern with financial resources upon death was less about material loss and more about preparation. Comhaire-Sylvain's text reflects this dissonance when she explains that "more than marriage, women were saving money to celebrate and memorialize their family" (Comhaire-Sylvain 1939, 6).¹⁵ The value in material assets for Adelsia was in her ability to serve her ancestors. Yet for Comhaire-Sylvain's audience, the narration of Adelsia's life also drew a fragile connection between women, placing them in the material and discursively-shared spaces of social and corporeal life and death.

In the spirit of the death wake and its multiple articulations, Comhaire-Sylvain's third article engages her readers in a type of reflexive play. In "La Femme dans le proverbe créole," Comhaire-Sylvain takes a sarcastic tone as she provides a litany of proverbs that discuss women. She does not analyze the list of familiar statements. Rather her presentation of proverbs like, "Actions are for men, Conversation is for women," or "He who has a daughter has a son-in-law," announces the profundity and irony of the proverbs. In particular, she identifies the ways in which the woman's body ("Heavy women have virtue"), value ("Girls are poor merchandise") and relationships ("Not all mothers are mothers") were used to mark the boundaries of gendered belonging and citizenship. This rarely acknowledged disconnect between national discourse and women's rights and citizenship further enunciated the need and demand for members of LFAS to wrestle with their feminist project.

With the death space situated as a site of translation, redress and play, Comhaire-Sylvain's fourth article returns to a tale of familial loss. In the March 1938 issue of *La Voix des Femmes* subscribers were introduced to the folktale "Adelmonde." Adelmonde is the story of a mother and daughter who have a profound love for one another. Comhaire-Sylvain recorded that each time the mother and daughter saw each other "joy danced in their black eyes." In the story, Adelmonde's beauty, laughter and loving spirit capture the attention of the Queen of the Water who kidnaps Adelmonde, makes her one of her many daughters and threatens Adelmonde and her mother with death if they attempt to reunite.

Adelmonde and her mother wept and longed for each other for many days. One day Adelmonde remembered that an old woman in the hills once told her that the Queen of the Water could not exist with sickness in her presence. So, for days, Adelmonde ate charcoal to make herself sick. After convulsing and spitting up black vomit, the Queen of the Water released Adelmonde perceiving her to be ill. When she was released, Adelmonde immediately ran home where the mother and daughter found each other and had a long embrace. Yet, as the narrator within the folktale recounts, before she was able

to congratulate the mother and daughter on their reunion she was distracted by a mysterious touch and when she turned back to the women, they were gone. The folktale ends with an inquiry, "Have you seen Adelmonde? Did she return to the water? If you see her please come fast and tell me" (Comhaire-Sylvain 1939, 14). At the end of the folktale Adelmonde and her mother's reunion results in their mutual disappearance.

By retelling "Adelmonde" on a feminist platform, Comhaire-Sylvain served as an interlocutor and transmitter of narratives centring Haitian women. Of the many folktales Comhaire-Sylvain could have translated, she chose a narrative in which the cast of characters were women who negotiated relationships complicated by deep love, desire, sister-motherhood and meanings of separation and loss. In her story choice we might first consider that Comhaire-Sylvain bears witness to her own loss—mourning and searching for her own mother (parents) at the intersection of death and women's intellectual recovery and practice. In addition to a reflection on personal loss this narration leaves room for reading this story as an introspective moment for elite Haitian feminists. Could, for example, *La Voix des Femmes*' readers identify with the Queen of the Water—truly desiring relationship with Adelmonde, but at the expense of ignoring the relationships and cultural framework within which she existed? Similarly, the early organizers of the women's movement continually butted against the incongruences between their aspirations and theories of feminism alongside the diversity of women's class and cultural experiences. Here folklore operates not only as a space of invention, but also, as Joseph Roach argues, as a medium that performs erasures. In her representative use of Adelmonde's story as a tale of women, writ large, the retelling could also ignore and reinvent the nuances within and between different women's experiences. Thus, the narration returns *La Voix des Femmes*' readership to a place of curiosity and reflection.

Conclusion

In her later scholarship about funerals in Kenscoff, Comhaire-Sylvain wrote extensively about mourning. She explains that in the village “there are two kinds of mourning”: “grand deuil” and “petit deuil.” Petit mourning begins the day of the funeral and for the immediate family this period lasts six months. She also explains that ten years after the death of a mother or father the children initiate a service to begin the grand mourning, which lasts two years for the mother and eighteen months for the father. At the end of the period, the bereaved hold a ceremony or mass for the peaceful rest of the deceased spirit and sing a “libera”—a song of release and freedom for the spirit—over the tomb (Comhaire-Sylvain 1959, 197-220).

Comhaire-Sylvain arrived in Kenscoff a decade and two years—*grand deuil*—after her father’s death. What if we consider Suzanne’s first year of study in Kenscoff and her four submissions in *La Voix des Femmes* as her “libera” for her father, mother and elder brother? In her research Comhaire-Sylvain identified an epistemic and economic valuation of the dead and ancestral lineage that intertwined the worlds of the living and the dead in the materiality of daily life. In addition to a place to project sentiments of loss, the death space—cemeteries and rituals for the deceased—bound and demarcated relationships to the land and the nation. Although the Sylvain siblings reunited several times over the course of their lives to remember and celebrate their father, Comhaire-Sylvain’s record does not disclose whether the family had a *libera* for their parents and brother. Yet, Comhaire-Sylvain draws her audience toward the site of death as a balm. Presented in the guise of scholarly research, Comhaire-Sylvain indoctrinates readers and members of LFAS into her process—inviting them, even if only in an intellectual project, to bridge a divide between women’s social and class performance, and to dwell in the continuity of mourning. As a balm the site of death held space for histories and relationships that could not be easily sutured. In this regard, in the wake of death there is space to recover and remake narratives and memories, but there is also room for acknowledging what is lost. Thus, while Comhaire-Sylvain was trailblazing in her ability to make

contact, exchange narratives and disseminate and validate the processes of rural history making, her fieldwork also reveals the power relations and cultural valuations shared between women within the fragile constructions of gendered solidarity. Attending to the utility of the dead and death space for national meaning in the post-occupation and interwar periods allowed for a different approach to recuperate narratives of women as well as revealed the barriers of class and culture which made the women's movement less accessible and relevant for the women that the organizers espoused to represent. The space of death brought the lines of difference into relief as well as projected the possibilities for blurring boundaries between groups. But it required, according to Comhaire-Sylvain's practice, closeness—touching, holding, listening and mourning. In this proximity to death Comhaire-Sylvain's work reveals the nuanced articulation of early Haitian feminist meaning.

References

- Alexis, Yveline. 2011. *Nationalism and the Politics of Historical Memory: Charlemagne Peralte's Rebellion against U.S. Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1986*. PhD. diss., University of Massachusetts Amherst.
- Charles, Carole. 2003. "Popular Imageries of Gender and Sexuality: Poor and Working-Class Haitian Women's Discourses on the Use of their Bodies." In *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, edited by Linden Lewis, 169-189. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Comhaire, Jean. 1984. "Vie et Oeuvre d'une Folkloriste Haïtienne en Afrique." *Folklore in Africa Today/Folklore en Afrique d'aujourd'hui*, 1-4. XI. African Research Project, Budapest, 103-118.
- Comhaire-Sylvain, Suzanne. Papers. Stanford University Library and Special Collections. Stanford University.
- Comhaire-Sylvain, Suzanne. 1959. "Mort et Funérailles dans la Région de Kenscoff (Haïti)." *Revue de l'Institut de Sociologie, Université Libre de Bruxelles*, n. 2.
- . 1938. "A Propos du Vocabulaire des Croyances Paysannes." *La Voix des Femmes* (February): 6-7.
- . 1939. "Quelques autres proverbes sur la Femme." *La Voix des Femmes* (March): 9.
- . 1939. "La Femme Dans le Proverbe Créole." *Études Haïtiennes*, 7-10.
- . 1939. "Notre Paysanne: Adelsia." *Études Haïtiennes*, 1-6.
- Dash, J. Michael. 1981. *Literature and Ideology in Haiti, 1915-1961*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. 1997. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Holland, Sharon Patricia. 2000. *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Johnson, James Weldon. 1920. "Self-determining Haiti: The American Occupation." *The Nation* (August): 236-38.
- Lescot, Élie. 1945. *Bulletin des Lois et Actes*, République d'Haiti Département de la Justice, Port-au-Prince.
- Magloire, Gêrarde and Kevin A. Yelvington, 2005. "Haiti and the Anthropological Imagination: Jean Price-Mars, Melville J. Herskovits, Roger Bastide." *Gradhiva: Revue d'Anthropologie et d'Histoire des Arts* (2005): 127-152.
- Manigat, Mirlande. 2002. *Etre Femme en Haiti Hier et Aujourd'hui: Le Regard des Constitutions, des Lois et de la Société*. Port-au-Prince: Université Quisqueya.
- Nicholls, David. 1996. *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Price-Mars, Jean. 1919. *La Vocation de l'Elite*. Port-au-Prince: Bibliothèque Haïtienne.
- . 1928. *Ainsi Parla l'Oncle*. (Essais d'ethnographie). Paris: Imprimerie de Compiègne.
- Sanders, Grace. 2013. "La Voix des Femmes: Haitian Women's Rights, National Politics, and Black Activism in Port-au-Prince and Montreal, 1934-1986." PhD diss., University of Michigan.
- Smith, Matthew J. 2009. *Black and Red in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict and Political Change, 1934-1957*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

- Sylvain, George. 1925. *Dix Années de Lutte pour la Liberté, 1915-1925*. Port-au-Prince: Editions Henri Deschamps.
- Sylvain-Bouchereau, Madeleine G. 1939. "The Feminist Movement in Haiti." *Bulletin of the Pan American Union*, LXXIII(6): 315-321.
- . 1947. "Nous Revoici." *La Voix des Femmes* (January): 1-2.
- . 1957. *Haiti and ses Femmes: Une Etude d'Evolution Culturelle*. Port-au-Prince: Les Presses Libres.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1994. "Culture, Color, and Politics in Haiti." In *Race*, edited by Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek, 146-174. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Woodson, Carter G. 1937. "Review of Le Creole Haitien and Les Contes Haitiens." *Journal of Negro History*, XXII: 369-372.

¹ There are several texts that study the impact of Haitian women's organizing for legal and constitutional rights. These texts include: Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, *Haiti and ses Femmes: Une Etude d'Evolution Culturelle* (Port-au-Prince: Les Presses Libres, 1957); Mirlande Manigat, *Etre Femme en Haiti Hier et Aujourd'hui: Le Regard des Constitutions, des Lois et de la Société* (Port-au-Prince: Université Quisqueya, 2002); and Grace Sanders, "La Voix des Femmes: Haitian Women's Rights, National Politics, and Black Activism in Port-au-Prince and Montreal, 1934-1986," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2013).

² The four Sylvain daughters were nationally and internationally known for their feminist organizing, but also for their historic role as the first degreed anthropologist, gynaecologist, attorney and social worker.

³ Unpublished manuscript by Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, M1835, Box 1, Folder 3. Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, Stanford University Archives (SUA), Stanford, California, US.

⁴ Kenscoff and Pétionville were classified in a shared jurisdiction until 1938 when Kenscoff became a "commune."

⁵ Unpublished manuscript by Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, M1835, Box 1, Folder 3. Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, SUA.

⁶ Unpublished manuscript by Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, SUA.

⁷ According to Comhaire-Sylvain, these families could all trace their ancestry to one enslaved African who traversed the Middle Passage.

⁸ Unpublished manuscript by Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, M1835, Box 1, Folder 3. Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, SUA. Also see "Paysans de la region de Kenscoff" by Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, M1835, Box 7, Folder 3, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, SUA.

⁹ Unpublished manuscript by Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, M1835, Box 1, Folder 3, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, SUA.

¹⁰ Unpublished manuscript by Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, SUA.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The newspaper had full circulation in the major cities of each region in Haiti including, Cayes, Cap-Haïtien and Jacmel (Sylvain 1957). In these areas, the core readership were most likely elite and middle-class women. During the 1937 Paris Exposition the writers of *La Voix des Femmes* were awarded a journalism prize for excellence in reporting.

¹³ Unpublished manuscript by Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, M1835, Box 1, Folder 3, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, SUA.

¹⁴ The marriage tax was repealed on January 15, 1945 under president Élie Lescot (Lescot, 1945).

¹⁵ Unpublished manuscript by Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, M1835, Box 1, Folder 3. Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, SUA.



Discrimination in Any Shape or Form: Black Activism and Women's Rights in Interwar Bermuda¹

Nicole Bourbonnais

Assistant Professor of International History
Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
Geneva, Switzerland

We glory in the spirit of the suffragettes, who are fighting because they feel that they are being discriminated against because of their sex. They have let it be known that they abhor discrimination in any shape or form. We feel therefore that they are worthy of our help because they, like us, are struggling against what they consider injustice....

We must therefore follow in their trail, and with them wage a relentless fight against discrimination in any form. They must eventually win. We too must struggle until victory is within our grasp and our rights as citizens within the British Commonwealth of Nations are fully recognized.

-- Editorial, "Suffragettes," Recorder, December 8, 1934²

Abstract: The 1930s and 40s saw a spike in anti-racist and women's rights activism in Bermuda. This article explores the relationship between the white-dominated Bermuda Woman's Suffrage Society (BWSS), its Secretary Gladys Morrell, and the Afro-Bermudian *Recorder* newspaper under editor David Tucker. Tucker and the *Recorder* expressed an ideological alliance with the BWSS in the 1930s, citing a shared battle against discrimination. Suffragists also mobilized against reactionary government policies targeting the black community. However, the Society's failure to take up a broader anti-racist agenda – coupled with political opportunism on Tucker's part – led to a split in the early 1940s. These experiences illustrate both the potential of and difficulties sustaining alliances across race/class/gender lines in a deeply divided society. The tendency of both the *Recorder* and the BWSS to speak on behalf of (rather than providing a platform for) black women also fuelled the splintering of agendas in these years.

Keywords: Anti-racist activism, feminist activism, suffrage, black press, Bermuda

Acknowledgements: I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Reena N. Goldthree and Natanya Duncan for including my work in this collection, to the peer-reviewers for their feedback, to Kristy Warren for helping me clarify my approach and fill in several missing pieces, and to Karla Ingemann for digging up pictures from the Bermuda Archives.

How to cite

Bourbonnais, Nicole. 2018. "Discrimination in Any Shape or Form: Black Activism and Women's Rights in Interwar Bermuda." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12: 143-168

The interwar years were a period of heightened debate and mobilization across Britain's Caribbean colonies, which lay at the intersection of several activist circuits. Building on earlier suffrage movements and emboldened by the role of women at home and on the battlefield in World War I, women's rights advocates across the British Empire pushed for the right to vote, run for political office, divorce, and inherit property on equal grounds as men (Sinha, Guy and Woollacott 1998; De Haan et al. 2012). Pan-Africanist organizations like the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP) and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) flourished in these years, spreading race consciousness around the Atlantic through local chapters, international conferences and a thriving transnational black press (Ewing 2014; Putnam 2013). A series of labour strikes and riots also prompted the formation of the British Caribbean's first broad-scale labour unions and nationalist political parties pressing for universal suffrage, labour rights, and measures to address racial discrimination in the civil services, health care and employment (Alexander 2004; Beckles 2004; Bolland 2001; Howe 2002; Post 1978; Singh 1994).

These currents have often been studied independently of one another, perhaps in part due to the differential race, class, and gender make-up of key leaders and organizations. Generally speaking, elite white women tended to dominate international feminist forums and early women's associations in the interwar years, while men assumed leadership of black activist and labour associations. Scholarship on Afro-Caribbean women's history, however, has challenged the characterization of women's rights and anti-racism as separate spheres of activity. As foundational histories of women's activism in Trinidad (Reddock 1994), Jamaica (Altink 2012; Ford-Smith 2004; Gregg 2005; Vassell 1993) and Belize (Macpherson 2007) point out, Caribbean women often straddled several organizations at once, pushing for women's issues within anti-racist/labour organizations and critiquing racial discrimination within the women's movement. In some cases, black women created their own organizations like the Jamaican Women's Liberal Club, which explicitly blended pan-Africanist, feminist and nationalist ideologies in its 1936 founding charter (Ford-Smith 1982, 81).

But even where independent black feminist organizations did not materialize in these years and activism appears more clearly segregated along race and gender lines, digging a bit deeper can unearth some illustrative connections (and disconnections) between these causes and their leaders. Rhoda Reddock (2014, 61) points out, for example, that some pan-Africanist men supported women's rights movements in the interwar years despite the patriarchal structure of organizations like the UNIA. Some British feminist activists also took critical positions against empire and race/class discrimination after WWI, departing from the more patronizing maternal imperialist feminism of earlier periods (Bush 2016). Rather than taking for granted the separation of these worlds, then, we might revisit this moment and ask: how did (white-dominated) women's rights activism and (male-dominated) black activism in particular places intersect with one another in the interwar years? What points of connection drew them together, and what were the central fault lines that drove them apart?

This article takes up these questions by exploring the relationship among the white-dominated Bermuda Woman's Suffrage Society (BWSS), its leader Gladys Morrell, and the Afro-Bermudian *Recorder* newspaper under activist David Tucker. I focus in particular on the years from 1934 (when Tucker became editor of the *Recorder*) to 1944, when women who met property qualifications obtained the right to vote. During these years, Morrell and the Society primarily promoted the cause of suffrage and brought a feminist perspective into public debates, while Tucker and the *Recorder* sought to represent the perspective of the island's Afro-Bermudian community and challenge racial inequality on the island. Their spheres of activity and critique, however, overlapped in interesting ways. As evident in the quote opening this article, editorials in the *Recorder* expressed broad solidarity with the BWSS in the 1930s, portraying the suffrage movement as ideologically aligned with the black community's struggle against "discrimination in any shape or form." The BWSS, in turn, subscribed to the *Recorder* and attempted to reach out to black community organizations and activists. Tucker and Morrell also found common cause in their opposition to a 1935 Report on Unemployment put forth by the House of Assembly that included proposals for compulsory sterilization measures targeting the black community.

The resulting cross race/class/gender community mobilization was able to bring a quick halt to this particularly reactionary measure. However, the *Recorder* was also critical of the BWSS for failing to engage seriously with the broader agenda outlined by the paper, namely universal suffrage and the battle against racial discrimination in nursing and the civil services. This tension – as well as a dose of political opportunism on Tucker's part – contributed to a fracturing of relations in the early 1940s, leading the BWSS to cancel its subscription to the paper and publicly condemn Tucker. These experiences show both the powerful potential of alliances across race/class/gender lines, as well as the difficulty of sustaining these alliances in a reactionary society where activists felt compelled to prioritize agendas of “their” community over a broader anti-racist, feminist agenda recognizing race and sex discrimination as intersecting/interlocking systems of domination (see Crenshaw 1989; hooks 2005). Coverage in the *Recorder* and meeting minutes from the BWSS also suggest that both tended to speak on behalf of (rather than providing a platform for) black women, which further fuelled the splintering of agendas in these years.

Connections

A small island of just 20.6 square miles, Bermuda has often been left out of accounts of twentieth-century Caribbean history. This may reflect in part Bermuda's physical distance from other islands, located some 1500km northeast of the Caribbean Sea due east of North Carolina. Bermuda's social and economic structure also had several unique characteristics. Although Bermuda shared with other islands a historical trajectory fundamentally shaped by the twin forces of British colonization and African slavery, the island's economy centred on military activities, small-scale farming, and commerce rather than the massive sugar plantations characteristic of the Caribbean proper. The island also had a much larger white settler population, forming 42% of the population in 1933 as opposed to 7% or less in other British Caribbean colonies. Bermuda's Colonial Parliament (consisting of an elected House of Assembly and an appointed Legislative Council) was given more power over local affairs than

elsewhere in the British Caribbean, although notably less than in the Dominions of Canada, Australia, and South Africa. Sex disqualification and high property qualifications, however, limited the franchise to some 8% of the population and ensured the dominance of the white male elite, with only a handful of black men able to obtain seats in the House of Assembly in the early twentieth century. The growth of the American tourist industry in Bermuda after World War I also provided justification for more explicit forms of racial segregation. In addition to the subtle discrimination by exclusion which prevented access to jobs in the civil services and other sectors, “coloured” Bermudians were restricted from owning properties or renting in areas reserved for whites, banned from tourist hotels and forced to sit in specially designated rows in theatres, cinemas and some churches. Interwar Bermuda thus sat at the intersection – geographically, politically, and socially – of Britain, North America and the Caribbean (Alexander 2004, 98-100; Brown 2011; High 2003; Swan 2009).

Bermuda's unique status within the British Atlantic and regressive race relations were a subject of frequent commentary in the Afro-Bermudian run *Recorder* newspaper, founded by Garveyite Alfred Brownlow Place and associates in 1925 as a counter to the island's main newspaper *The Royal Gazette and Colonist Daily* (widely considered an organ of the conservative white elite). The establishment of the *Recorder* built on and helped fuel a larger wave of black mobilization on the island. In 1920, a protest-turned-“riot” spurred by dissatisfaction among members of the black Bermuda Militia Artillery (BMA) drew attention to racial divisions on the island; that same year saw the creation of a Bermudian branch of the UNIA. Both events were harshly repressed by the government, which also banned the UNIA's *Negro World* newspaper and refused to allow Marcus Garvey to visit the island on four occasions. Still, Quito Swan argues that this period marked something of a “Black Renaissance,” evident in the flourishing of a number of community associations and the influence of the *Recorder* on race consciousness. Beginning as a small weekly tabloid, by the mid-1930s the paper had expanded to a 12-page broadsheet published on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Although the *Recorder* was not linked directly to any one organization, it sought to spread a Garvey-inspired message

of race pride, represent the concerns of “the masses” and connect Bermudians to a broader transnational black community (Swan 2009, 13-14; Butler 1987, 11; Philip 1987, 88-95). This focus comes across clearly in surviving copies of the paper held by the Bermuda National Library, covering the period from 1933 to the last issue in 1975. Articles in the 1930s likened the struggles of local Bermudians to the broader oppression of “the coloured races of the Empire”³ and regular columns such as “So This is New York” and “Boston Bean Pot” kept islanders up to date on political and social life among Bermudian expats in the United States. The paper's “News in Brief” section focused on news pertaining to Africa and the African Diaspora, while the “Society” pages and “Poetry Corner” provided spaces to highlight black leisure and creative expression.

The *Recorder* would also become a critical medium for the views of David Tucker, a lawyer and intellectual who became one of the island's most forceful anti-racist activists. Tucker had left the island to obtain a BA and MA from Howard University in the United States before moving to London in 1929 to attend law school. While in London, Tucker served as Assistant Secretary of the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP) and editor of its journal, *The Keys* (Butler 1987, 33; Hodgson 1997, 32). Upon returning to Bermuda in 1933 he began writing features for the *Recorder* before assuming the editorship from 1934-1951. Under his reign, the paper focused on questions of citizenship and racial discrimination, critiquing segregation in schools and hospitals, demanding a Civil Service entrance exam and touting the cause of universal suffrage. Tucker also used the *Recorder* to organize mass protests against particular policies put forward by the Colonial Parliament, suggesting a substantial readership.⁴



Fig 1. David Tucker. *The Recorder*, 2 September 1933, p.1. Courtesy of the Bermuda Archives.

The interwar years were also a period of heightened activism among Bermudian suffragists. While early bills to give property-owning women the same rights as men had been put forward (and defeated) in 1895 and 1896, local historian Colin Benbow (1994) cites the formation of the Bermuda Woman's Suffrage Society (BWSS) in January 1923 as the beginning of an organized movement. The Society was formed by a group of elite white women led by Gladys (Misick) Morrell. A member of a prominent local family, Morell was educated in London and returned home energized by the extension of the franchise to propertied women in the UK in 1918. Several provinces of Canada, New Zealand, Australia and India had also granted women's suffrage; closer to home, women who met property or income qualifications could vote in municipal elections in Belize as of 1912 and (on unequal terms with men) in Jamaica in 1919 (Macpherson 2007, 37; Altink 2011, 156-60). The BWSS sought to seize on this momentum and began holding regular meetings, drafting legislation and organizing public protests. Officially, the Society's goal was limited to the effort "to obtain for the women of Bermuda political enfranchisement on the same terms as it is, or may be, granted to men" (Benbow 1994, Appendix B). However, Morrell and the BWSS

also intervened in wider social and political debates, holding lectures and taking positions on subjects such as juvenile delinquency, youth reform, taxation and labour policies. The BWSS also made attempts to engage with the black community by subscribing and writing letters to the *Recorder* in addition to the *Royal Gazette*, speaking before black community associations, and stating clearly in its Constitution that: “[n]either race nor alien nationality shall constitute any bar to membership” (Benbow 1994, Appendix B). In reality, the BWSS remained heavily dominated by white elite women, although a few black women do appear in meeting minutes, most notably nurse and community organizer Alice Scott and educator Marjorie Bean.⁵ The Society also reached out to British suffragists and MPs like Florence Underwood and Eleanore Rathbone, who wrote letters to the Colonial Office in London imploring officials to intervene on behalf of Bermudian women's suffrage.⁶



Fig 2. Left to right: Gladys Morrell, Suffragists marching in Bermuda. Gladys Morrell Collection, Bermuda Archives. Courtesy of the Bermuda Archives.

These efforts, however, bore little fruit in the 1920s and 1930s. Although the BWSS had support from several representatives in the House of Assembly, bills and court challenges to extend the franchise to women brought forth in 1925, 1929, 1930, and 1935 were roundly defeated (Benbow 1994). The slow progress in Bermuda reflected in part the generally conservative approach to political, economic and social change on the island (known as “one of the most reactionary colonies in the British Empire” (High 2003, 7)) as well as the sexist attitudes of representatives who openly stated that women were not suited to political life. Bermuda’s long history of local control also limited the Colonial Office’s willingness and ability to exert pressure from above. Benbow (1994) and commentators at the time, however, placed particular stress on the race politics of suffrage in a society where black and white communities were seen as two separate groups with competing political interests. As the BWSS stated plainly in a petition to the Colonial Office in the early 1930s, both white and black Bermudians suffered from “racial fears, i.e. fears of the dominance of the other race. Each thinks that the extension of the franchise will benefit the other race at their own expense.”⁷ While the BWSS tried to assuage these fears with figures showing that an equal number of white and black female property-holders would be eligible to vote under the contemporary qualifications, white Members of Colonial Parliament (MCPs) portrayed any change as a threat to white rule. The few black MCPs also voted as a block against women’s suffrage bills throughout the 1920s and 30s, fearing it would tip the racial balance even further in favour of the white community (Benbow 1994).

If racial tensions created clear division in the political realm, however, coverage of the BWSS in the *Recorder* in the 1930s suggests more enthusiastic support for women’s suffrage amongst other sectors of black society. Tucker, in particular, portrayed women’s rights as a cause that ran parallel to the anti-racist struggle. In a December 1933 feature on “Secondary Schools in Bermuda,” for example, Tucker noted that “[w]omen’s suffrage and the adherent of the same is looked upon with suspicion in some quarters today. Someday we will realize how foolish we were in trying to fight against progress and in attempting to erect barriers on account of sex, creed or colour.”⁸ As editor, Tucker published some fourteen

editorials in the 1930s (unsigned, but likely written by Tucker himself)⁹ highlighting the work of the BWSS and/or touting the cause of women's suffrage more generally. These editorials portrayed women's right to vote as a hallmark of "enlightened" society, noting that: "among important countries within the Empire only South Africa and Bermuda have denied women the vote."¹⁰ The paper also chastised Bermuda's government for being "backwards" on the question,¹¹ adding: "it is indeed unfortunate that we should have anything in common with the Union of South Africa."¹²

This commentary on women's suffrage reflected a broader support for women's rights evident in the *Recorder* during these years. The paper published several feature articles tracing "women's progress" internationally, including features on women's political participation in different European countries, the role of black women in the U.S. Army, the appointment of women to leading positions in church congregations and the international travel of black feminists like Jamaican Una Marson.¹³ Editorials traced the intellectual history of women's rights from Plato to John Stuart Mill to Silvia Pankhurst,¹⁴ arguing that: "[t]he emancipation of women from a position of inferiority to one of absolute equality in all things political economic and social must come."¹⁵ The paper claimed that Bermuda was "to some extent living in the Stone Age when women were regarded as chattels"¹⁶ and argued that "world opinion...laughs at Bermuda's antiquated ideas on treatment of women."¹⁷ Editorials even addressed the subject of masculinity, mocking the "superiority complex" of "our men folk" and praising men like Amelia Earhart's modest husband who belonged to "the new school of thought" able to step aside and support their wives' careers.¹⁸

As evident in the quotation that opened this article, the *Recorder* portrayed solidarity between the BWSS and the black community as a natural outgrowth of their common struggle against injustice and "discrimination in any shape or form." Indeed, the overwhelming dominance and audacity of the island's white male MCPs could be a powerful unifying force, as evidenced in the swift mobilization of both the *Recorder* and the BWSS against a Report on Unemployment produced by the House of Assembly in May of 1935. Tapping

into a wave of neo-Malthusian and eugenic anxiety spreading across the globe in the 1920s and 1930s (Bashford and Levine 2010; Bourbonnais 2016), the Report argued that population growth threatened the economic and political security of the island and recommended the dissemination of birth control at Board of Health clinics as well as the compulsory sterilization of “mental defectives,” women who mothered two illegitimate children and men who fathered one illegitimate child.¹⁹ The Report made plain its disdain for the “indolent and inefficient”²⁰ local labour force and its willingness to resort to extreme measures to instill control over the population.

The *Recorder* came out immediately against the Report, arguing in a scathing editorial that the “ruthless proposals” made “the effort of Hitler to ‘purge’ the German nation seem tame” and would “rock the very foundation of our social system.”²¹ The paper also called readers to a public protest meeting at Alexandria Hall chaired by David Tucker, where members of the community highlighted the racist undertones of the proposals targeting the labouring population and births out of wedlock. Since black Bermudians made up the majority of labourers and illegitimacy rates were believed to be higher amongst black residents, one participant stated frankly that: “they [the sterilization proposals] will hurt the coloured people more than the white...it will decrease our population if the measure is carried through, and that is one of the motives aimed at.”²² Although the *Recorder* had previously published several pieces arguing in favour of increased access to contraception, it stressed that any birth control plans needed to be voluntary, apply to “every section of our island community” and not merely “one group,”²³ and be accompanied by education, employment opportunities, and other measures to address wider economic inequalities.

The BWSS entered the debate in part on feminist grounds, challenging the right of an all-male House of Assembly to enter into the realm of birth control “without any effort to ascertain women’s views thereon.”²⁴ But Gladys Morrell also moved beyond the issue of suffrage into a wider critique of Bermudian social mores and economic policy. In a letter to the *Royal Gazette* she scolded the House for

attacking the “defenceless” and defended those born out of wedlock, suggesting that many such persons were “reputable Bermudians.”²⁵ At a meeting of the BWSS in late May, Morrell also argued against “shifting the emphasis from unemployment to over-population” because:

I think that is getting away from the real issue. No country can call this problem a problem of over-population. It is, and I think we should not cease to emphasise it, an economic problem of unemployment, and we should deal with it as such. Maybe we will have to face the question of unemployment relief. I think that is what the Legislature is afraid of; they are afraid they might have to put their hands in their pockets and pay some persons during unemployment which is unavoidable on their part.²⁶

Her argument was echoed by fellow suffragist Margaret E. Misick, who felt that birth control should not be seen as “a panacea for all economic ills” and called for “a wider application of the principles of social justice and a broader conception of a government's responsibility for the welfare of its people.”²⁷ In doing so, both moved beyond their own priorities as elite white suffragists, suggesting a broader vision for social change and labour rights on the island. Morrell and Misick's position was challenged by at least two members of the BWSS who expressed support for the proposals at the meeting that May. But in the end, the Society unanimously passed a resolution strongly condemning the recommendations of the report.²⁸

Morrell also mobilized her connections with British high society to prevent the proposals from moving forward, including a copy of the Report's recommendations in a letter to British suffragist Florence Underwood on May 27.²⁹ Morrell's letter was forwarded to Lady Astor (Britain's first female MP and a longstanding ally of the BWSS), who in turn passed it on to the Secretary of State for the Colonies Malcolm Macdonald, adding: “if it goes through for want of protest in this country it will be a disgrace to the whole British Empire.”³⁰ By the time the Colonial Office actually got in touch with Bermuda's Attorney General in August of 1935,³¹ the recommendations under question had already been discarded in response to the local protests.³² But a flurry of memos suggest the

Colonial Office was ready to act; although officials noted that the disallowance of Bermudian legislation would be an “unusual step,” the proposals were considered so extreme that the Secretary of State would have no alternative but to intervene.³³ Organizing from both above and below, black civil society and women’s rights activists thus formed a powerful front against the local oligarchy, able to overturn legislative proposals and potentially even override the island’s longstanding local autonomy within the British Empire.

Disconnections

The protests against the 1935 Report on Unemployment marked a high point in Bermudian civil society activism and illustrated the possibility of effective cross-group mobilization. But this enthusiasm was difficult to sustain. In July of 1936, the *Recorder* lamented the lull in political life that seemed to have taken over the island just one year after the protest at Alexandria Hall.³⁴ This stood in stark contrast to islands in the Caribbean proper, where wide-scale labour strikes and riots in the mid- to late-1930s brought the reality of race and class discrimination to the forefront of public debate and prompted a wave of nationalist and labour organization (Hart 1998). This period also opened up new spaces for women’s activism, both within labour and nationalist organizations and in new women’s clubs and federations (Reddock 1994; Gregg 2005). While Jamaica saw the election of its first woman (teacher and social activist Mary Morris-Knibb) to public office in 1939, bills to expand suffrage to women in Bermuda were defeated again in 1937 and 1942. This period also saw increasing tensions between key Bermudian activists like Tucker and Morrell, culminating in a severing of relations between the BWSS and *Recorder* in May of 1943.

The split built on longstanding tensions simmering beneath the ideological alliance built between the two in the 1930s. Indeed, although the *Recorder* consistently supported the cause of women’s suffrage, the paper also expressed concern from the outset about some of the apparent gaps between the suffragists’ ideology and practice. In particular, the paper pointed to the close

links between the BWSS and two other organizations: the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE), a charitable organization with chapters in different British dominions, and the Bermuda Welfare Society (BWS), which had overseen the island's district nursing programme since 1925. Although not officially affiliated, many of the Society's most prominent suffragists were members of one or both of these organizations. As the *Recorder* pointed out, the practices of the IODE contradicted the suffragist's commitment to advancing the rights of black and white women alike, as the organization's Craddock Scholarship was available only to white girls.³⁵ The BWS was technically open to all but required district nurses to be official "Queen's nurses," a qualification that required training at hospitals in England known to discriminate against black nurses (Williams 1994, 96-97). As an editorial in the *Recorder* noted, in practice this was "another way of telling the coloured girl that she must try some other profession."³⁶ Editorials supporting the BWSS were thus occasionally accompanied by calls imploring suffragists to expand their agenda and "[g]ive our local nurses a chance, open the doors of scholarships, institute exams for the civil services – in short, work for the alleviation of the evils of the present system."³⁷

The concern for nurses in particular was likely influenced in part by Tucker's early work with the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP) in London. As Tucker noted in a feature on "Nursing in Bermuda" in 1933, one of the LCP's first campaigns had centred around discrimination against nurses in London's hospitals and institutions.³⁸ Back home, Tucker was appalled to find that Bermudian nurses trained in American hospitals were able to work at the island's (severely underfunded) black-only "Nursing Home" or set up their own practice, but were excluded from government hospitals and the BWS.³⁹ Tucker saw this as blatant evidence of discrimination on the island and called on the (male) black community to advocate on behalf of nurses. As he wrote:

We must rouse ourselves from our lethargy and realize that a dignified profession is slowly but surely being wrested from the grasp of our sisters. We must protect them and safeguard their interest. They have a right to be nurses, chemists, or hold any other post for

which they are educationally equipped. Let us look into the matter, and help them to maintain their right to live.⁴⁰

Tucker's appeal tapped into a subject of considerable friction on the island, as evident in a handful of letters to the editor. As one nurse who had recently returned from abroad wrote to the *Recorder*, for example, it was crushing to work so hard and yet "find so many doors closed to us."⁴¹

Tucker's invocation of "the right to live" illustrates his awareness that black women's interests in these years may have included but also likely expanded beyond the desire to vote and into concerns for economic survival. The *Recorder* thus pushed the BWSS to expand their agenda to "do good for the greatest number, which may not necessarily result from the project which is being put forward."⁴² Meetings of the BWSS suggest its members were aware of these critiques,⁴³ prompting Morrell to speak before the Sandy's Educational Association (SEA) in January 1937. The SEA had been organized by Alice Scott and included David Tucker among its members, making the speech a critical opportunity to build bridges across activist circles. But Morrell's speech seems to have taken a more accusatory rather than conciliatory tone, focusing on the political opposition amongst black MCPs. As the *Recorder* covered, according to Morrell:

During the time when the [latest suffrage] Bill was discussed in the House of Assembly, in looking over votes for, and against she discovered that four of the coloured members had voted against it. She asked herself the question, Are they free? She came to the conclusion that they were not; they were dominated by fear, and selfishness.⁴⁴

That this speech did not achieve the desired effect is evident in an editorial published by the *Recorder* a few months later which again expressed ideological support for the suffrage movement but noted that: "[t]he various addresses made by speakers for suffragettes have never given any explanation for their treatment of local nurses and their attitudes on many problems affecting their Negro sisters and brothers."⁴⁵

Another opportunity to connect anti-racist and women's rights agendas more concretely came in May 1938, when the BWSS interviewed Tucker on the question of suffrage in the context of his bid for a seat in the House of Assembly in the island's upcoming elections. Tucker referred to the positive impact of women's suffrage in England and noted favourably the increased presence of women at local political meetings. While Tucker did not address the question of the IODE and BWS directly with Morrell, he did note that some voters worried that women in power would want to take away votes from the black community. Morrell countered by arguing:

From its very beginning the Suffrage Society has been firm in its attitude on the race question. Our forefathers established the political equality of the races in Bermuda and on that basis has been built the satisfactory condition which exists here.

But just because we Suffragists accept the justice of political equality between the races we are the more determined to fight against the unjust discrimination which still exists between the sexes.

46

In a sense, Morrell's response to Tucker mirrored his own logic, which situated sex and race equality as parallel causes. But Morrell's invocation of "the satisfactory condition which exists here" also suggests a certain blindness to the depth of racial discrimination on the island and the barriers facing black women beyond political rights. Indeed, Morrell and others repeatedly responded to calls that they address the problems of the black community by re-stating that "this Society has always upheld that the vote should be granted to all women, irrespective of race."⁴⁷ In doing so, Morrell drew on a wider discourse surrounding race relations in the Caribbean, in which the lack of official distinction on the grounds of colour was taken as evidence of racial equality and used to stifle discussion of racism (Bryan 1991, 17; Lewis 2001, 158). Indeed, statements encouraging black women to speak up at a BWSS meeting in 1942 were tinged by strong admonitions against anyone who would attempt to make suffrage a "racial issue," which would be "strongly depreciated" and a "very

unwise thing.”⁴⁸ Perhaps unsurprisingly, this did not seem to create much space for discussions of the intersections of race and gender. As the BWSS minutes for this particular meeting noted: “Miss Marjorie Bean was the only coloured woman who spoke”⁴⁹ (what exactly she said, unfortunately, went unrecorded).

Morrell and the BWSS seem to have determined that only the most narrow of political agendas (propertied women’s right to vote) could be successful, even if this meant ignoring or eliding other struggles forwarded by black activists and organizations. When challenged by a crowd at St. Paul’s A.M.E. Lyceum to take up the cause of universal suffrage, for example, Morrell argued that “the object of our Society was, that the vote should be granted to women on the same basis as it is or may be granted to men;” if the crowd wanted universal suffrage, “she advised them to draw up a bill to cover their requirements, form themselves into a society and work for it as the women were working.”⁵⁰ Political calculations also seem to have ultimately undermined Tucker’s support for the BWSS. Running again for political office in 1943, Tucker came out explicitly against women’s suffrage, invoking precisely the race-based arguments he had previously chastised. Tucker argued that he had to respond to the “fear on the part of the Coloured people that, with women voting, they would be swamped politically and would cease to exist as members of the House of Assembly” and stated that as a minority group they could not afford to “commit political hari-kari.” Tucker also alluded to frictions over nursing by noting that in the future he hoped that “women of both groups” could get together and “iron out their problems.”⁵¹ In doing so, Tucker seemed to posit himself as a defender of black women’s interests at the same time as he denied them the political franchise, sacrificing the rights of those black women who might have qualified for suffrage for the support of his existing black male voting base.

Tucker’s words came as a considerable shock to the BWSS. In a meeting at the beginning of the next year Morrell described his speech as “a betrayal of the higher standards of education and integrity and a menace to the standards of public life.”⁵² Scott also expressed her surprise at Tucker’s position and stated that the allusion to nurses was “only made to cause discord and to cloud the

issue,” although she added that: “the only slight grievance felt among the Bermuda nurses had been caused by the action of the Welfare Society in not including any of their number as district nurses.” But Scott’s attempt to raise this issue within the BWSS – even when framed in such a delicate way – was quickly dismissed, as Morrell and others repeated the oft-cited explanation that “the only reason” for the Welfare Society insisting on Queens Nurses was because they were “highly qualified and also undergo special training in district nursing.”⁵³ Morrell closed the meeting by proposing a letter to the editor of the *Recorder* “assailing his duplicity and insincerity, severing connections with the paper and requesting a statement of our account as of March 1st.”⁵⁴

Tucker and Morrell would not mend fences until the passing of a women’s suffrage bill in the House of Assembly in April 1944. Although Tucker voted against the bill in the Assembly, he spoke at the BWSS’ victory celebration and praised the organization in the *Recorder* shortly after. As he wrote:

We must offer our congratulations to the Suffrage Society for the dignified way in which they have waged their fight. Less than 300 ladies were powerful enough to alter our franchise. Surely 20,000 people, if united, should be able to bring about universal suffrage, and thereby, give every adult in the Colony an opportunity to have a voice in the affairs of Government.⁵⁵

Tucker’s enthusiasm for a united front in favour of universal suffrage and against racial discrimination, however, proved overly optimistic. The BWSS dissolved soon after the bill passed, rather than moving into the broader realm of women’s rights and social reform hinted at in some of Morrell’s speeches and advocated by the *Recorder*. Practical steps to address discrimination in healthcare would have to wait until the mid-1950s and the first black BWS nurse was not hired until the 1960s (Williams 1994, 122-148; Williams 2007, 48-51). And while the majority of Caribbean islanders obtained universal adult suffrage over the course of the mid-1940s to mid-1950s (Buddan 2004), all adults over 25 would not receive the vote in Bermuda until 1963 (Swan 2009, 14-18; Zuill 1999, 201-203).

Conclusion

An analysis of the relationship between the *Recorder* and the BWSS in the 1930s and 1940s vividly illustrates both the powerful potential and the tensions shaping civil society mobilization against oligarchical rule in the interwar British Atlantic. The *Recorder* challenged the opposition to women's suffrage among black politicians, highlighting the ideological connections between women's rights and black activism in these years. When key figures like Tucker and Morrell were able to unite around particular issues (such as the Report on Unemployment), they could also serve as a powerful obstacle to the white male elite oligarchy. But the BWSS's legitimacy in the black community was hampered by its failure to address the problem of discrimination in nursing head on or consider agendas beyond political rights for propertied women, while Tucker temporarily abandoned his support of the BWSS in his pursuit of political power. When push came to shove, both privileged the priorities of their perceived "group" (whether defined as "women" [read: white women] or the "black community" [read: black men]).

These approaches were at least partly strategic, a response to the extremely conservative context in which any expansion of rights was seen as a fundamental threat to the island's rigid social system. But the tendency of both to see women's rights and the anti-racist struggle as parallel (but not necessarily intersecting) causes likely also reflected the marginalization of black women by both sides. While both the *Recorder* and the BWSS claimed to represent the interests of black women and advocated on their behalf, neither appears to have provided a strong platform for the actual black women activists within their midst. Women like Alice Scott and Marjorie Bean are mentioned only sporadically in the *Recorder*, as members of associations or keynote speakers at meetings.⁵⁶ When they appear in BWSS meeting minutes, their concerns are frequently unrecorded or dismissed by other participants (as evident above). As a result, we have little sense of their lived reality at the intersection of race and sex discrimination or how they managed the tensions between their different activist allegiances. Perhaps if these women had been given more space within

the BWSS to speak or the chance to write their own articles for the *Recorder*, their experiences might have illustrated more concretely the fundamental fallacy of separating women's rights and black activist agendas and the powerful potential of a united feminist, anti-racist platform.

References

Primary Source Collections

Bermuda Woman Suffrage Society, Private Papers, Bermuda Archives, Hamilton, Bermuda.

Colonial Office and predecessors: Bermuda, Original Correspondence, CO 37, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, U.K. Recorder, Bermuda National Library (BNL) – Digital Collection: <http://bnl.contentdm.oclc.org/>

The Royal Gazette and Colonist Daily, Bermuda National Library (BNL) – Digital Collection: <http://bnl.contentdm.oclc.org/>

Secondary Sources

Alexander, Robert J. 2004. *A History of Organized Labor in the English-Speaking West Indies*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Altink, Henrice. 2012. "'We are Equal to Men in Ability to do Anything!': African Jamaican Women and Citizenship in the Interwar Years." In *Women's Activism: Global Perspectives from the 1890s to the Present*, edited by Francisca de Haan, Margaret Allen, June Purvis and Krassimira Daskalova, 77-89. London and New York: Routledge.

Barriteau, Eudine and Alan Cobley, eds. 2001. *Stronger, Surer, Bolder, Ruth Nita Barrow: Social Change and International Development*. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.

Bashford, Alison and Philippa Levine, eds. 2010. *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Beckles, Hilary McD. 2004. *Chattel House Blues: Making of a Democratic Society in Barbados*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.

Benbow, Colin H. 1994. *Gladys Morrell and the Women's Suffrage Movement in Bermuda*. Bermuda: The Writers' Machine.

Bolland, O. Nigel. 2001. *The Politics of Labour in the British Caribbean: The Social Origins of Authoritarianism and Democracy in the Labour Movement*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.

Bourbonnais, Nicole. 2016. *Birth Control in the Decolonizing Caribbean: Reproductive Politics and Practice on Four Islands, 1930-1970*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Brodber, Erna. 1986. "The Pioneering Miss Bailey." *Jamaica Journal* 19(2) (May-July): 9-14.

Brown, Walton Jr. 2011. *Bermuda and the Struggle for Reform: Race, Politics and Ideology 1944-1998*. Bermuda: Cahow Press.

Bryan, Patrick. 1991. *The Jamaican People 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control*. London: Macmillan Caribbean.

Buddan, Robert. 2004. "Universal Adult Suffrage in Jamaica and the Caribbean Since 1994." *Social and Economic Studies* 53(4) (December): 135-162.

Bush, Barbara. 2016. "Feminising Empire? British Women's Activist Networks in Defending and Challenging Empire from 1918 to Decolonisation." *Women's History Review* 25(4) (February): 499-519.

- Butler, Dale. 1987. *Dr. E.F. Gordon—Hero of Bermuda's Working Class: The Political Career of Dr. E.F. Gordon and the Evolution of the Bermuda Workers' Association*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1: 139-167.
- Curtis, Celia Palmer. 1994. *A History of Women in Bermuda*. Bermuda: The Ministry of Community & Cultural Affairs, Heritage Exhibition.
- De Haan, Francisca, Margaret Allen, June Purvis and Krassimira Daskalova, eds. 2012. *Women's Activism: Global Perspectives from the 1890s to the Present*. London and New York: Routledge Press.
- High, Steven. 2003. "The Racial and Class Politics of Wartime Labour 'Control' in Bermuda, 1940-1945." Paper presented at the *North American Labour History Conference*, Wayne State University, October.
- hooks, bell. 2005. "Feminism: A Transformational Politic." In *Feminist Theory: A Reader* (2nd Edition), edited by Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski, 464-469. Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Ewing, Adam. 2014. *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ford-Smith, Honor. 1988. "Una Marson: Black Nationalist and Feminist Writer." *Caribbean Quarterly* 34(3/4) (September/December): 22-37.
- , 2004. "Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular: Performing Engendered Nationalisms in the UNIA in Jamaica." *Interventions* 6(1): 18-44.
- , 1982. "Women and the Garvey Movement in Jamaica." In *Garvey: His Work and Impact*, edited by Rupert Lewis and Patrick Bryan, 73-83. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Gregg, Veronica Marie, ed. 2005. *Caribbean Women: An Anthology of Non-Fiction Writing, 1890-1980*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Hart, Richard. 1998. *From Occupation to Independence, A Short History of the People's of the English-Speaking Caribbean Region*. London: Pluto Press.
- Hodgson, Eva. 1997. *Second Class Citizens, First Class Men*, 3rd edition. Bermuda: Writer's Machine.
- Howe, Glenford. 2002. *Race, War and Nationalism: A Social History of West Indians in the First World War*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Lewis, Linden. 2001. "The Contestation of Race in Barbadian Society and the Camouflage of Conservatism." In *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, edited by Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl, 144-195. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Macpherson, Anne. 2007. *From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 1912-1982*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Meeks, Brian and Folke Lindahl, eds. 2001. *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Philip, Ira. 1987. *Freedom Fighters (From Monk to Mazumbo)*. London: Akira Press.
- Post, Ken. 1978. *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

- Putnam, Lara. 2013. *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Reddock, Rhoda. 1994. *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago: A History*. London: Zed Books.
- , 2014. "The First Mrs. Garvey: Pan-Africanism and Feminism in the Early 20th Century British Colonial Caribbean." *Feminist Africa* 19: 58-77.
- Singh, Kelvin. 1994. *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State: Trinidad 1917-1945*. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Sinha, Mrinalini, Donna J. Guy and Angela Woollacott. 1998. "Introduction: Why Feminisms and Internationalism?" *Gender & History* 10(3) (November): 345-357.
- Swan, Quito. 2009. *Black Power in Bermuda: The Struggle for Decolonization*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Vassell, Linnette Silvera. 1993. "Voluntary Women's Associations in Jamaica: The Jamaica Federation of Women, 1944-1962." M. Phil diss., The University of the West Indies.
- Williams, J. Randolph. 1994. *Care: 100 Years of Hospital Care in Bermuda*. Hamilton, Bermuda: Camden Editions.
- , 2007. *Lois: Bermuda's Grande Dame of Politics*. Hamilton, Bermuda: Camden Editions.
- , 1988. *Peaceful Warrior: Sir Edward Trenton Richards*. Hamilton, Bermuda: Camden Editions.
- Zuill, W.S. 1999. *The Story of Bermuda and Her People*. 3rd ed. London: Macmillan Education.

¹ I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Reena N. Goldthree and Natanya Duncan for including my work in this collection, to the peer-reviewers for their feedback, to Kristy Warren for helping me clarify my approach and fill in several missing pieces, and to Karla Ingemann for digging up pictures from the Bermuda Archives.

² The Recorder was accessed through the library's online text-searchable database: <http://bnl.contentdm.oclc.org/>. There are some gaps in coverage, notably in the mid-1940s.

³ Editorial, "The Centenary of the Abolition of Slavery," *Recorder*, August 26, 1933, 2.

⁴ See, for example, "Country-Wide Protest Against the Unemployment Report," *Recorder*, June 1, 1935, 1. Although I do not have figures on readership for these years, an article in *The Bermudian* puts circulation at 5,000 during the "height" of the *Recorder*, likely referring to the 1940s-60s, when the population of the island was around 30-40,000 people. Meredith Ebbin, "A Trio of Pioneering Newsman: A look back at the lives of three publishing legends," *The Bermudian.com*, August 1, 2016, accessed online at: <http://www.thebermudian.com/features/1917-a-trio-of-pioneering-newsmen>.

⁵ Although there is little information on these women in the academic literature or my sources (as discussed in the Conclusion to this paper), brief biographies of Scott and Bean can be found at: "Alice Scott," *bermuda bios*, <http://www.bermudabiographies.bm/Biographies/Biography-Alice%20Scott.html>, and "A fitting tribute to Dame Marjorie Bean," *The Royal Gazette*, May 12, 2015, <http://www.royalgazette.com/article/20150512/ISLAND03/150519934>.

⁶ See, for example, Florence A. Underwood to S.E.V. Luke, December 6, 1935, CO 37/282/5, and Eleanor F. Rathbone to the Right Hon J.H. Thomas, Letter, November 29, 1935, CO 37/282/5, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, U.K. (hereafter "NAUK").

⁷ "Note of Points Made by Mrs. Morrell of the Bermuda Woman Suffrage Society Before the Empire Parliamentary Delegation of Imperial Parliament," (Petitions (1931-1944), Bermuda Woman Suffrage Society, Private Papers, Bermuda Archives (hereafter "BWSS, Private Papers, BA").

⁸ David Tucker, "Secondary Schools in Bermuda," *Recorder*, December 16, 1933, 5.

⁹ Local histories attribute editorials in these years directly to Tucker (see Hodgson 1997, 32; Benbow 1994, 56). I have erred on the side of caution and speak generally of "editorials under Tucker" since the authorship is not clear.

¹⁰ Editorial, "Suffragettes," *Recorder*, December 8, 1934, 2.

¹¹ "The Week in Brief," *Recorder*, March 16, 1935, 1.

¹² Editorial, "Suffragettes," *Recorder*, December 8, 1934, 2.

¹³ See for example: "Women's Progress During Past Year," *Recorder*, January 9, 1937, 5. "Coloured Women Serve the Country in the U.S. Army," *Recorder*, May 19, 1943, 2; "Negro Jamaican Girl at League of Nations" (from the Jamaica Gleaner), *Recorder*, November 14, 1936, 1.

¹⁴ Editorial, "Suffragettes," *Recorder*, December 8, 1934, 2.

¹⁵ Editorial, "Amelia Earhart," *Recorder*, July 7, 1937, 2.

¹⁶ Editorial, "New Year 1938," *Recorder*, January 1, 1938, 2.

¹⁷ Editorial, "Bermuda's Abuse of Power," *Recorder*, February 8, 1936, 2.

¹⁸ Editorial, "Amelia Earhart," *Recorder*, July 17, 1937, 2.

¹⁹ "No.75: Report on Unemployment," May 15, 1935 (Journals of the House of Assembly of Bermuda: Session 1934-35, BA), 284, 282.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 280.

²¹ Editorial, "After Us, the Deluge!" *Recorder*, May 25, 1935, 2.

²² "Country-Wide Protest Against the Unemployment Report," *Recorder*, June 1, 1935, 1.

²³ "Editorial: Birth Control," *Recorder*, May 22, 1937, 2.

²⁴ Bermuda Woman Suffrage Society, "12 Annual Report," March 12, 1935 (Annual Reports: 1931-1942, BWSS, Private Papers, BA), 3.

²⁵ Gladys C. Morrell, "Letter to the Editor: Defending the Defenceless," *The Royal Gazette and Colonist Daily*, May 28, 1935, 3.

²⁶ "Suffrage Society Score Unemployment Report," *The Royal Gazette and Colonist Daily*, May 30, 1935, 8.

²⁷ Margaret E. Misick, "Letter to the Editor: The Catholic Attitude," *The Royal Gazette and Colonist Daily*, May 27, 1937, 2.

²⁸ "Suffrage Society Score Unemployment Report," *The Royal Gazette and Colonist Daily*, May 30, 1935, 8.

²⁹ Mrs. John Morrell to Miss Underwood, Letter, May 27, 1935 (CO 37/282/5, NAUK).

³⁰ N. Astor to Malcolm Macdonald, Letter, August 1, 1935 (CO 37/282/5, NAUK).

³¹ A.C.C. Parkinson to E.J. Waddington, August 19, 1935 (CO 37/282/9, NAUK).

³² "Country-Wide Protest Against the Unemployment Report," *Recorder*, June 1, 1935, 5.

³³ See H. Beckett, Note, August 14, 1935, and [Illegible author], Note, August 15, 1935, A.J.R. O'Brien, August 23, 1935, Note (CO 37/282/9, NAUK).

³⁴ W.E. Wharton, "Practical Policies," *Recorder*, July 4, 1936, 4.

³⁵ Editorial, "Woman Suffrage: Think it Over," *Recorder*, March 16, 1935, 2.

³⁶ Editorial, "The Nursing Home," *Recorder*, November 3, 1934, 2.

³⁷ Editorial, "An Appeal to the Suffragettes," *Recorder*, March 30, 1935, 2. See also: "What about it, Suffragettes?," *Recorder*, August 29, 1936, 2; Editorial, "Local Politics," *Recorder*, January 9, 1937, 2.

³⁸ David Tucker, "Nursing in Bermuda," *Recorder*, December 2, 1933, 1.

³⁹ Editorial, "The Welfare Society," *Recorder*, February 24, 1934, 2. For more on the Bermuda Nursing Association and Nursing Home, see Williams (1994, 88-107); on nursing in the Caribbean more generally, see Barriteau and Cobley (2001).

⁴⁰ David Tucker, "Nursing in Bermuda," *Recorder*, December 2, 1933, 1.

⁴¹ An Anxious Reader of the Recorder, "Letter to the Editor: Local Nurses," *Recorder*, March 7, 1936, 5. See also George Dixon, "Letter to the Editor," *Recorder*, December 3, 1938, 4; Vox Populi, "Letter to the Editor," *Recorder*, December 15, 1934, 5; "Visitor Lectures at St. Paul's A.M.E. Lyceum," *Recorder*, August 15, 1936, 1, 6.

⁴² Editorial, "Woman Suffrage: Think it Over," *Recorder*, March 16, 1935, 2.

⁴³ "Committee Meeting Minutes," April 1, 1942, (Minutes 1940-42, BWSS, Private Papers, BA), 1.

⁴⁴ "Jottings from Somerset," *Recorder*, January 16, 1937, 5.

⁴⁵ Editorial, "Politics Again," *Recorder*, April 10, 1937, 2.

⁴⁶ "Members of Women's Suffrage Society Interview Assembly Candidates," *Recorder*, May 28, 1938, 4.

⁴⁷ "Committee Meeting," May 19, 1943 (Minutes 1943-45, BWSS, Private Papers, BA), 1.

⁴⁸ "Monthly Meeting," May 5, 1942 (Minutes 1943-45, BWSS, Private Papers, BA), 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

⁵⁰ BWSS, "Report of Debate Held in St. Paul's Lyceum, Hamilton" (Minutes 1943-45, BWSS, Private Papers, BA), 2.

⁵¹ "Pembroke Candidates Address Political Meeting," *Recorder*, May 12, 1943, 2.

⁵² BWSS, "Committee Meeting," February 29, 1944, Minutes 1943-45, (BWSS, Private Papers, BA), 1.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Benbow (1994, 56). The paper from this date was not available through the Bermuda National Library's Digital Collection.

⁵⁶ See, for example, mentions of Alice Scott at "Sandys Educational Association Honours Mr. David Tucker, M.A.," *Recorder*, October 7, 1933, 3; INTERESTED, "Letter to the Editor: Omitted," *Recorder*, March 24, 1934, 5; "Society", *Recorder*, April 14, 1934, 5; on Marjorie Bean at "Old Towne Notes," *Recorder*, March 10, 1934, 4.



"Race" and Class among *Nacionalista* Women in Interwar Puerto Rico: The Activism of Dominga de la Cruz Becerril and Trina Padilla de Sanz¹

Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz

Associate Professor
Director of the Undergraduate Studies Program
Sociology Department
Binghamton University

"We need to recognize not only differences but also the relational nature of those differences... White women and women of color not only live different lives but white women live the lives they do in large part because women of color live the ones they do."

Elsa Barkley Brown, "What Has Happened Here" (1992)

Abstract: This article examines the lives of two prominent Nationalist women from Puerto Rico: Dominga de la Cruz Becerril (1909-1981) and Trina Padilla de Sanz (1864-1957). These two women, one black and working-class and the other white and patrician, were emblematic figures of the existing tensions within the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and the broader independence movement. Tracing the social changes and political conflicts in Puerto Rico between the two world wars, I illustrate how both women have been positioned in the history of such conflicts and in the contentious 1930s debates over the Puerto Rican national question. Both women embodied racialized differences that, in turn, were emblematic of the multiplicity that accompanied being a Nationalist woman and the complexities inherent to how “the fatherland” was envisioned and fashioned during the interwar period.

Keywords: race, gender, class, nationalism, Puerto Rico

How to cite

Jiménez-Muñoz, Gladys M. 2018. ““Race” and Class among *Nacionalista* Women in Interwar Puerto Rico: The Activism of Dominga de la Cruz Becerril and Trina Padilla de Sanz.” *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12: 169-198

Scholarship on the history of Puerto Rican women has made great strides in recent decades (Colón-Warren 2003; APIHM 2013). Located within that tradition, this article examines: what "race" has meant to women in Puerto Rico (white and, primarily, non-white) within the context of the struggle for national independence; how "race" structured these women's lives and social conditions; and the images that have been socially constructed of them, both as Puerto Rican women and as racially located Puerto Ricans. Furthermore, this article aims to contribute to the interdisciplinary scholarship on gender in the Caribbean by exploring how gender ideologies developed historically in a colonial context, with all its complexities and contradictions, including the fissures within and between its social protagonists (Shepherd 1995; Beckles 1999; Moitt 2001; Moore, Higman, Campbell, and Bryan 2003; Gaspar and Hine 2004).

My analysis of the lives of Dominga de la Cruz Becerril (1909-1981) and Trina Padilla de Sanz (1864-1957), one black and working-class and the other Creole-white and patrician, offers us a window to examine the contradictions within the leading anti-imperialist organization in Puerto Rico during the interwar period—the *Partido Nacionalista*—as well as related tensions across the broader movement against U.S. colonialism on the island. The contradictions embedded within the Puerto Rican national body/"family" highlight the gendered racial differences and structural inequalities persisting underneath anticolonial sentiments in early-twentieth-century Puerto Rico. Furthermore, by acknowledging race as an important category for social analysis we can unsettle mainstream historical narratives on the national question in order to suggest that, in Puerto Rican history, black lives and voices matter too. In this way we can transform and enrich our understanding of the intellectual history of anticolonial movements (Santiago-Valles 2007; Rodríguez-Silva 2012; del Moral 2013; Llorens 2014). The intersection of race, gender and nation, as an abstract-conceptual process and as a lived experience, has proven to be more fundamental than generally acknowledged in socio-historical inquiry, especially within Puerto Rican Women's History (some exceptions include: Matos Rodríguez 1995; Findlay 1999; Jiménez-Muñoz 2003; Roy-Féquièrre 2004; Alegría Ortega and Ríos González 2005).

Examining the changes and social conflicts in Puerto Rico between the world wars, I illustrate how both Dominga de la Cruz and Trina Padilla have been positioned in the history of those conflicts and in the contentious 1930s debates over the Puerto Rican national question. I discuss how both women embodied racialized differences symbolic of the multiple identities associated with being a *Nacionalista* woman, complexities inherent to how la patria (the fatherland/motherland) was envisioned and fashioned at that time. The article is divided into six parts, beginning with a brief description of the dire situation of early twentieth-century Puerto Rico and of the political organization to which de la Cruz and Padilla belonged, followed by some preliminary biographical data on both these women. The third section addresses the racial and class-based inequalities constituting the lived experience of both women, while the fourth section considers the role of Catholicism and the gendered transcendence of socio-racial differences within the national imaginary. The fifth section scrutinizes the correlation between both women, the island's outlawed national flag, and related patriotic iconography. Lastly, I focus on the poetics of peoplehood and national community—embraced and ascribed—between Dominga de la Cruz and Trina Padilla.

Socioeconomic Conditions and the *Nacionalistas*

After Spain was replaced as the island's colonial ruler in 1898, North American corporations (e.g., tobacco manufacturing and the garment industry) led by the U.S. sugar conglomerate rapidly took over Puerto Rico's local economy (Clark 1930, 606-607, 646; Perloff 1950, 71, 136-137, 406). By the 1920s, the provincial hacienda system declined considerably in view of falling world-market prices and the credit controls inflicted by U.S. colonialism. As coffee planters laid off growing numbers of rural labourers, the latter flocked to towns and cities joining Puerto Rico's already expanding impoverished population (Clark 1930, 521-522; Perloff 1950, 88; Picó 1983). By the late 1920s overall wages had plunged and mass hunger became widespread, a situation soon aggravated by the Great Depression and because basic goods were more expensive locally on account of

the colonial government's fiscal policies (Clark 1930, 565; Diffie and Diffie 1931, 174-175, 182). By the mid-1930s two-thirds of the island's labouring population was officially unemployed (Quintero Rivera 1975, 24-42).

By the time Dominga de la Cruz Becerril and Trina Padilla de Sanz emerged as prominent members of the Partido *Nacionalista* de Puerto Rico in the 1930s that organization had changed considerably. Established in 1922, the Partido *Nacionalista* began as a moderate pro-independence faction that broke with the old Partido Unión de Puerto Rico (Unionistas). Like the Unionistas, the *Nacionalistas* from 1922-1930 were led by besieged coffee-growing, Creole-white hacendados and their affluent urban-intellectual kinfolk, albeit supported by bankrupt tobacco farmers and indigent peasants connected to the haciendas (Ferrao 1990, 40-41, 48-53; Rosado 2003, 117-144). However, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions among Puerto Rico's labouring-poor majorities contributed to a shift in the social composition—and, in part, in the political practice—of the *Nacionalista* party in general and particularly among its leadership after 1927 (Santiago-Valles 2007, 112-113).

From 1930-1938 more than half of party leadership (local and national) now consisted of racially heterogeneous small-property owners, white-collar workers, petty vendors, and students (Quintero Rivera 1975, 24-50; Ferrao 1990, 90, 92-93). By 1928-1930 the party was moving towards a more aggressively Latin Americanist and anti-imperialist position: the 1930 election of the mulatto lawyer and fiery orator, Pedro Albizu Campos, as the organization's president reflected that change in composition and party goals. Total party membership figures during this period are imprecise (in part because of the mounting government persecution). However, the one time the *Nacionalistas* participated in colonial elections they received approximately 5,000 votes (TFP 1982; Ferrao 1990).

Dominga de la Cruz Beceril

Published before de la Cruz's death in 1981, the principal biographical source we have on de la Cruz comes from North American writer and photographer Margaret Randall (1979) who interviewed de la Cruz then living in exile in Cuba. In this testimonio de la Cruz describes herself, first and foremost, in social class terms. The daughter of manual labourers Domingo Clarillo de la Cruz and Catalina Beceril, she was orphaned at the age of four and parceled out along with her three siblings to the homes of different families. For a few years she came to live with her godmother, Isabel Mota de Ramery, who was married to a Spaniard, a proprietor of a coffee plantation, following the custom of large-landowning families to ritually adopt (usually as house servants) the dependent children of their sharecroppers and ex-slaves.

According to de la Cruz, the death of her godmother and economic difficulties interrupted her schooling in the fourth grade. The demands of the colonial educational system also created problems for how people raised their children, negatively affecting school attendance in the case of girls (ibid, 15, 19; Jiménez de Wagenheim 2016, 34). When the European war worsened the limited market for local coffee production, many coffee haciendas collapsed, including the one owned by her godmother's husband. Consequently, de la Cruz was sent away to live with the rest of her siblings, then subsisting under extreme penury in the city of Mayagüez. Along with her sister, de la Cruz toiled in the needleworks cottage industry (Randall 1979, 19-21, 23-25). Black and mulatto female needleworkers like her were rarely supervisors but rather operated the sewing machines and/or sewed by hand. However, she later got a job at a tobacco-products factory eventually becoming a reader for the employees on the shop floor, following the established working-class tradition throughout the Atlantic world (Tinajero 2010).

The general racialization of the island labour market at this time needs to be taken into account. At one end of the spectrum, Creole-white men comprised around 90% of most professions, especially the better remunerated "higher careers" (e.g., lawyers, physicians, engineers, pharmacists, authors, graduated reporters, and

college instructors). The few Afro-descended Puerto Rican men and "native" women of all races in the professions were disproportionately clustered in low-paying "lower careers" such as teachers and registered nurses. At the other end of the spectrum—i.e., manual work—non-white women were heavily concentrated in domestic service and to a lesser extent manufacturing, while Afro-descended men were significantly overrepresented in the harshest jobs like sugarcane work and dockyard labour (USBC 1941, 61-65; Crespo-Kebler 2005, 137-139).

It was not until the late 1920s that de la Cruz first heard the speeches of the emerging leader of the *Nacionalistas*, Pedro Albizu Campos. At that time, she also benefitted from the workers' spirited discussions inside the cigar factory as she read out loud local newspaper coverage of the April 6, 1932 incursion into the colonial capitol building by *Nacionalista* demonstrators. The protesters were denouncing the legislative bill to transform the Puerto Rican flag into the official emblem of the island's colonial government, rather than the banner of the future Puerto Rican republic the *Nacionalistas* were struggling to establish. The proposed 1932 law would have sullied and historically deracinated the flag created in 1895 by the Puerto Rican Section of the Cuban Revolutionary Party. The latter organization was then fighting to liberate both islands from Spanish colonialism, a struggle interrupted by the U.S. entry into the War of 1898 (Hidalgo Paz 2008). Albizu Campos had condemned the 1932 bill because "he considered the Puerto Rican flag very sacred, too lofty and exalted, to allow those selling out their homeland in order to use it for their politicking." During that confrontation, a *Nacionalista* protester fell from the second-floor interior balcony and died from the injuries. "But, the flag was safe. They took Albizu to jail, but he was freed immediately" (Randall 1979, 30).

Within Puerto Rican history Dominga de la Cruz is mostly remembered for her 1930s *Nacionalista* militancy, in particular for her participation in the events leading up to the Ponce Massacre in 1937. On Palm Sunday of that year, a peaceful march of *Nacionalistas* assembled in the city of Ponce to commemorate the 1873 abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico and to protest the

federal government's incarceration of Albizu Campos and most of the party's top leadership recently convicted of sedition. Risking her life, Dominga de la Cruz ran to raise the Puerto Rican flag when its designated bearer was wounded in the hail of police bullets mowing down the unarmed protesters (Ponce Massacre Commission of Inquiry 1937; Moraza Ortiz 2001).

In Randall's interview, de la Cruz describes her work with the *Nacionalistas* throughout the 1930s as primarily writing articles for the newspaper *El Sol* published in Mayagüez, as well as preparing flyers related to working-class conditions and *Nacionalista* activities. On one occasion, she wrote a short article about Albizu Campos, later printed on leaflets, which she subsequently distributed herself (Randall 1979, 37). Until now, I have been unable to confirm her actual authorship because the pertinent articles in *El Sol* were signed "anonymous." Such precautions are understandable given the widespread harassment, surveillance and repression *Nacionalista* militants experienced, above all during 1932-1938 (Meneses de Albizu Campos 2007).

After the Ponce Massacre, de la Cruz lived in San Juan for two years reciting other authors' poems, giving presentations in schools, theatres, and public forums, such as El Ateneo de Puerto Rico. Taking advantage of the relative political liberalism under the new colonial administration of Governor Rexford Guy Tugwell, she shifted her politico-cultural activism from the street to the performance hall (Randall 1979, 65). In 1941, she received a homage and tribute at the Escuela Superior Central in Santurce, Puerto Rico. Albizu Campos' wife, Laura Meneses, attended this activity and suggested that de la Cruz should further develop her artistic abilities by studying in Cuba. Following that advice, de la Cruz relocated to Cuba from 1942 to 1944 (ibid., 61-68).

When she returned to Puerto Rico, the local Communist Party helped her gain access to several important venues, where she gave recitals in theatres such as La Perla in Ponce and El Tapia in San Juan. But with the rising tide of Cold War intolerance, Dr. José Lanauze Rolón, president of the island's Communist Party, advised her to leave Puerto Rico again. Lanauze recommended that, given the

renewed and expanded government persecution, she use her art and talents to denounce the political situation in Puerto Rico. Obviously, McCarthyite hysteria was hardly a favourable climate for artists, intellectuals, and performers—principally those from colonized populations and who moved in anti-imperialist circles. Such a fate also befell other radical Afro-diasporic artists and activists like Paul Robeson and the Trinidadian Claudia Jones. De la Cruz left Puerto Rico in 1945, briefly travelled the Americas, and lived in Mexico for 16 years. She returned to Puerto Rico in 1976 for four months, after having lived in exile in Cuba since 1962 (Randall 1979, 68-71). The continuing lack of published works about—and by—Dominga de la Cruz confirms the neglect that black and mulatto women have been subjected to within Puerto Rican history and letters (Notable exceptions include: Randall 1979; Jiménez Muñoz 2003; Jiménez de Wagenheim 2016).

Trina Padilla de Sanz

Trina Padilla was the daughter of prominent writer, poet, and physician, José Gualberto Padilla, better known as "El Caribe." Her father also owned the La Monserrate sugar plantation in Vega Baja. The family had two other houses: one in front of the Plaza de Recreo in Vega Baja and another in Old San Juan on O'Donnell Street, in front of the Plaza Colón. For much of her childhood, Padilla lived in the city of Arecibo in a mansion refurbished by Padilla's parents but formerly owned by the heirs of Don Francisco Ulanga, a prominent and wealthy Spaniard who had been Mayor of Arecibo in 1860. Padilla studied in Ruiz Arnao High School in Arecibo and then in the Royal Conservatory of Madrid (Fernández Sanz 1996, 57-59).

According to her granddaughter and biographer Yolanda Fernández Sanz (1996), at 18 Padilla married Angel Sanz Ambros: a distinguished property owner, "Spaniard of royal spirit," and "the Queen's Procurador [local barrister and legal representative]" who was responsible for the Customs Office in Arecibo. The 1898 shift from Spanish colonialism to U.S. colonial rule forced Padilla to abandon the Ulanga mansion and move to the Fernandina manor. A widow at the age of 45,

Padilla was left with five children and required to live off her remaining inheritance supplemented by teaching piano lessons. She also became a freelance writer for newspapers and magazines, all of which allowed her to renovate “Casa Fernandina” and take care of her family (Fernández Sanz 1996, 57-61).

Unlike Dominga de la Cruz, Trina Padilla is well represented within Puerto Rico’s historical record and politico-literary memory as a celebrated intellectual, poet and writer (Miller 2016). Known in the world of letters as “La Hija del Caribe,” she published eight books and championed female suffrage as a founding member of two pioneering women’s rights organizations (Fernández Sanz 1996, 51; Azize 1985, 117, 123-124). Padilla’s numerous newspaper articles also reflected her concern for the arts, Catholicism, childhood education, and patriotic values—albeit, from a patrician perspective.

Similar to de la Cruz, Padilla belonged to the *Partido Nacionalista* and was an enthusiastic supporter of Pedro Albizu Campos. However, differences with the *Nacionalista* leadership eventually led her to leave the party. On September 23, 1936, during the celebration of the Grito de Lares, Albizu Campos made a speech announcing that “for every Puerto Rican [killed by the colonial regime], ten Americans would fall” referring to the assassination of two more *Nacionalistas* by the colonial police in February of that same year. Padilla, also a speaker at the rally that day, then declared: “I am and will always be pro-independence but [today] I am going home. I do not believe in violence” (Fernández Sanz 1996, 162). As discussed below, that stance strongly differed from Dominga de la Cruz’s role in forming the *Nacionalista* nurse corps assisting the party’s paramilitary units.

Racial and Social-class Disparities

Dominga de la Cruz’s lived experience was that of domestic needle manufacture and later the tobacco workshops. By 1930 needlework employed most of the labour force in manufacturing owned by U.S.-based commercial clothing outlets and textile businesses. Labourers earned far less than most agricultural workers,

who themselves lived near starvation (Picó 1983, 22-23). Needlework in particular generated even worse deprivation: this was where her two daughters had died of rickets. De la Cruz tells Randall that needlework in Mayagüez was "slave labor" where she and her sister worked "badly nourished." This municipality then had one of the highest tuberculosis levels in the entire island when TB and anaemia were the most prevalent diseases of those years (Randall 1979, 23). Other serious maladies included high rates of infant mortality (Fernós 1928, 461-467).

But for Trina Padilla, working people were figures that enlivened and adorned the picturesque scenery surrounding her white-Creole, titled home. "Inés, the fisherman," with his "white pants folded to his knees" would make "his daily morning rounds... dropping off the best of the catch," that fisherman being "part of the landscape of Arecibo." The servants of the house and their uniforms were depicted lovingly as "part of the family." Seated at "the large round table with its white linen tablecloth, Meissen china, and silverware," Padilla instructed her family in observing "all the rules of courtesy and good etiquette. From those rules, no one escaped, not Juan nor José, who served the table and for which occasion he wore pants, a tie, black shoes, and a very starched white long-sleeved shirt" (Fernández Sanz 1996, 114).

For Dominga de la Cruz, making a living during the 1930s Depression (including waged domestic labour) was neither picturesque, nor sentimental. In labouring-poor homes there was no "Meissen china or silverware," just as no fisherman paid "his daily morning visit" since fresh fish was not eaten regularly by the likes of her. She describes a very different dietary regimen: "we used to make tea ...from naranjo [orange-tree] leaves, and mixed it with milk to give to the girls. That would fill them up... This was the situation for many women." It all came down to "Working and finding how to earn more pennies": "what was done to us was a crime" (Randall 1979, 27-28). De la Cruz disclosed: "I didn't understand class struggle, but I did understand my misery" (ibid., 25). Her daily life consisted of hitting the streets in search of her day-to-day subsistence.

Fernández Sanz offers another telling reminiscence about how Padilla understood that island's socio-racial demarcations. The granddaughter had a playmate named Ruth who could not attend social events at the Casino de Puerto Rico, the exclusive club for white-Creole elites. When the granddaughter asked why, Padilla responded: "the day will come when you will not only understand, but you will also come to accept it. Ruth cannot attend because she is not white." Padilla then added, "That's simply the way things are, an injustice invented by men" (Fernández Sanz 1996, 131). Needless to say, neither de la Cruz and her siblings, nor for that matter the leader of Padilla's own political party (Albizu Campos) would have been allowed to attend social functions at this social club either.

I have yet to find documentation as to whether de la Cruz crossed paths with Padilla. Nonetheless, their experiences exemplify Elsa Barkley Brown's (1992) observation in the epigraph opening this article. De la Cruz's life was very much the life of "the rest of the help," of "Inés, the fisherman," and of the "man who used to bring us the warm bread for breakfast," and even like the life of "Ruth." The life of de la Cruz was the life of all those labourers who made the lives of people like Padilla (and her granddaughter) possible.

Gender, Racial-national Unity, and Catholic Militancy

The 1930-1938 shift in the composition of the Nacionalista steering committee still retained Pedro Albizu Campos as President. The scarce female representation in the local and intermediate leadership could have been solved by numerous capable women like Padilla herself and the poet Julia de Burgos. Dominga de la Cruz Becerril and Isolina Rondón (secretary and treasurer) were some of the few women occupying party leadership positions during 1937-1938 (Ferrao 1990, 87). The lack of high-ranking women among the *Nacionalistas* merits greater examination because "women" figured so prominently in nationalist narratives.

For Albizu Campos (1974), women were indispensable to national sovereignty and it was necessary that all women unite above social differences. In order "for the Puerto Rican woman to reach this unity, she has to feel viscerally...the sisterhood with other women, regardless of racial differences and without any distinctions in material goals" (ibid., 201). This socio-racial unity was key to Albizu Campos's nationalist project since for him "the national structure is not an epidermal structure"; rather, "race...follows the transformation of a population pursuing a spiritual ideal" (ibid., 194-95; see also Santiago-Valles 2007). For the *Nacionalista* leader, such a national civilizational renovation required unanimity among all Puerto Rican women: "Where women are divided, the nation will be dismembered...Women bring together the union of a race, the union of a civilization, the union of a people." According to Albizu Campos, "the engine of Puerto Rican unity has to be the Puerto Rican woman" (Albizu Campos 1974, 200). But, of course, such a cultural transformation would not necessarily imply a shift in other hierarchical relationships and gender imbalances. Elsewhere, I explain how favouring women's political participation in Puerto Rico hardly meant overhauling conservative social values (Jiménez-Muñoz 1994-95), a fact confirmed by gender relations remaining unaltered once universal female suffrage was achieved on the island in 1935.

Yet *Nacionalista* women did participate in early 1930s party polemics. The party's leadership asked de la Cruz to oversee the "militant ladies of the party" for the 1933 annual Asamblea Nacional (National Assembly) in the city of Caguas. Party women asked her to write about "the changes women had to undergo" within the *Partido Nacionalista* (Randall 1979, 38). After conferring with them—and with the party's President—de la Cruz recommended that they not remain something secondary, passive like the Asociación de las Hijas de la Libertad (Daughters of Liberty) established in 1932 originally as the party's female auxiliary within Puerto Rico's high schools (Dávila Marichal 2014; Jiménez de Wagenheim 2016, 311). Instead, they could be something more significant like the Enfermeras del Ejército Libertador (Nurses of the Liberation Army), affiliated with the existing paramilitary corps, the Cadetes de la República. These women "were going through drills and everything, but they wanted more, ...to advance as women as such...not to

imitate men but to stand out as women within the Party." The proposal caught on among party women and de la Cruz was charged with giving it concrete form (Randall 1979, 38-40; Dávila Marichal 2014). That was how the political leadership of this black working-class woman first crystallized and was officially recognized by the Nacionalistas.

Randall's book contains a photograph of the *Nacionalista* December 8, 1935 General Assembly, in which de la Cruz is at the Executive Committee table sitting between the Party's two main leaders Pedro Albizu Campos and Juan Antonio Corretjer (ibid., 39). Evidently, the presidium table at the Assembly of Caguas, where de la Cruz sat, was a very different table from "the large round table with its white linen tablecloth" in Padilla's Arecibo mansion. At the *Nacionalista* Assembly in Caguas, which de la Cruz attended with Albizu Campos and Corretjer, she was not "servicing the table," nor wearing the "white-starched" uniform required of the domestic servants at Padilla's house.

However, the Caguas Assembly's presidium table was not excused from contradictions and hierarchy. At that table, de la Cruz was not the one "sitting in front of the entrance," she was not the one "observ[ing] every little movement." True, that privileged position was occupied by another descendant of slaves from a poor Ponce family similar to hers (namely, Albizu Campos). Yet that honoured seat belonged to someone who, unlike de la Cruz, had surpassed a fourth-grade education: Albizu Campos had attended the University of Vermont on a scholarship and would later continue to Harvard (Rosado 2003, 7, 10-11, 13-14, 20-21, 27-31, 36).

By all accounts, de la Cruz had enormous respect for the figure of Albizu Campos: "We loved Don Pedro, no, not like a myth we mentally had concocted, no. But like a father who wanted his children to have dignity, who educated us to achieve that dignity" (Randall 1979, 42-43). The auto-infantilization in this narrative substantiates how the table at the Caguas Assembly—like the *Partido Nacionalista* itself—was not a place where de la Cruz, as a Puerto Rican woman, could feel, in the very words of Albizu Campos, completely "free," "sovereign,"

and "independent." However, and opposite Padilla's table, de la Cruz was not there to display good manners. There she could claim a certain degree of political validation and agency, exhibiting the same rights and aspirations no less legitimately than a member of the island's patrician class.

As was customary among Nacionalistas at the time, de la Cruz refers to Don Pedro as "a father," "our apostle," and "the Teacher," adding: "those of us who followed him [did so] as his disciples" (Randall 1979, 40, 41, 48). Comparable mythic-religious elements and Christic symbology were also significant within the world of Padilla, a devout Catholic. Fernández Sanz's book contains a photograph of her grandmother leading the 1936 procession of the Virgen Dolorosa (Holy Virgin of Sorrows). Padilla also wrote frequently for the islandwide Catholic weekly, *El Piloto*, dedicated to protecting Vatican doctrine against freemasonry, communism, spiritualism, and especially Protestantism (Ferrao 1990, 281). *El Piloto* likewise condemned the burning of convents during the Spanish Civil War, and blamed communists for spreading free-thinker influences among the island's population (ibid., 282). For instance, Padilla's article for the September 5, 1931 issue criticized the "licentiousness" and "bacchanalia" of Puerto Rican youth (ibid., 285). Other Nacionalistas contributed articles to this weekly paper, including Juan Antonio Corretjer, J. M. Toro Nazario, and José Paniagua Serracante (ibid.). However, emerging scholarship has begun re-interpreting these socio-cultural complexities within the Partido Nacionalista and in the writings and political practice of its most prominent leaders during that period (Carrión 1993; Rodríguez Vázquez, 2004; Santiago-Valles 2007).

Some of the same fears over the social changes accompanying modernity, anxieties expressed by well-bred educated women like Padilla, informed the era's Creole-white elite narratives. Nonetheless, these imagined and real transformations cannot be understood without considering the socio-economic and political shifts actually taking place within Puerto Rico during the interwar decades. The worsening economic situation towards the end of the 1920s and early 1930s not only precipitated an increase in social strife and disorder among the island's impoverished majorities. A frenzied scramble for bureaucratic posts

and administrative favours ensued on the part of islandwide political leadership and party cadres, leading to a series of new alliances, splits, and coalitions among local political organizations. Above all, it fostered a rash of intense disputes: between and within the various party leaderships; between the latter and their own party bases; between the colonial governor and the colony's legislature; and among the colonial legislature and the U.S. Congress, the Bureau of Island Affairs, and the U.S. President (Clark 1975, 76-105). For these and other reasons, propertied and educated "natives" longed for the restoration of order within a landscape perceived as increasingly slipping from their social and semiotic grasp.

The elite's sense of foreboding over looming socio-economic chaos and political disorder very much explains Padilla's need to cling to old ways of life, particularly if she herself was experiencing the economic consequences of those changes. Fernández Sanz mentions her grandmother oftentimes vehemently expressing the need to preserve her class heritage and condition: "It is necessary, she said, to maintain at all cost the decorum within which one is born" (Fernández Sanz 1996, 61). To generate some revenue, she also rented out two rooms in her home (separated by a hall) to North American school teachers arriving in the island in large numbers. In Arecibo people were aware of Padilla's shrinking inheritance: physicians would not charge honorariums for their services to the family and two bottled-milk factories delivered free milk to her house. At the municipal theatre hall she had a designated balcony and sounding board enabling her to enjoy the performances of Spanish artistic troupes. She was also an honorary member of select clubs like the Casino Puertorriqueño in Arecibo, the Casino Español and many other elite socio-cultural organizations. The property taxes on her residence were waived by an administrative law inaugurated by her good friend and Secretary of the Treasury (1935-1940), Rafael Sancho Bonet (*ibid.*, 66). By comparison, no physician (paid or otherwise) was available to save de la Cruz's children from death at an early age due to rickets. Likewise, and in sharp distinction to Padilla, de la Cruz's access to socio-cultural enrichment had been primarily limited to the literature and political tracts she was paid to read in the tobacco manufacturing shops.

As women, de la Cruz and Padilla were social and racial opposites, who nevertheless shared the same general political ideal and unevenly shared a conservative vision of what it meant to be a woman and to be a Puerto Rican, accepting many of the same gender hierarchies. But, in Puerto Rico during the 1920s and 1930s, their disparate lived experiences meant that the possibilities available to both women were not the same. As recent scholarship demonstrates (Matos-Rodríguez and Delgado 1998; Findlay 1999; Rodríguez-Silva 2012, 213-216), the meaning of women's roles and gender hierarchies in early twentieth-century Puerto Rico varied widely across class lines. The privilege—or imposition—of staying at home for propertied and educated women (like Padilla) was socio-economically impossible for labouring poor women (like de la Cruz) who inevitably had to earn a living outside the household. Similarly, notions of respectability and sexual morality among "native" working-class women at that time ran the gamut from an institutional defense of marriage to a support of free love (Azize 1985; Valle Ferrer 1990).

Of the Anticolonial Flag and Other Patriotic Symbols

The Puerto Rican flag figured prominently in the historical memory shared by de la Cruz but, here again, the racialized nature of the national question merges with the question of social class. She discussed another incident related to the Puerto Rican flag, this time implicating the *Nacionalista* committee of Mayagüez towards the end of 1933 vis-à-vis President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's announced visit to Puerto Rico. On that occasion, the flag became the epicentre of the class struggle within the *Partido Nacionalista* mediated by Albizu Campos. Some of the patrician members of the party wanted to receive President Roosevelt with a flower bouquet, which led Albizu Campos to travel to Mayagüez and dissolve that *Nacionalista* committee. "The 'bourgeois' elements that abandoned the committee decided to establish a separate Club... [and] tried to use the Lares flag" of the 1868 uprising against Spanish colonialism. However, "Don Pedro reminded them that the Lares flag harked back to the first revolutionary

movement where Puerto Rico [struggled to] establish itself as a nation, and advised them that if they insisted on using it, the real Nationalists would greet them with gunfire" (Randall 1979, 36).

It is worth remembering that during the first half of the twentieth century and per U.S. colonial decree, it was illegal to publicly display the 1895 Puerto Rican flag. For de la Cruz, the flag evidently was a vital and precious symbol, for which one should be willing to die, if necessary. The most eloquent confirmation of that ideal is de la Cruz's participation in the already mentioned 1937 *Nacionalista* mass demonstration which ended in the Ponce Massacre. This was how de la Cruz described to Randall the events of March 21, 1937: "I saw a person cross [in front of me] fall wounded, and at that moment, I saw the flag on the floor. I took the flag drenched with blood, and continued [forward] with it" (ibid., 52). Carmen Fernández, the wounded person to whom de la Cruz refers, was one of the over 150 protesters and bystanders seriously wounded by a police assault that also killed 19 Nationalistas in the massacre (Ponce Massacre Commission of Inquiry 1937; Pérez Marchand 1972).

Arthur Garfield Hays, general counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union and a lawyer in numerous legendary trials (including those of Sacco and Vanzetti as well as of the Scottsboro Boys), came to Puerto Rico to investigate the 1937 Ponce Massacre at the request of the *Partido Nacionalista*. A formal committee was established composed of the presidents of the local Bar Association, Medical Association, the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, and the directors of the most important daily newspapers on the island, *El Imparcial*, *La Correspondencia*, and *El Mundo*. This commission rendered a final report holding the colonial government responsible for the massacre (Ponce Massacre Commission of Inquiry 1937; Moraza Ortiz 2001).

Dominga de la Cruz testified before the commission, making very clear the nature of her participation in the Ponce events that day (Randall 1979, 56-57). According to de la Cruz, Hays "rose to his feet when I strode by. And he wrote in *El Mundo* newspaper, something like 'one had to see her, young, black, immutable in her

dignity'" (ibid., 57). This racial marking is significant because being black had been detached from anything having to do with dignity given the received discourses of the period, not only in the United States but also in Puerto Rico. For her part, this was how Randall positioned the magnitude of de la Cruz's role in the history of Puerto Rico: "We went in search of the woman behind the historical [1937] moment ...Dominga ...must have had to live years and years accessible to our most intimate pain" (ibid., 12).

But how does this compare with Trina Padilla's status and ranking within the history of Puerto Rico? To what extent and at what level was she too "the woman behind the historical moment" and, in her case, what moments were these? Padilla's relation to those patriotic symbols is very different from that of de la Cruz, albeit by no means any less complex. That different positioning begins with how "respectable" public opinion at the time converted Padilla herself into a patriotic representation: la patria transubstantiated in the flesh and blood of a woman, a living symbol of Puerto Rican nationhood. Journalist Luis Villaronga (1947) confirms this iconography: "La Hija del Caribe! [i.e., both 'The Daughter of the-poet-known-as-'El Caribe' and 'The Daughter of the Caribbean Region'] It's as if we said the soul of Puerto Rico! Our Fatherland's Muse," to which he added: a "loving muse, devotee of our Borinquen [i.e., Puerto Rican] homeland ...mindful of the traditional, moral, and intellectual values of our land" (ibid., 2).

In her case too we have emblematic encounters with the Puerto Rican flag, revealing much about Padilla's own attitude towards that national (anticolonial) banner. According to her granddaughter, Padilla "was the first Puerto Rican woman, who dared to...fly the Puerto Rican flag from the balcony of her house, the [flag] with the lone star." Padilla knew full well that "this was against the law, but Grandma ignored that ban, and no one ever dared take down the flag." According to her, "Those in charge of enforcing the law looked the other way while the flag continued waiving at the house of that brave woman" (Fernández Sanz 1996, 158). Notwithstanding the indisputable bravery of having an elite "native" woman defy colonial law so brazenly, it is highly doubtful the local authorities and police would have been so tolerant if the banned flag had been

flying from a much more modest house, for instance, that of a black needle-manufacture worker and reader at cigar factories.

Fernández Sanz subsequently narrates an incident coinciding with the visit of the celebrated Chilean poet, Gabriela Mistral, to Padilla's house in 1932. That month, two rival political rallies were scheduled to take place, one called by the pro-U.S. and bureaucratized Partido Socialista and the other by the moderate and pro-independence Partido Liberal (successor to the old Unionistas) led by Antonio R. Barceló (Silvestrini 1979; Baldrich 1981; Fernández Sanz 1996, 158). As the Socialista demonstration filed in front of the Padilla manor, the marchers "began insulting the two women, and attempted to rip off the Puerto Rican flag while Grandma and Doña Gabriela struggled, holding on to the flag." "Days afterwards...the Liberales carried out their own rally and both women stood at the same balcony, next to the Puerto Rican flag. But this time, the participants enthusiastically applauded and ceremoniously hailed [Padilla and Mistral, saluting them by] raising their hats" (Fernández Sanz 1996, 158). Note that, with all probability, part of what was playing out in that first confrontation in front of Padilla's mansion was fieldhands settling old scores with the daughter of the owner of the La Monserrate sugarcane plantation in Vega Baja. After all, the Socialistas were part of the island's labour movement and its trade-union federation, the Federación Libre de Trabajadores, had organized many of the sugarcane workers throughout the island, including in Arecibo where Padilla lived (Silvestrini 1979).

Alternatively, what is more germane is the obvious similarity between de la Cruz and Padilla regarding their willingness to physically and publicly expose themselves to some degree of bodily harm in defense of the illegal national flag. However, and once again, a significant contrast remains when it comes to the risks involved in each case. On the one hand, there was the threat of the rowdy unarmed participants (the Socialista demonstrators) even as "those in charge of enforcing the laws" "look[ed] the other way." On the other hand, there was the unarmed de la Cruz, dodging bullets fired by those same agents "in charge of enforcing the laws."

Conjuring a People and a National Community

More broadly, de la Cruz and Padilla epitomized two conflicting approaches within 1930s discussions about the national question and Puerto Rican identity. De la Cruz has been represented as the one who knows "our most intimate pain" (Randall 1979, 12) and the one who protected the freedom of her people with her body and life, while the image of Padilla is more of one who protected "the traditional, moral, intellectual values of our land" (Villaronga 1947, 12) with her pen. Indeed, they both were active members of a political party sworn to the emancipation of a people and a land from U.S. colonialism and to achieving recognition for the Puerto Rican nation. But, what kind of "people," what sort of "nation"/ "[national] family" or what manner of "land" is being evoked in each case? For de la Cruz, the lived meanings of "people" or "nation" ultimately seemed to refer to the island's working people, to the plight of labouring poor Puerto Ricans. Yet what did that mean for Padilla?

In her case, the "people" or the "nation"/ "[national] family" were more likely to be identified with the rarified abstractions fashioned by Creole-white patricians and the "native" elite intelligentsia, an appraisal easily confirmed given her ample literary corpus. The poems and dedications in Padilla's *De mi collar* (1926) signal a discernible national camaraderie and distinguished cultural fellowship. This book's introduction was written by the well-known Spanish poet and novelist, Concha Espina, and the collection contains poems dedicated to propertied and highly cultured Puerto Rican figures such as: the poet, political leader, and patriarch Luis Muñoz Rivera; the poet, corporate lawyer, orator, and politician José de Diego; the physician and abolitionist Ramón Emeterio Betances; and the poet, educator, and politician Virgilio Dávila. She also dedicated poems to some other of her illustrious friends, including: Concha Espina; the soprano and educator Amalia Paoli; and the philanthropist, educator, and suffragist Isabel Andreu de Aguilar. The poems are divided thematically and each topic is given the name of specific precious stones: amethysts, pearls, diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and diamonds. Here Padilla is quite clear about who she wants to be associated with—Puerto Ricans and Latin Americans—in the world of letters.

La patria (the fatherland/ motherland) appears in the fourth section of the book, under the topic "Rubies." In her poem, "Labor, Omnia Vincit," ["Hard Work Conquers All"], Padilla (1926, 106) describes the "nation"/ "[national] family" in the following manner: "I want to see you free and strong and powerful/ shining with your star at a radiant height/ under the pale blue sky where your ideal resides." Padilla reclaims only two canonical and kin identities later famously upheld by Antonio S. Pedreira ([1934] 1971), Clara Lair (1937) and other members of the Generación del Treinta (The 1930s Generation). Within this uncanny lyrical universe, the ghostly presence of extinct indigenous ancestors textually resurfaces as a component only to be superseded by the defense of the Spanish lineage of the Americas and where the African-descended element is conspicuously absent. Within the received Creole-white elite tradition, only the first two iconic kinfolk were understood to be the foundations of Puerto Rican national identity/"family" (Flores 1979; Rodríguez Castro 1987-1988; Roy-Féquièrre 2004).

In juxtaposition to the wealth of writings by and about Padilla apropos her discursive politics of location, the mismatch with de la Cruz once again could not be more stark. For one thing, the already mentioned scarcity of material written by de la Cruz (and about her) makes it more difficult to demonstrate how she viewed identity affiliations vis-à-vis the national question between the two world wars. One way of illustrating her textual sympathies and politico-cultural kinships is via the large number of "negro-themed" poems and labouring-poor invocations she staged in public—notably, not her own verses since, as far as is known, she herself wrote no poetry. A typical example of this ethno-literary and political proclivity is the programme from her performance "Farewell Recital" in San Juan's Teatro Tapia on April 5, 1945. Here the abundant Afro-diasporic subject matter and working-class topics give us a glimpse of the company she was likely to keep: Luis Lloréns Torres ("Copa de Noche de Reyes", "La Radio"), Teófilo Badillo ("La Canción del Gigue"), Pedro Juan Labarthe ("Me he ido de Gitaneria esta Noche"), Nicolás Guillén ("Sabás", "Balada de Simón Caraballo"), Julia de Burgos ("Ay, ay, ay, de la Grifa Negra"), Oña Casadoras ("María Reglas"), Luis Palés Matos ("Lamento", "Pueblo Negro"), Emilio Ballagas ("Comparsa Habanera",

"Elegia de María Belén Chacón"), Matilde Rodríguez ("El Pregón del frutero"), and José Zacarias Tallet ("La Rumba") (Randall 1979, 69).

Consider the contradictory and emblematic case of renowned Creole-white poet, Luis Palés Matos (1898-1959), who published in 1926 in the newspaper *La Democracia*, what was said to be one of the first Afro-Antillian poems, "Pueblo Negro," and who in 1937 published his similarly themed book of poems *Tuntún de pasa y grifería*. How does de la Cruz encounter the poetry of Palés? According to de la Cruz, the 1937 Ponce Massacre greatly affected her, causing her to become extremely nervous and emotionally distressed. A psychologist recommended she retire from her more politically active life, whereupon she started collaborating with the Mayagüez radio station, WPRA, reciting poems on the air (Randall 1979, 61-62). She mentions that after reciting lyrical poems on the radio "they would play... pretty, melodious music; ...then [a year later], ...they sent me to learn the Negroide poetry of Palés Matos—who is the most outstanding poet of all things black in Puerto Rico—for which, they would put on music fitting that type of poetry" (Randall 1979, 64-65). Note that on one hand, there is "pretty, melodious music," and on the other hand, there is another type of music, one "fitting that type of poetry," the "Negroide poetry." Also note that if she was not familiar with Palés' poems, it might have been partly because they did not necessarily respond to her reality, specifically, the reality of the poor, working population. Palés' poems mainly depicted blackness as something mythological and exotic (Branche 1999; Williams 2000, 53-56; Roy-Féquièrre 2004). In this sense, how could Palés' version of "blackness" have been relevant or familiar to some one like her?

Dominga de la Cruz was not the first recital performer of African descent to narrate Palés' poetry in Puerto Rico. That performance canon was established by Cuban-born Eusebia Cosme during her recitals of 1934-1938 in Puerto Rico (López-Baralt 1997, 133, 137-145). In fact, the photographs of those performances from the late 1930s reflect the similarity between how Cosme dressed and the wardrobe donned by de la Cruz as a public performer of the Negroide poetry. In an article by poet and writer Carmelina Vizcarrondo, the author comments on

one of those performances in a clever but contradictory manner: "Eusebia also knows how to make herself ours, and that is by reciting the verses of Luis Palés Matos" (1936, 2). Then she adds, "Now is when we can appreciate the exact worth of our poet. Palés, the poet who playfully made-up his own black world, the poet who...has not had the opportunity of capturing from black life itself the most sincere impressions, who has never left our beaches, and that, nonetheless, has accomplished the very dignified conception of 'Danza Negra'" (ibid.).

I am not going to dwell on the otherwise arguable assumption that Palés whimsically invented "a black world" of "his own," wishing "to capture...black life" despite his limitations in doing so because he was not black and because he "had never left" Puerto Rico in order to get to know first-hand those "most sincere [black] impressions." What Vizcarrondo is clearly implying is that "black life," that "black world" (and those black people), are so removed and extraneous to Puerto Rico that they need to be "made up" or found outside "our beaches." According to Vizcarrondo the Puerto Rican proximity of a Cuban-born, international performer and actress Eusebia Cosme is possible due to her ability to recite Palés' poetry. In other words, what "makes her ours" is based on how well she interprets something that could only come from Palés's fertile imagination precisely because that something was not "ours" (i.e., Puerto Rican). One wonders if in the corresponding recitals of de la Cruz, just like those of Cosme, there was no other way of also "making herself more ours"—namely, more part of the national Puerto Rican and Antillean identity—than "reciting the verses of Luis Palés Matos."

It is particularly telling the extent to which the fanciful representation and exoticization of black female bodies was widely accepted in these circles. In the introduction of that same article, Vizcarrondo characterizes Cosme's eyes as "raw molasses" and her body as having "rhythm" and an "amusing walk" (1936, 2). From this description we can infer the position de la Cruz had to negotiate when she also performed these negroide poems: not only the partial deracination and objectification of herself and her poems but also the comparisons to the

performances of Cosme. The literary critic Nilita Vientós Gastón (1936, 2) described Cosme as the originator of this kind of performance.

Such uses of the Palesiano verse are particularly significant in view that de la Cruz did not have the reputation, nor the artistic authority, of Palés. Deploying these poems by Palés could have been an indirect way of legitimizing a tradition and a socio-cultural lineage similar to the same destitute workers that the Creole-white patricians "discarded on the ground." It was perhaps a vehicle—an occasion—to communicate the Black-Puerto Rican experience: a counter-maneuver to overstep the racism and sexism of Palés' famous verses. She might have been utilizing Palés as a bridge for other generations and kin traditions with which she identified, but who obviously did not share Palés' personal or poetic identity/"family," nor that of his generation.

Hence, using Palés in this manner could have been part of an auto-ethnographic moment, insofar as reciting Palés (similar to Ballagas and doing it while dressed as Cosme had done) "involve[d] partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror" (Pratt 1992, 7). In this case, it was about the cultural canons of those Spanish descendants who personified most of the Antillean politico-literary leadership. Yet, as a counterpoint to Palés with Guillén and together with the poem "Ay, ay, de la Grifa Negra" by Julia de Burgos, could we not say that de la Cruz also was making evident the traces of transculturation found in Palés and members of his generation? Paraphrasing Mary Louise Pratt's reworking of Fernando Ortíz' signature concept, we should ask ourselves: To what extent was Palés "transporting to [Creole-white elites in Puerto Rico] knowledges [Afro-Puerto Rican/Afro-Antillean] in origin; producing European [and Euro-Caribbean] knowledges infiltrated by non-European ones?" A maneuver whereby Afro-Puerto Rican/Afro-Antillean organic intellectuals and performers later "would re-import that knowledge as [multi-racial, democratic-national] knowledge whose authority would legitimate [the greater participation of Afro-Puerto Ricans/Afro-Antilleans within new, more inclusive forms of political and cultural] rule" (Pratt 1992, 132, 137) .

Conclusion

The lives of Dominga de la Cruz and Trina Padilla highlight the racial and structural inequalities within and across the socio-political body of Puerto Rico and the related political movements against U.S. colonialism. In the end, it remains an open question whether the nationalist struggles of the interwar years were able to transcend the actual practice of taking for granted the alleged moral superiority of Creole-white elite women in relation to the perceived shortcomings of working-class Puerto Rican women of colour.

Although unspoken, and despite all aspirations to the contrary, there is still the strangely familiar allusion that there might actually be more than one [Puerto Rican] nation: the one imagined by de la Cruz, the one desired by Padilla, and certainly, the one envisioned by Albizu Campos. All this suggests the need to rethink the famous phrase from the Partido Unión and the 1920s Alianza of “la gran familia puertorriqueña” (the Great Puerto Rican Family) (Quintero Rivera 1986; Llorens 2016). Instead, it would appear there was a great subaltern, mixed-race, national family versus a great, white/near-white, property-owner national family. Although the New Puerto Rican Historiography already has begun researching and critiquing this slogan (Torres 1998), that does not mean the political discourse on “the [national] family” and the “family”/community does not merit further inquiry and much more indepth scrutiny. The comparative life histories of these two women seem to suggest as much.

References

- Albizu Campos, Pedro. 1974. *La conciencia nacional puertorriqueña*. Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores.
- Alegría Ortega, Idsa E. and Palmira N. Ríos González, eds. 2005. *Contrapunto de género y raza en Puerto Rico*. Río Piedras: Universidad de Puerto Rico-Centro de Investigaciones Sociales/ Instituto de Estudios sobre Raza y Etnicidad.
- Asociación Puertorriqueña de Investigación de la Historia de Mujeres (APIHM). 2013. "Asociación Puertorriqueña de Investigación de la Historia de Mujeres: Misión y objetivos." *Boletín de la Asociación Puertorriqueña de Investigación de la Historia de Mujeres* 1(1), March; <http://senriquezseiders.blogspot.com/p/boletin-i.html> [viewed August 20, 2017]
- Azize, Yamila. 1985. *La mujer en la lucha*. Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural.
- Baldrich, Juan José. 1981. "Class and the State: The Origins of Populism in Puerto Rico, 1934-1952." Ph.D. diss., Yale University.
- Beckles, Hillary. 1999. *Centering Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Branche, Jerome. 1999. "Negrisimo: Hibridez cultural, autoridad y la cuestión de la nación." *Revista Iberoamericana* LXI(188-189): 483-504.
- Brown, Elsa Barkley. 1992. "'What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics." *Feminist Studies* 18(2): 295-308.
- Carrión, Juan Manuel. 1993. "Etnia, raza y la nacionalidad puertorriqueña." In *La nación puertorriqueña: Ensayos en torno a Pedro Albizu Campos*, edited by Juan Manuel Carrión, Teresa C. Gracia Ruíz and Carlos Rodríguez Fraticelli, 3-18. Río Piedras: Editorial U.P.R.
- Clark, Truman R. 1975. *Puerto Rico and the United States, 1917-1933*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Clark, Victor, ed. 1930. *Porto Rico and Its Problems*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Colón Warren, Alice. 2003. "Puerto Rico: Feminism and Feminist Studies." *Gender and Society* 17(5): 664-690.
- Crespo-Kebler, Elizabeth. 2005. "¿Y las trabajadoras domésticas dónde están? Raza, género y trabajo." In *Contrapunto de género y raza en Puerto Rico*, edited by Idsa E. Alegría Ortega and Palmira N. Ríos González, 135-154. Río Piedras: Universidad de Puerto Rico, Centro de Investigaciones Sociales/ Instituto de Estudios sobre Raza y Etnicidad.
- Dávila Marichal, José Manuel. 2014. "Metamorfosis: de Las Hijas de la Libertad al Cuerpo de Enfermeras de la República del Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico, 1932-1937." *Memorias del Tercer Coloquio (tercera parte)*, Asociación Puertorriqueña de Investigación de la Historia de Mujeres (March 6): http://senriquezseiders.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_17.html [viewed August 10, 2017]
- Del Moral, Solsiree. 2013. *Negotiating Empire: The Cultural Politics of Schools in Puerto Rico, 1898-1952*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Diffie, Bailey and Justine Diffie. 1931. *Porto Rico: A Broken Pledge*. New York: Vanguard Press.
- Fernández Sanz, Yolanda. 1996. *Trina Padilla de Sanz: La Hija del Caribe*. San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Plaza Mayor.

- Fernós, Isern A. 1928. "Infantile Morbidity and Mortality in Porto Rico." *Porto Rico Review of Public Health and Tropical Medicine* 3: 461-467.
- Ferrao, Luis Angel. 1990. *Pedro Albizu Campos y el nacionalismo puertorriqueño*. Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural.
- Findlay, Eileen J. Suárez. 1999. *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Flores, Juan. 1979. *Insularismo e ideología burguesa en Antonio Pedreira*. La Habana, Cuba: Casa de Las Américas.
- Gaspar, David Barry and Darlene Clark Hine, eds. 2004. *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Hidalgo Paz, Ibrahim. 2008. "Puerto Rico en el Partido Revolucionario Cubano, 1895-1898." *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional José Martí*, 1(2): <http://revistas.bnjm.cu/index.php/revista-bncjm/article/view/169/166> [viewed March 12, 2016.]
- Jiménez de Wagenheim, Olga. 2016. *Nationalist Heroines: Puerto Rican Women History Forgot 1930s-1950s*. Princeton, NJ: Marcus Wiener.
- Jiménez Muñoz, Gladys M. 1994-95. "Re-thinking the History of Puerto Rican Women's Suffrage." *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños* VII (1): 96-106.
- _____. 2003. "Carmen María Colón Pellot: On 'Womanhood' and 'Race' in Puerto Rico during the Interwar Period." *The New Centennial Review* 3(3): 71-92.
- Lair, Clara. 1937. *Arras de cristal*. San Juan: Biblioteca de Autores Puertorriqueños.
- Lloréns, Hilda. 2014. *Imaging the Great Puerto Rican Family: Framing Nation, Race, and Gender During the American Century*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- López-Baralt, Mercedes. 1997. *El barco en la botella: La poesía de Luis Palés Matos*. Biblioteca de Autores Puertorriqueños, San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Plaza Mayor.
- Matos Rodríguez, Félix V. 1995. "Street Vendors, Pedlars, Shop-Owners, and Domestic: Some Aspects of Women's Economic Roles in Nineteenth-Century San Juan, Puerto Rico (1820-1870)." In *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*, edited by Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton, and Barbara Bailey, 176-193. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Press.
- Matos-Rodríguez, Félix and Linda Delgado, eds. 1998. *Puerto Rican Women's History: New Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
- Meneses de Albizu Campos, Laura. 2007. *Albizu Campos y la independencia de Puerto Rico*. San Juan: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas.
- Miller, Carly. 2016. "Trina Padilla de Sanz: A Woman Ahead of Her Time." University Libraries: Seton Hall University (09/2): <http://blogs.shu.edu/archives/category/archives-and-special-collections/trina-padilla-de-sanz-papers/> [viewed Sept. 30, 2016].
- Moitt, Bernard. 2001. *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Moore, Brian L., B.W. Higman, Carl Campbell, and Patrick Bryan, eds. 2003. *Slavery, Freedom, and Gender: The Dynamics of Caribbean Society*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Moraza Ortiz, Manuel E. 2001. *La Masacre de Ponce*. Hato Rey, Puerto Rico: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas.
- Padilla, Trina. 1926. *De mi collar*. Paris: Editorial París-América.

Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz: "Race" and Class among Nacionalista Women in Interwar Puerto Rico: The Activism of Dominga de la Cruz Becerril and Trina Padilla de Sanz

- Pedreira, Antonio S. (1934) 1971. *Insularismo*. Río Piedras: Editorial Edil.
- Pérez Marchand, Rafael V. 1972. *Reminiscencia histórica de la Masacre de Ponce*. San Lorenzo, Puerto Rico: Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico (21 de marzo).
- Perloff, Harvey. 1950. *Puerto Rico's Economic Future: A Study of Planned Development*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Picó, Fernando. 1983. *Los gallos peleados*. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán.
- Ponce Massacre Commission of Inquiry. 1937. *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Civil Rights in Puerto Rico*. n.p., (May 22).
- Pratt, Mary Louise. 1992. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York: Routledge.
- Quintero Rivera, Angel. 1975. "La base social de la transformación ideológica del Partido Popular en la década del cuarenta." Unpublished conference paper. Río Piedras: CIS-UPR/ CEREP.
- _____. 1986. *Conflictos de clase y política en Puerto Rico*. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán.
- Randall, Margaret. 1979. *El pueblo no solo es testigo: La historia de Dominga*. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán.
- Rodríguez Castro, María Elena. 1987-1988. "Tradición y modernidad: El intelectual puertorriqueño ante la década del treinta." *Op.Cit.*; *Boletín del Centro de Investigaciones Históricas* 3: 45-65.
- Rodríguez-Silva, Ileana. 2012. *Silencing Race: Disentangling Blackness, Colonialism, and National Identities in Puerto Rico*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rodríguez Vázquez, José Juan. 2004. *El sueño que no cesa*. Río Piedras: Editorial Callejón.
- Rosado, Marisa. 2003. *Pedro Albizu Campos: Las llamas de la aurora*. San Juan: n.p., segunda edición revisada y aumentada.
- Roy-Féquièrre, Magali. 2004. *Women, Creole Identity, and Intellectual Life in Early Twentieth-Century Puerto Rico*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Santiago-Valles, Kelvin. 2007. "'Our Race Today [is] the Only Hope for the World': An African Spaniard as Chieftain of the Struggle Against 'Sugar Slavery' in Puerto Rico, 1926-1934." *Caribbean Studies* 35(1): 107-140.
- Shepherd, Verene, Bridget Brereton, and Barbara Bailey, eds. 1995. *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Press.
- Silvestrini, Blanca. 1979. *Los trabajadores puertorriqueños y el Partido Socialista, 1932-1940*. Río Piedras: Editorial Universitaria.
- Taller de Formación Política (TFP). 1982. *La cuestión nacional*. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán.
- Tinajero, Araceli. 2010. *El Lector: A History of the Cigar Factory Reader*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Torres, Arlene. 1998. "La Gran Familia Puertorriqueña 'Ej Prieta de Beldá' (The Great Puerto Rican Family Is Really, Really Black)." In *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean: Social Dynamics and Cultural Transformations. Volume II: Eastern South America and the Caribbean*, edited by Arlene Torres and Norman E. Whitten, Jr., 285-306. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- U.S. Bureau of Census (USBC). 1941. *Sixteenth Census. 1940; Puerto Rico; Bulletin no.3: Occupation and Other Characteristics*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Valle Ferrer, Norma. 1990. *Luisa Capetillo: Historia de una mujer proscrita*. Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural.

- Vientós Gastón, Nilita. 1936. "El arte de Eusebia Cosme." *El Mundo* (12 de abril): 2.
- Villaronga, Luis. 1947. "La Hija del Caribe." *El Mundo* (1 de Junio): 2, 14.
- Vizcarrondo, Carmelina. 1936. "El arte de Eusebia Cosme." *El Mundo* (12 de abril): 2.
- Williams, Claudette M. 2000. *Charcoal and Cinnamon: The Politics of Color in Spanish Caribbean Literature*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

¹ All translations from Spanish texts are mine unless otherwise specified.



“Do Something to Mek She Change”: Reading Respectability in- and unto the National Female Body in two Jamaican Interwar Fictions of Obeah

Janelle Rodriques

Assistant Professor of English Literature
Auburn University, Alabama

Abstract: The short stories here compared articulate both agitation for and anxiety surrounding West Indian self-government, chiefly through the signifiers of “woman” and Obeah, two aspects of the imagined nation that are represented as volatile outliers that must be subdued by their narratives, either by silence or by ridicule. These narratives illustrate the struggle regarding the incorporation of both women and Obeah into fledgling conceptions of national identity, at a time when the former were increasingly visible in the public sphere, and the latter was proving a most stubborn “vestige of the African past” to eradicate. Their elaborations of Obeah as enacted upon women’s bodies by men in pursuit of heteronormative sexual relations demonstrate the complex web of associations among women, Obeah, and “the folk,” an intersection that brings together, while tearing apart, the discursive imaginary of a future Jamaican/ West Indian nation.

Keywords: Obeah, Jamaica, women, heteropatriarchy

How to cite

Rodriques, Janelle. 2018. ““Do Something to Mek She Change:” Reading Respectability in- and unto the National Female Body in two Jamaican Interwar Fictions of Obeah.” *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12: 199-220

At Jamaica's independence in 1962 national character, as outlined by the country's urban intelligentsia, was contingent on the notion of "respectability," manifested through "education, thrift, industry, self-sufficiency via land ownership, moderate Christian living, community uplift, the constitution of family through legal marriage and related gendered expectations, and leadership by the educated middle classes" (Thomas 2004, 6). Respectability, an inherently elitist aspiration, meant adherence to Victorian ideals of family life – ideals institutionalised in Jamaica with the establishment of "free villages" by Baptist missionaries at the end of slavery. For the Baptists, male employment was crucial to family, cultural and national survival, as was heteronormative marriage, which discouraged women from engaging in waged labour out of "modesty and a sense of shame" (Hall 2009, 189). The ideal family comprised a husband who worked on plantation estates for low wages and a wife who took care of his home; one missionary boasted in 1843 that the "dark passions and savage dispositions" of "cunning, craft and suspicion," endemic in African Jamaicans, had given way to "a noble, manly, and independent, yet patient and submissive spirit" (Phillippo 1843, 253). The "perfect Negro," therefore, was at once independent and compliant; the perfect nation, by extension, was to be at once "modern" and Victorian – feminised and constrained by the stewardship of middle classes who adhered to essentialised, heteropatriarchal constructions of gender.

Concurrently, "respectability" and "progress" also meant the abandonment of "African superstition," the rejection of what Jamaicans recognise as Obeah, a complex of Afrosyncretic spiritual and faith practices developed by enslaved Africans on plantations across the West Indies and inherited by their descendants. Obeah is an expression of various religious, social, political and scientific knowledges, one that rejects the separation between the physical and spiritual worlds characteristic of European Enlightenment (colonial) thought. While it may have lost much of its terror today, Obeah still holds some intrigue, if not authority, as a cultural repository and defence against violent domination, despite its association with the "occult," with African-ness and therefore with "backwardness." As one of the Anglophone Caribbean's most embodied

African survivals Obeah has played an important, if problematic, role in the articulation of West Indian cultural identity, as a marker of black (majority) aesthetics and social and cultural logic. It is ideally suited to a culture that would define itself against colonial rule, but has often been shunned by the region's middle and upper classes, who would co-opt other, less threatening aspects of "folk" culture into their visions of Caribbean identity. These attitudes towards Obeah can be understood historically, considering that the practice allowed the enslaved to "act with more knowledge and authority than their masters," and as such undermined the dominant discourse of the (post-)plantation from *within* it (Levine 2007, 74). Obeah has always had an oppositional status to dominant colonial culture and discourse because it was a way for the enslaved to make sense of their enslavement, for those who had yet to be accepted or fully integrated into "respectable" society to negotiate the antagonistic and alien worlds into which they were born, but to which they did not necessarily belong. As I will demonstrate with the stories I have chosen for analysis here, both women and Obeah threatened paternalistic imaginings of "modern" West Indian nationhood, and as such were often narrated as volatile outliers that had to be subdued and/or ridiculed in order to maintain some semblance of national cohesion.

R. L. C. Aarons' "The Cow That Laughed" and Ethel Rovere's "Coolie Bangle" are two of the first expressions of the anxiety and ambivalence engendered by the interwar re-assessment of the West Indies' relationship with Britain and its empire vis-à-vis the question of self-governance. They are further significant in that they express this ambivalence through the enactment of Obeah onto the bodies of poor, rural black (or, rather, brown) women. Both narratives were published in 1939 in *Public Opinion*, a Jamaican weekly newspaper that established itself in 1937 as "a new voice" that would "focus attention on facts and theories, on *men* and events [...] to represent the new opinions of the present time – its ambitions and its hopes" (emphasis added). The front page of its first edition affirms that Jamaicans had "a national character, capable of giving them cohesion in framing institutions suitable to their history and environment," and asserts the magazine's purpose, "to meet [the] need for

some organ existing solely for the presentment of topics with a direct bearing on the welfare of Jamaica" (1937, 1). *Public Opinion's* self-appointed mandate was to foster and foment a national consciousness and present a popular alternative to political "business as usual." One of the ways it did this was to encourage the development of a domestic literary aesthetic – to promote "local colour" by publishing fiction that focused on the lives of the rural labouring classes. *Public Opinion*, as Raphael Dalleo observes, "attempted to map out the new nation by putting the cultural and the political together on the same page. In the movement toward Jamaican nationhood," he continues, "the early issues of *Public Opinion* seek to give roles to both the political and the literary, the technical and the creative" (2010, 59, 61). The period from 1939-1941 saw the publication of the most short stories in the newspaper's history (Dalleo 2010, 63). In one of the first issues of 1939 W. A. Domingo, a leading member of the New York-based Jamaica Progressive League, argued the need for a national history that would emphasise "events that occurred in Jamaica" over "the glories of England." He believed that "the masses must be imbued with those facts and interpretations that will bolster their love of country and develop a healthy respect for their rulers" – the socially mobile, British-educated, male middle classes (10). Deborah Thomas has identified "the pursuit of respectability and the acceptance of a paternalistic patriarchy" as "the two primary aspects of the creole nationalist project." After the labour disturbances of the 1930s, in which the majority of the region's people posed a very credible threat to Crown Colony rule, the creole elite's vision of "a particular ideological and material structure within which men and women would create families and contribute to community and national life" only intensified. The nuclear family unit was seen as "the determining institution of socio-political and economic stability," Thomas continues, a stability that depended on the separation, privatisation and domination of the so-called "feminine" sphere and on the further marginalisation of the rural from the urban, the "masses" from the elites (252).

Yet, this "stable" nuclear family has never been the norm in Jamaica – black Jamaican women, in particular, have always complicated these visions of "progress." In 1899 the editor of Jamaica's *Daily Gleaner* noted that women

“earned their livelihood, and lived their own robust, independent life,” contrary to missionary ideology. The (black) Jamaican woman, he continued, “preferred her freedom, and accepted its greater responsibilities with equanimity.” This admiration of black women’s independence was limited, however: later in this passage he claimed that black women’s “unconscious sensuality [proved] the greatest obstacle to the development of their character” (Livingstone 1899, 46-47). This anxiety surrounding women’s sexuality and the “fortitude” of the nation has therefore long been established, and with the emergence of a black middle class in the aftermath of World War I women’s economic and sexual freedoms came under increased scrutiny. Belinda Edmondson observes that by the 1920s “women were at the vanguard of a new cultural class: working, mostly (but not always) middle class, often single, socially ambitious, and willing to spend money on leisure” (2009, 43). The elite’s obsession with upholding Victorian “respectability” however, in conjunction with their ambivalence and anxiety surrounding the character of these new nation(s), manifested in stories, columns and opinion pieces lamenting the future of black families – implicitly, the behaviour of these “new women.” Working-class women, in particular, “came to be perceived by the rest of society as both unusually industrious and sexually promiscuous” (Cobham 1990, 197). Henrice Altink notes that “in the two decades following the First World War” several middle-class, educated and professional black women used newspapers to “reflect on the condition of Afro-Jamaican women” – reflections stymied by their maintenance of the class and gender status quo. Not only did these professional women fail to demand their right to enter supposedly “male” professions, argues Altink, they ignored the physical and sexual abuse of black women at the hands of their employers, partners, fathers and brothers. Moreover, they did not demand suffrage for all women, demonstrating that they “did not favour the upward mobility of lower-class girls” (2006). Many of these “activists” appealed to their “sisters” on the basis of potential motherhood, implicitly *and* explicitly endorsing the exclusion of women from public politics. In 1929 a concerned reader wrote to the editor of the *Panama Tribune* that “our children are rising in such numbers. They must copy the lives we lead [...]. It is said a people cannot rise higher than its women, and so the responsibility hangs on us fellow West Indian women to raise the

standard by aiming high and living clean lives" (16). In Guyana, the Negro Progress Convention's 1931 assembly focused on "Women and Social Progress," but only in conjunction with the question of "family." As Lara Putnam observes, for many commentators at this time, "the 'upliftment' of the Negro race depended on women" (2014, 495). Women were charged with the burden of respectability for a nation in which they were not required to participate on an equal footing to men – particularly when these women were poor, black and undereducated.

This imagined woman was what Elaine Campbell would call a "dichotomised heroine," a protagonist "drawn to settle her dilemma – for good or for ill – through marriage or mating" (1987, 138). Marriage was considered the ultimate goal for responsible, respectable Jamaican women. In 1937 Jamaican educator and social worker Amy Bailey, who regularly contributed to *Public Opinion*, claimed that

the dream and aim of most women is to marry and have a home of their own. [Of] course, love should be the ruling factor in any union, and man has the privilege of bestowing the honour of his name and estate on the woman he loves. It is only unfortunate that he finds it so often impossible to love a black girl. Could he but love her, all other things would fall into their right places.

Jamaica, she mournfully concluded, was "losing the pleasing and beautiful spectacle of its cultured black families" (10). Yet even as Bailey decries this state of affairs her comments, in addition to demonstrating her internalised sexism, reinforce historical attitudes surrounding "brown" (mixed-race, lighter-skinned) women in Jamaica, as more desirable than black (darker-skinned) women – a phenomenon that is hinted at, but not extensively explored in Rovere's and Aarons' stories. "Brown people," argues Edmondson, "have always suggested a problem of cultural representation, a cultural 'otherness.'" Yet from the nineteenth century "cultural brownness" became definitive of the Caribbean, having "seized the popular imagination" as evidence of the region's supposed multiculturalism and creolisation. The same physiognomy that signified "cultural sterility" became archetypical of beauty, desirability and literary romance,

which “essentialises the traits of brownness from an unstable ‘mulatto-ness’ – and unsteady blend of black and white, embodying neither – into something natural, the characteristics of a people with their own habits, their own society, their own traditions” (2009, 51, 61). The competing anxieties of colour, class and gender converge in these stories, but are subsumed by the dark spectre of Obeah.

Obeah has long been used to both signify the credentials of these West Indian nation(s) in waiting *and* challenge the integrity of these discursive borders by at once “scandalising” and fascinating readers. Authors and editors were heavily invested in literature as a cultural barometer, and their stories championed (and exploited) these folk forms in their creation of an imagined national identity based on, but not made for (or by) these “folk.” Although nationalists were heavily invested in promoting “folk” aesthetics – such as beatification of the pastoral idyll and celebration of the cultural practices of the rural peasantry (often at the expense of the increasingly urban poor) – the progress they envisioned did not include what they would call “necromancy.” Considered one of the most “extreme” Afro-Jamaican folk practices, Obeah often featured in these stories as an indicator of how “far” we were away from “progress.” Suzanne Scafe notes that, due to “its potential to evoke a range of emotionally intense responses,” Obeah was “one of the most common topics for fiction writing and news reporting” during the 1930s and 1940s (2010, 74). A lasting problem with this return to the folk, however, is the attendant authorial condescension, even hostility, towards the black peasantry. Narratives of Obeah, in particular, tend to repudiate the “ordinary man” as much as they champion him, decrying imperial authority and ideology while simultaneously dismissing and bemoaning peasant “superstition.” These stories expose what Scafe describes as the “colonial anthropologist” tone in narrative (70), what Gillian Whitlock called “colonial realism,” an “elementary determination to write about life as it was observed in the local sphere” – in other words local colour, observed and imagined from a distance (1985, 17). The question of African-derived religious practices, Scafe continues, often “raised the spectre of barbarism and was evidence of the nation’s potentially ungovernable elements” (72). Early twentieth-century West Indian writers, while they may have

been keen to embrace the more respectable aspects of folk culture (and to romanticise them in their art), were engaged more in a process of idealistic re-imagination than of honest reflection. Obeah represented a limit case in terms of the integration of the folk into nascent nationalist literary ideals. Both Rovere and Aarons would have been aware of, and indeed exploited, Obeah's sensationalism, but while Aarons portrays Obeah as further suppression of the peasant classes based on their stubborn adherence to "superstition" and hardly considers the woman on whose body Obeah is enacted, Rovere presents Obeah as a tool of resistance and agency for women, a means to assert our rights over our own bodies and defy patriarchal domination.

Men dominated the literary field in the 1930s but their protagonists were mainly women, reflecting the anxiety that accompanied women's growing visibility in the public sphere. Obeah practitioners were often configured in this time period as "venal [male] charlatan[s]" with unsuspecting female victims (Johnson 1993, 228), reflecting in turn nineteenth-century missionary ideology that "identified the [black] woman's independence, along with the persistence of the practice of Obeah, as the two major obstacles in the path of 'civilising' the former slaves" (Cobham 1990, 195). The nexus of "woman" and "Obeah," therefore, was particularly fraught; together, they posed both real and imagined threats to the fledgling West Indian nation, even as they seemed to determine its parameters. The implicitly sexual danger Obeah posed to both woman and nation speaks to the fragility of the imagined national communities creole nationalists were trying to build and the significance of the figure of "woman" and the spectre of "Africa" to these imaginaries. These two short stories foreground the practice of Obeah as enacted upon women's bodies by men in pursuit of heteronormative sexual relations and illustrate the complex web of relations between woman, nation and "folk."

R. L. C. Aarons' "The Cow that Laughed" tells the story of a spectacular working of Obeah by down-at-heel Obeahman Buddyjoe, involving a sick cow whose cough sounds like "sinister inhuman" laughter (1939, 6). The story opens with Buddyjoe "plodding" home from a nine-night party; he is depressed because a

new Obeahman, skilled in more modern techniques such as the administration of oils and powders rather than roots, weeds and grave dirt, has begun to threaten his livelihood. Buddyjoe is unambiguously a figure of ridicule – the narrator has not even bothered to give him a plausible name. While there is no master/slave dynamic between any of the characters in this story its narrator is clearly a member of Jamaica's educated elite, and therefore "superior" to his protagonist, whom he explicitly disdains. Buddyjoe, devoid of any other apparent source of income, is introduced as a confidence trickster: when he stumbles upon the sick cow he immediately figures – according to the narrator, with "the swift low cunning of his kind," not our "high" kind – that if the cow could fool him, it could fool others. He decides that he will use the cow to dupe peasant-proprietor Dan Smearbow, who had offered the Obeahman £10 if he could work it so that Zekie Grantham, the district's most eligible bachelor, would fall in love with his "brown skin" daughter, Mary. "Cow" reinforces the colonial marriage and racial norms decried by Amy Bailey by asserting that a woman need merely be "brown" to attract a wealthy, industrious husband – she proves her worth through her colour/beauty, while he proves his with his physical labour, and we are to infer that Zekie may want her because their offspring will have the potential to "lighten up the race." We are not to infer that any of these characters may aspire to leave the land, or that they may want more for their futures than a life of marriage, labour and reproduction. Aarons further references (if he does not necessarily critique) popular literary romance tropes of the ideal "brown" woman, like "Bangle"'s Liza who, while she may be prized for her "high" colour, is also constrained by it, as I will demonstrate below. The matter of Mary's marriage, furthermore, is not her choice but her father's; to him (and her future husband) she is a status symbol, not a desiring subject. The same "masses" on whom this new nation is to be built, therefore, simply mimic colonial marriage, gender and respectability norms, rather than creating their own, and Obeah is helping them do it.

Yet Obeah, represented by Buddyjoe, is not to be trusted. The Obeahman "could have retailed [...] to the parties concerned" that Zekie had already expressed his interest in Mary to him but, we are told, "had no difficulty however

in resisting the temptation." Buddyjoe is not, as he pretends to be, an agent of nuptial – national – harmony; he has no scruples exploiting members of his own community for his individual financial gain. He does not even believe in his own Obeah – and neither should we. Dan Smearbow, to him, is "an old fool," engaging in Obeah while being a member of his local church. Obeah is not to be taken seriously in this narrative, even as Aarons indicates that the practice has far from been eradicated. The narrator's investment in ridiculing Obeah, however, belies his own nervousness about the practice's persistence. We are directed to recoil from Buddyjoe's "shaggy face with its pair of thick overhanging lips," a description which, while unnecessarily cruel and unsympathetic, is moreover humourless. This grotesque creature threatens Mary's virtue – Mary who is simultaneously objectified and sexualised in this narrative yet hardly described. Buddyjoe, the narrator continues, "seemed the perfect embodiment of all the powers of low cunning and trickery." "His black face [...] shone with a ghastly frightfulness that was increased ten fold [sic.] by the unearthly reddish glow imparted to his big uneven yellow teeth," and he is further described as a "nightmare figure of horror" – a frightful predator to Mary's helpless prey. Buddyjoe's masculinity is primal, unrefined, anti-intellectual in contrast to Mary, the feminised body of the somewhat childlike and innocent nation. In a parody of Gothic melodramatic horror, the Obeahman's yellow teeth are unhealthy, his aspect is terrifying and his "old black waistcoat [decorated] with the immemorial symbols of the wonder worker, the cross bones and skull" suggests a rapacious, murderous appetite. Aarons' sensationalism is exaggerated, but our laughter is still uncomfortable. The narrator's anxiety is not completely dispersed by his mockery and the spectre of the "evil Obeahman" must be exorcised from the pastoral idyll. Aarons reveals the dominant culture's terrified consciousness, which defines itself against "primitive," darkest Africa.

Buddyjoe summons "de damsel" into the living room and orders her to strip naked. Mary, "plainly not knowing what she should do," is reluctant. She giggles nervously throughout the ceremony and has to be physically supported by her parents. Her appeals that her mother protect her modesty fail; the older woman breaks her silence only to say "you'd better do it, darter – it's fe you' own good,"

thus sanctioning the violation of her female child in the name of Obeah and of narratory voyeuristic pleasure. Obeah, this narrative suggests, violates the rules of respectability and violates the “purity” of the feminised nation. Yet it is the narrative that sexualises Mary as a form of control, as we will see with Liza in “Bangle”. Edmondson argues that

brown women’s subjectivity was a hall of mirrors, reflecting and refracting the gaze of whatever constituency was watching. Next to white women, they were promiscuous. Next to black women, they were respectable. [...] Brown women’s ambiguous sexual status can be read as a metaphor for the unstable, ever-shifting possibilities of an emerging black and brown middle class, whose bid for legitimacy depended so heavily on the status of its women. Brown women were, simultaneously, an asset and a liability: they were privileged and victimised; respectable and wanton; eroticised and desexualised (60).

Mary’s sexuality (her freedom of choice) is destined to be curtailed by marriage to an industrious black man, the supposed backbone of the nation, ostensibly in the name of familial “stability” and “modern” nationalism – at the hands of an extremely, grotesquely black Obeahman. We do not know if Mary is even interested in Zekie – she is barely spoken to throughout this narrative and speaks only to ask a question – she is then silenced in her attempt to protect her own body. The Obeahman is this story’s agent of subjugation, not liberation; he is impatient with Mary’s demurral, with the “very simple matter” of her desire to keep her body to herself. After rubbing their daughter with various oils and other “foul-smelling” liquids Buddyjoe directs the family to the window, under which is the sick cow. When the cow “laughs,” to signify Mary’s having “won” Zekie, the narrator is almost enraptured: “then suddenly out of the night it came,” Aarons writes. “Like a flood. Not merely once or twice or three times, but over and over again.” The narrator’s – and Buddyjoe’s – relief is ecstatic, their shared triumph over Mary’s body orgasmic. The Obeahman leaves the Smearbows trembling “with a terror they made no attempt to control,” and the story comes full circle (goes nowhere) as he “plods” his way home.

"Cow" is not a story of much consequence. No real change has been effected, nor has any real harm been done. Obeah functions in this story as a superstition to be mocked, a marker of poverty and ignorance, but as a serious threat to middle-class sensibilities, despite its persistence in the "lower ranks." This "defanging" of Obeah, however, also silences the brown female body, which exists as a canvas and catalyst for black male desire – a body to be smeared with foul-smelling liquids. Yet while Mary is subjected to Obeah in order to fulfil this paternal nationalistic desire Liza, in Ethel Rovere's "Coolie Bangle," uses Obeah to free herself from it – despite her story being narrated by an old black man, who is in turn narrated by a younger white man. The white man is our narrator but he does not tell his own story – the overwhelming majority of the page is taken up with direct quotation, in patois, of the implied Obeahman, in tricky dialogue with a member of the white landowning class. Yet this is not the old man's story either – it is Liza's. "Bangle" recalls the histories of slavery not only through location (like "Cow," in the post-emancipation countryside), but also through Anancy-like linguistic dissimulation that exposes the limitations of the Enlightenment ideal of (Anglo/European) encyclopaedic knowledge. She and her speaker(s) have access to knowledge unknown and ungovernable by the plantation apparatus; they frustrate official narratives and play on fears that neither women, nor Obeah, can be fully controlled. The unnamed narrator – and his silent, but wilful female protagonist – reveal the unease surrounding the creation of a "modern" West Indies, distinctly by *not* speaking truth to power.

Like "Cow," "Bangle" glances back at a past, perhaps present type of life that is fast disappearing, a type of life in which Obeah is a social determinant. Obeah is an ambivalent signifier of the West Indian nation and with this ambivalence comes anxiety about the character of this new imagined national community. The white landowning narrator does not have the story's opening words, but quotes his interlocutor, "the old fellow" – a presumably black man whom he notes "scraping his foot in the loose dirt on the road, after the old custom of his African forefathers" (Rovere 1939, 6). Rovere uses very few words to locate us on a post-emancipation plantation, evoking the memory (and wounds) of slavery and establishing the "modern" space as haunted by ancient ghosts. She also

presents Afro-Caribbean spiritual belief and culture as a dilution (perhaps degeneration) of African spiritual beliefs, thus reiterating that Jamaica's heritage is indeed African, far more than it is European. Again with ambivalence this one sentence, with its clear contrast of speech patterns, establishes not only the dynamic between these two men but also the imperial male gaze which we are initially encouraged to adopt. This woman's story, we come to understand, is to be narrated (mediated) by two men who claim not only her, but the pastoral idyll on which the new nation is to be built. Yet "Bangle" subverts these conventions and expectations, almost immediately as it establishes them. The narrator gently mocks the speaker's "sanctimony," as "I had known him all my life and was quite aware that the old rascal was an Obeahman," but the "old rascal"'s sanctimony is matched only by the narrator's, whose whiteness will forever place him at a remove from the language, culture and understanding of the old man, from the story he is (re)telling – and from Liza, the fledgling, feminised nation. This myth of the nation is therefore contingent, unstable and suspect, as we can trust neither of these narrators with Liza's story. Rovere suggests with this narrative construction that men (black as well as white) will always obscure women's stories, as each of these men is lying to the other and Liza does not and cannot appear on the page to defend herself. The narrator's language – most of which is ventriloquism – betrays his anxiety at being part of a dwindling minority and of a crumbling power structure: the black man's perspective overpowers the white man's, even in the latter's own story.

The rest of the "sketch" is taken up by the old man telling the younger, unsolicited, the story of Liza's unhappy yet brief marriage. Liza is a member of their community who had died the night before and the story is about the death of her husband, which may or may not have involved Obeah. Liza, who the narrator reasons in an aside "had always been a little mad," was a "light yellow gal," according to the retired Obeahman. Her colour would have made her desirable and enviable in turn, yet also vulnerable to exploitation from men on both extremes of the plantation colour/class spectrum. Her mother worked in the greathouse and her father, unknown, is reckoned to have been one of the narrator's father's many visitors – of course, the Obeahman's suspicion never

falls on the massa himself. Rovere's feminist critique of colour/sex relations in the Caribbean focuses on the insidious effects of white male desire on black female bodies and the damage this desire does to Afro-creole West Indian families. She also critiques the association of creole/mixed-race Caribbean women and "madness," a trope that is common in West Indian fiction. The suggestion – by the white man, not the black – of Liza's madness reinforces the paternalistic, misogynistic stereotype of "the spirited creole woman," which is again linked to her skin colour. The narrator in "Bangle" associates Obeah with perceived sexual-racial transgression, a trope that is repeated in novels such as Alfred Mendes' *Black Fauns* (1935), C. L. R. James' *Minty Alley* (1936), Claude McKay's *Banana Bottom* (1934), Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Herbert de Lisser's *The White Witch of Rosehall* (1929), whose protagonist Annie Palmer is believed to be an Obeahwoman, perhaps the natural extension of her madness and sexual depravity. Rovere's narrator's designation of Liza as "mad" suggests displeasure and unease with her refusal to conform to the roles designated to her by society based on her colour, class and gender. Moreover, it reflects broader cultural discomfort with mixed-race/light-skinned individuals in the Caribbean, who indelibly signify some of the harshest excesses and betrayals of slavery. Rovere pulls away from this critique by placing Liza's pregnancy before the young massa's birth – firmly in the "bad old days" before "modern" reform – and the word "rape" is never used here. But Liza's story, as well as her mother's, cautions that women's bodies are always vulnerable; it follows, therefore, that so too is the body of the nation.

Liza had been uninterested in her many suitors (both black and white), and when she became pregnant refused to divulge the identity of her child's father – perhaps out of a desire to protect him. She was happy to raise her child herself but the interfering "missus," more concerned with appearances than with Liza's happiness, forced her to marry the plantation headman, a situation this white woman determined was better than Liza having no husband at all. The "ole massa" had wanted to leave Liza to raise her child in peace, but was browbeaten by his wife after she asked him "what you know about it," again suggesting that he may have known more about Liza's pregnancy than he was

willing to admit, and alluding to Liza's (and her mother's) precarity as an attractive, female, non-white member of his household. Rovere also alludes to the injurious effects of white (women's) interference in the lives of members of the peasant class – the colonising woman is often elided in narratives of slavery and Caribbean history – and Rovere's portrayal of this missus critiques this silence. Moreover, Liza's husband is a (slave)driver: at once exploited and exploiter, such figures were immediately and intimately responsible for some of the harshest punishments enacted on enslaved bodies and minds – they, too, are often overlooked in Caribbean historiography. As both victim and oppressor, such a figure perpetuates Liza's (the nation's) misery – in the service of a colonial “order” and “propriety” that, this narrative suggests, stymied the nation's “natural” development.

Liza might not have been thus exploited were she darker as, given her colour and class, she does not have as much freedom of access to her own body as would women considered “blacker” and therefore less valuable. Instead, because she is associated with the great house, whose influence extends to the private lives of its staff, she is forced into an alien, regressive family ideal that leaves her even more vulnerable and dependent. Liza's marriage may ostensibly reverse the trope of the workshy black man and enterprising black woman, but it is neither healthy nor progressive – in fact, the narrative strongly implies that this imposition goes against the “natural order.” “Bangle” thus places itself in direct opposition to normative discourses of the nuclear family and to the rhetoric of “maternalist social reform” popularised by women such as Amy Bailey who, as Putnam argues, did not acknowledge, and therefore did not renounce “white racist ideas about black people and sex” (504, 550). As Edmondson has also observed, middle-class Caribbean identity, from the late nineteenth century, was nervously predicated on women's sexuality and breeding potential (79). However, as Liza demonstrates, this sexuality was particularly slippery and neither the narrator nor the speaker – nor the author – can contain or suppress it. The nation, therefore, is also elusive and slippery – whatever it may be is only *partially* performed by the text.

Liza is unconcerned with – indeed excluded from – Victorian notions of chastity. Her baby is born with straight hair (another indication of the “bad old days”) but when he dies within a week Liza becomes quiet, withdrawn and submissive. Again, Rovere suggests that coerced, anonymous sexual unions between white men and black women are not “healthy” options for the future. Three years later, her husband comes to this Obeahman claiming that his wife is “a bad wutless woman” because she has been seen wearing a “coolie man bangle” on her arm, which she claims to have found on the roadside. Liza’s husband may be particularly incensed by the fact that her new lover appears to be “Indian,” given ongoing tensions between the recently emancipated African peasant class and the indentured Indian labourers who replaced them. He takes his wife’s newfound happiness as evidence of her infidelity – her happiness is “improper” – and asks the Obeahman to “do something to mek Liza change.” Liza’s happiness represents her rebellion – against her husband, against societal pressure – and therefore immorality. Our speaker insists that he “doan know nuttin bout Obeah, Massa,” but agrees to “mix a bush tea dat can cure all kind of sickness” in order to placate Liza’s husband, even though both the narrator(s) and the readership know that Liza was not “sick.” The Obeahman, mindful of a change in Liza that he considers positive, “tink it is better to see de girl happy.” He thus undermines the authority not only of a husband over his wife, but of a driver over a plantation. He also undermines the authority of the “ole missus,” and assists Liza in forming romantic/sexual bonds of her own choosing – thus upsetting, too, the already unsteady black-brown-white hierarchy on which the would-be nation imagines itself. Liza had been manipulated into marriage (a colonial institution) to a man unsuited to and violent towards her. Obeah is used in this narrative to overturn that domination and return Liza’s body to its rightful owner. Indeed, it is the sight of Liza’s naked body that begins her husband’s undoing.

A month after his consultation with the Obeahman the headman spies Liza naked, without her knowledge or consent, through the window of their home. As he goes to beat her (to punish her wilful, private use of and pleasure in her own body), he hears and sees a white owl. Rovere’s readership – or perhaps the

unnamed narrator – may or may not have known that “when white owl follow you to you house dat mean death.” The headman decides against the beating, eats his dinner and dies before morning. We do not know why and how the Obeahman would have gained access to so much detail about Liza’s husband’s last night (down to what the driver saw and felt before he died), but the narrator does not question him. The narrative, in describing Obeah, trips up and the old rascal becomes not only the narrator of the tale he is telling his benefactor, but of the tale we are reading – we are not sure who is the official teller of the national tale. The slip is brief, however, as the landowner-narrator returns to snap the Obeahman out of his reverie by asking him if Liza had also been to him for “medicine” for her husband. The Obeahman answers “solemnly” that the driver had always suffered from stomach pains, so he had given him the same bitter aloes that he gave (may have given) Liza. When asked about the “coolie man” he replies, “vaguely,” that he “doan know nuffin bout no coolie man,” much like he doan know nuffin bout no Obeah. His repetition of “Liza fine de bangle on de roadside” is formulaic and rehearsed. The Indian man is dismissed as quickly and as stealthily as he is introduced and Liza is restored to herself. It is possible that this Obeahman has just confessed to murder but his patron is not appalled and neither are we; instead, we are happy for Liza. The “truth” is irrelevant and “Bangle” uses Obeah to subvert discursive strategies and social norms, thus allowing the folk to speak for themselves – albeit under the not-so-watchful eyes of their colonial masters and within their narrative constraints. “Bangle” undermines plantation discourse, the system(s) put in place to subjugate and dehumanise poor black people. It is set in the past but suggests a future in which poor black women may take control of their own bodies, while critiquing a present in which these women cannot yet speak for themselves. Rovere may stop short of having her subaltern(s) speak, but in this narrative at least she exposes the fallibility of the speeches made for them.

These stories provide quick snapshots into the lives of Jamaica’s poor labouring classes during a period of increased political and social upheaval, during which Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean began to question its relationship to Britain and its empire, as well as the possibility of self-government. The new

nation(s) that Jamaica's intelligentsia envisioned pivoted on the vexing question of Jamaican womanhood and the subsumption of feminised bodies into the rhetoric of "respectability." (Brown) female sexuality is a slippery signifier of nation in these narratives, which illustrate the anxiety and violence inherent in aspiring to both "modernity" and "propriety." This anxiety over feminised bodies, when coupled with a simultaneous rejection of and fascination with the "African past," exposes the fragility and elusiveness of these imagined communities. "Coolie Bangle" and "The Cow That Laughed" may indeed support Esther Chapman's assertion in 1934 that "there can be no kind of uniformity of political outlook in a people sundered by race, language and temperament" (quoted in Wade 2008, 18). In fact these two interwar fictions further sunder this "people," and problematise this vexed unity along the lines of gender. Both narratives' women are silenced and marginalised by their narrators and in both cases the agent of Obeah, and mediator of sexuality, is male. Yet while Aarons' Mary is subjugated to and by Obeah in order to maintain colonial moral codes, Rovere's Liza uses Obeah to free herself from them. Aarons maintains that Obeah is predatory and limiting, while Rovere suggests that the practice can be liberatory, even progressive. Their respective plots are inconsequential, but their intersection of nation, Obeah and female sexuality brings together, while tearing apart, the discursive imaginary of a future Jamaican/West Indian nation.

References

- Aarons, R. L. C. 1939. "The Cow that Laughed." *Public Opinion*, April 15.
- Altink, Henrice. 2006. "'The Misfortune of Being Black and Female:' Black Feminist Thought in Interwar Jamaica." *Thirdspace: a journal of feminist theory & culture* 5. Accessed December 14, 2016. <http://journals.sfu.ca/thirdspace/index.php/journal/article/viewArticle/altink/130>.
- "A Word to my People." *Panama Tribune*, January 6, 1929.
- Bailey, Amy. 1937. "Not Wanted – II." *Public Opinion*, October 16.
- Campbell, Elaine. 1987. "The Dichotomised Heroine in West Indian Fiction." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 22(1): 137-143.
- Cobham, Rhonda. 1990. "Women in Jamaican Literature 1900-1950." In *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature*, edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, 195-222. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Dalleo, Raphael. 2010. "The Public Sphere and Jamaican Anticolonial Politics: *Public Opinion*, Focus, and the Place of the Literary." *Small Axe* 14: 56-82.
- Domingo, W. A. 1939. "Wanted – A National History." *Public Opinion*, 14 January.
- Edmondson, Belinda. 2009. *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Elkins, W. F. 1986. "William Lauron DeLaurence and Jamaican Folk Religion." *Folklore* 97: 215-218.
- Fernández- Olmos, Margarite and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, eds. 2003. *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo*. New York: New York University Press.
- Hall, Catherine. 2009. *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Johnson, Joyce. 1993. "Shamans, Shepherds, Scientists, and Others in Jamaican Fiction." *New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 67: 221-238.
- Josephs, Kelly Baker. 2013. *Disturbers of the Peace: Representations of Madness in Anglophone Caribbean Literature*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Levine, Lawrence W. 2007. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Livingstone, W. P. 1899. *Black Jamaica: A Study in Evolution*. London: Sampson, Low, Marston.
- "Old Wine, New Bottles." *Public Opinion*, February 20, 1937.
- Phillippo, James M. 1843. *Jamaica; its Past and Present State*. London: John Snow.
- Putnam, Lara. 2014. "Global Child-saving, Transatlantic Maternalism, and the Pathologisation of Caribbean Childhood, 1930s-1940s." *Atlantic Studies* 11: 491-514.
- Rodriques, Janelle. 2016. "Narratives of Obeah in Twentieth-century Anglophone West Indian Literature." PhD thesis, Newcastle University.
- Rovere, Ethel. 1939. "Coolie Bangle." *Public Opinion*, June 1.
- Safe, Suzanne. 2010. "'Gruesome and yet Fascinating:' Hidden, Disgraced and Disregarded Cultural Forms in Jamaican Short Fiction 1938-50." *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 6: 67-79.

Janelle Rodriques: "Do Something to Mek She Change:" Reading Respectability in- and unto the National Female Body in two Jamaican Interwar Fictions of Obeah

- Stewart, Dianne M. 2005. *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Thomas, Deborah A. 2004. *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalisation, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- "Thompson." "Obeah in Jamaica." *Public Opinion*, October 23, 1937.
- Wade, Carl A. 2008. "Re-imagining a Community: *The West Indian Review*, 1934-1940." *Wadabagei: Journal of the Caribbean and its Diaspora* 11: 3-27.
- Whitlock, Gillian. 1985. "The Bush, the Barrack-yard and the Clearing: 'Colonial Realism' in the Sketches and Stories of Susanna Moodie, C. L. R. James and Henry Lawson." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 20: 36-48.



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



Fabricating Intimacies: Artificial Silk and Frock Ladies in the Interwar Moment

[Faith Smith](#)

Associate Professor of African and Afro-American Studies and English
Brandeis University

Abstract: This article analyzes Una Marson's short story "Sojourn" in tandem with fiction by West African journalist Mabel Dove, as well as contemporaneous newspaper references to fabric and attire. It uses the symbolic resonances of cloth to ask what we might see if the colonial subject waiting in the wings is a desiring female subject. The interwar period coincides with key moments in Anglophone Caribbean nationalism as well as anthropological interest in working-class female intimate relations. If centering the middle-class Jamaican woman's leisure and intimacy risks ideological conservatism, it offers an opportunity to be less sure about the endgame of nationalism – about what was desired – in a period that tends to be narrated in terms of the forward march to nationhood. Finally, it provides a chance to put West Africa and the Caribbean in a contemporaneous rather than diasporic, non-coeval relationship.

Keywords: textiles, intimacy, West Africa, Jamaica, nationalism

How to cite

Smith, Faith. 2018. "Fabricating Intimacies: Artificial Silk and Frock Ladies in the Interwar Moment." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12: 221-244

In "Sojourn," a 1931 short story by Una Marson (1905-1965), a visiting English salesman finds himself charmed by the shy and efficient Jamaican stenographer and her middle-class family who are his hosts, as well as by the colony's "smartly dressed" modernity. Published in *The Cosmopolitan*, the Jamaica Stenographer Association's monthly periodical that Marson herself edited, "Sojourn's" references to artificial silk and to appropriate attire more generally offer rich symbolic resources for probing issues not necessarily fully captured by determining Marson's important place in feminist, intellectual, Pan-African, or political genealogies, which has been carefully analyzed.¹ If the interwar period is a key moment in the formation of the labour unions, political parties and cultural institutions that accompanied anticolonial struggles, and if Marson is a member of the class that is arguably best poised to benefit from these political and social developments, "Sojourn" asks what the single middle-class woman can expect if she wants a companion for the cinema. That is, it asks us to think of the pleasures of intimacy and leisure as an important and vexed prong of freedom.

Marson, Amy Bailey, and other black and brown members of the middle class in colonial Jamaica were remarkable interwar feminist reformers whose respectable liberalism can appear cautious or even conservative when read backwards from independence narratives that privilege strikers taking to the streets to demand a living wage across the region; or when compared with British Caribbean women in Limón, Costa Rica, taking their grievances before a hostile legal system (Putnam 2002); or to the Puerto Rican women who joined Socialist study circles, fought for better wages, or formed part of the "[m]ore than one thousand women seamstresses and embroiderers [who] signed a petition to the Puerto Rican legislature in 1918 urging the approval of 'a law that would liberate them from the inhumane exploitation which they have suffered from time immemorial.'"²

The narration of anticolonialism as the steady movement from imperial attachment to nation-building, and as the rise of party and union leaders and intellectuals harnessing the energies of enthusiastic but undeveloped masses,

has been tempered by careful analyses of the gendered and classed complexities of that era (Reddock 1990; French and Ford-Smith 1984). Indeed, as Nicole Bourbonnais shows, labor movements “were intimately linked to reproduction and sexuality” (Bourbonnais 2009, 42). Curiosity about “the Afro-Jamaican woman” and her desires runs the risk of reproducing social scientists’ claim to “know” her through the codification of her intimate relationships, as anthropologists would rush to do particularly after World War II (Robinson 2013). In centering the *middle-class* subject’s anxieties about who would love her, or recognize her, the danger is that my focus presses gender into the service of a particular class; in effect, “it comes to the aid of this black, heteronormative, maternal subaltern imaginary” as most worthy of recognition by the colonial state, and later by the postcolonial nation (Rowley 2010, 14).

But here I take up Veronica Gregg’s caution that there has been a flattening of the layered complexity of the purportedly staid middle-class black woman. Not only would Marson, Bailey, and others endure greater marginalization with the rise of formal party politics after World War II (coinciding with Bailey’s exit from the People’s National Party and Marson’s return to Europe), but Gregg urges that we must rigorously unpack “the ideological abstraction of the Negro woman” or “the iconography of the Negro woman,” given the collusion of the era’s policy makers with anthropological scholarship in keeping alive representations reaching back to the slaveholding era of a diseased and degenerate populace with perverted kinship structures, and dressing these up in the language of social reform (Gregg 2004, 29, 48, 52-53). I read “Sojourn” as precisely engaged in this unpacking, as it examines this dubious inheritance. Attending to the short story’s representations of intimacy and desire allows us to assess what is left over, what remains unresolved, in that historical moment’s regulations of productive, reproductive and other forms of labour. Marson’s portrait of a “dark” middle-class woman’s desire to be wooed presses us to enquire into the desiring female subject waiting in the wings, as she advocates for the expansion of imperial citizenship in the interwar moment.

Clothing cements ties to or dramatizes breaks with the past; it indexes material and emotional nuances of social status, racial, ethnic, religious and other affiliation, surveillance, self-fashioning and desire. Clothing also offers the metaphorical resonance of legal personhood, of being clothed with or stripped of rights. Theorizing the French Revolution in the wake of the Second World War, Hannah Arendt discusses the *persona* or mask, the “legal personality” through which citizens perform public personhood in society, the protective power of which was “torn away” during the Reign of Terror (Arendt 2006, 98). While this implies a rights-bearing subject who is *produced*, whose rights cannot be taken for granted as *natural*, Ayten Gündogdu notes that this must also mean that “not every human being is automatically recognized as a person,” contrary to what human rights discourse tends to assume, and this provides a sobering lens on the plight of the migrant’s statelessness today (Gündogdu 2015, 102). This sense of a being whose personhood cannot be taken for granted is reminiscent of social death, as theorized by Orlando Patterson, in which members of the “naturally alienated” enslaved community “were not allowed freely to integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives,” so that their affirmation of kinship or other social ties was “never recognized as legitimate or binding” (Patterson 1982, 5-7). If being clothed can be interpreted following the Latin *investire*, implying variously being adorned or enveloped, vested with power and authority, as well as the profitable investment of money, then the stripping bare implied by social death marks a fraught genealogy of accumulation and personhood for Caribbean subjects. Marson and other members of her generational cohort such as C. L. R. James (b. 1901) and Nicolás Guillén (b. 1902) were born on the cusp of massive migrations into Panama, Trinidad, Cuba, and other territories, migrations that were generating and redistributing wealth in ways that both undermined and reinforced older systems of accumulation and patronage. Clothing’s intimations of wealth, propriety and comfort or the absence of these are an apt metaphor of such changes, but can also register as irrelevant to the social upheaval of the period under discussion here.

In considering a period that is both mired in empire and deeply entangled with a chronology we have tended to maintain about the future nation in the anglophone Caribbean context, we sometimes assume that those social actors must be fighting to bring something into being, or if not, are perversely dazzled by empire's gleam. But rather than rescuing or redeeming that generation I am trying to understand their complex postures, to avoid tripping them up in teleological projects that are more in keeping with our wishful thinking about present predicaments than their own sense of their time. No doubt we look to them with these imposed temporalities because of the despair of some of us, at least, about our present; we didn't think that we would be *here*, when *here* means the wariness with some feminist assumptions that pervades Michelle Rowley's text, cited earlier, or with the neoliberal present that has followed radical projects such as the Grenadian Revolution, in which we inhabit "a world in which the idea of the revolutionary overcoming of the past is no longer viable as a way of thinking futurity" (D. Scott 2014, x).

Caribbean labourers have joined others across the world in stitching the expensive designer clothing that renders some global consumers fashionable. Recall that in Stephanie Black's *Life and Debt* Jamaican workers who are replaced by Chinese workers show how one constituency gets swapped out for another in the precarious global arena of sweat shops, but also how some workers get cast as particularly suited to the demands of transnational capitalism (Black 2001; Kang 2002). We must assume that these workers, Jamaican and Chinese, also sometimes desire the clothing that they are fashioning. Meanwhile, the region's athletes receive lucrative contracts to be identified with global brands: is this small-state sovereignty in the age of globalization, or branding as a new enslavement?

Recently, Yarimar Bonilla has cautioned independent territories in the region against our investment in "flag independence," arguing that the entire region is marked by varying degrees of the category of the "non-sovereign" (Bonilla 2015). She argues that we have inflated the Westphalian model of the "territorially bounded, culturally homogenous, economically self-sufficient

liberally democratic state” to the status of a “universal norm” rather than a “provincial myth” (Bonilla 2013, 153). As she revisits Aimé Césaire’s postwar embrace of *département* status for Martinique, she paints a vista of bad and less bad options, quite different from the usual scenario by which the decision not to choose independence can only be interpreted as bad faith (Bonilla 2015, 20-24). As I am reading backwards from my present to a past that is not necessarily Marson’s own sense of her future, I want to learn to be less certain about the futures of the past. Bonilla urges us to be less certain that we know what those who came before us meant, to avoid rooting them down in a project such as that of the future nation that is not necessarily present in their discourses. Marson’s portrait of artificial silk and smartly-dressed Jamaicans might permit us to limn out the material and symbolic resonances of a respectable black feminine imaginary, doomed to wait wistfully – “in vain,” as her eponymous 1930 poem put it (Marson 1996, 128) – even as it presents itself as properly clothed for full personhood.

Frock Ladies and Cloth Wives

Another member of Marson’s generational cohort allows us to explore a particularly vivid usage of the metaphor of clothing, before returning to “Sojourn.” Mabel Dove (born, like Marson, in 1905, and also known by a number of other journalistic aliases, and as Dove-Danquah when she was briefly married to a prominent nationalist) explored the social roles of the “cloth wife” and “frock lady” in her short fiction, plays, and newspaper columns. This allowed her to make wry social commentary on the gendered, classed and racialized social roles of the west coast cities of Lagos (Nigeria), Accra (Gold Coast), and Freetown (Sierra Leone), to which she was connected by parentage, birth or employment. In “The Torn Veil,” published in 1947, a woman finds her usefulness as a “cloth wife” brought to an end when her socially mobile husband acquires another wife. While he is “young and struggling” she is an adequate mother to their three children but after he gets a degree and considers running for political office, he looks around for a “frock lady.” She leaves the house with the children

after admonishing him. On his wedding day he has an apparition of this first wife dressed in a “white brocaded silk cloth” with a “long bridal veil” (13), and her beauty makes him regret his new marriage. He trips in an effort to catch her, and dies from the fall; meanwhile, a telegram the next day announces that, living in another town and not in direct contact with him, she died at the same time that he did.

We can define the “cloth woman” as the perceived inferior, uneducated woman who is dressed in traditional African attire and probably engages in commercial activities external to the household such as market trading (Newell 2002, 13). She is also not recognized as a wife in the legal or Christian sense. By contrast, the “frock lady” is perceived to stay in the confines of the home – defined in nuclear rather than extended terms – and to embody Victorian ideals of respectability, probably as a Christian convert (Newell 2002, 4). As Stephanie Newell as noted, this opposition issues from the anxieties of the husband at the center of this familial arrangement, since in reality many frock ladies were also poorly educated, in a social milieu in which women had less access to education. For Newell, the significance of this distinction between two types of wives redounds to a man who, dressed in a wool jacket and trousers manufactured in England, resented both women’s authority and the growing number of men who were more recent converts and less educated than he was.

We might read “The Torn Veil,” then, as Dove’s critique of the wider social forces that shaped these domestic relationships to the advantage of men of a particular privileged class. This was also a critique of Native Customary Law that allowed men to exploit their partners, legislation that Dove would fight against when she entered the legislature in the 1950s. In the story, he comes to his senses, as it were, when he sees his first love clothed in white and begs her forgiveness; this after his earlier reaction to her protests and to her departure with the children was to privilege the blow to his ego and to consider whether or not to ask her family to repay her bride price. Here the veil, a symbol of the clothing that she could not wear in life and which the new bride’s ability to wear

further marked her abjection, becomes the means by which she entices her former lover and literally brings about his downfall. That is, it is because he catches the phantom veil that he falls against the table and dies. We could surmise that his lingering desire and his guilt, as well as her own despair and her desire to have been able to wear such clothing in life, together produce the apparition which ultimately kills them both.

The Native Customary Law and polygamy had constituted a social conundrum for Gold Coast nationalists generations earlier. The fiction of J. E. Casely Hayford and others, for instance, sought to rationalize the institution as representative of a parallel modernity that Africans need not be ashamed of in the face of British colonial claims of premodern immorality (Newell 2013). "The Torn Veil" stresses the degreed man's thoughtless casting away of a soulmate in order to pursue shallow societal norms, but also stresses her and her children's vulnerability; in exchange for years of social and physical reproduction, she is left with nothing, her children cannot inherit, and she and her family are socially indebted to a man who has traded her in for a better model. Interestingly, Dove's play *A Woman in Jade*, serialized in the *Times of West Africa* [Gold Coast] in 1934, portrays frock ladies who, educated and with male fiancés who are their social counterparts, carry on compromising sexual relationships with white men. In scenes of nightlife that are meant to critique the women's moral judgement for consorting with expatriates, their betrayed beaux also come in for censure since their impending marriages will not disrupt these men's relationships with "two or three" cloth girls (Dove 2004, 67). The frock lady, then, finds herself caught between reprehensibly consorting with white men and meek fidelity to a man who will keep his cloth women when he marries her.

Marson and Dove's similarities – stenographers, journalists, political activists, writers across a range of genres, frock ladies in British colonial societies who share with their respective male counterparts a sense of straining against the barriers to their desire for vigorous political participation – do not make them the same. Marson's training and employment as a stenographer allowed her a significant foothold into avenues for social mobility but also illustrated the limits

of a well-educated black middle class with finite economic resources. Conversely, Dove acquired her training as a stenographer stealthily; her father sent her to finishing schools in England expecting her to enter the professions and marry within her well-off family's social class when she returned to West Africa. Marson's social and economic unsteadiness is very different from Dove's rootedness in generations of a well-to-do social milieu. At the same time, the careers as well as the fiction and non-fiction of both allow us to see their gendered, racial and classed negotiations. Placing both figures in the same conversation, albeit briefly, allows us to explore the extent to which the Caribbean may be relevant to current discussions of "intimate interactions [that] multiplied the possible subject positions Europeans and Africans could occupy, challenging the centrality of a hierarchical colonizer/colonized dichotomy as the key locus of conflict in European-African encounters during the colonial period....[and of] African women who did not automatically experience disempowerment and did not, for various reasons, understand themselves to be lower-status members of society on the basis of their sex" (Abosedo). It also nudges us out of the temptation to position West Africa in a relationship of static diasporic past relative to the Caribbean.

Cloth ties both regions together and is also a factor in the terrible transformations in the meanings of personhood. Cloth is woven into the histories of slave-trading, enslavement and indentureship. Textiles were traded for humans, gold and kola nuts by Europeans who acquired or tried to reproduce in Manchester mills the patterns and textures of a demanding and discerning African clientele; across slave trade routes, heirloom cloth from Africa, Europe and Asia was carefully stored in family chests in prosperous households or covered the body in multiple layers of adornment as signs of prestige (LaGamma and Giuntini 2008, 18, 20). The coffle march, dungeon, and Middle Passage entailed a stripping of clothing and personhood to facilitate the remaking of an efficient tool of western prosperity (Hartman 2007, 110-135). In the Americas, plantation rations of coarse osnaburg and sumptuary laws governing the placement of head ties and ruffles pointed both to the limits

placed on enslaved people and free people of color and the consternation caused by their disinclination to stay in their presumed place (Buckridge 2004).

Clothing was also part of the meaning-making/signification system governing past or present, African-born or diasporic, in systems of visibility which would eventually utilize the camera as a medium through which supposed inherent essences and imposed modernities could be observed. Thus in the early twentieth century Harry H. Johnston used photographs of “Africans” and “New World Negroes” as the basis for his claim to tell the difference between “Negroes” on both sides of the Atlantic, and Krista Thompson has shown how Afro- and Indo-Caribbean people were posed on donkeys or with fruit in order to create a visual presentation of the Caribbean as ordered and quaint for tourists imagined as white and modern (Johnston 1910; Thompson 2006). Visiting Jamaica in the late 1890s, Boston tourist Allan Eric noted of an indentured immigrant Indian woman: “Her arms are wound about with silver bracelets from wrist to shoulder, silver rings on every finger, her ankles bound with very heavy silver anklets, and silver rings again on every toe” (Eric 1897, 83). This implied that such women were exotic, “traditional,” compliant, and *full of culture* as opposed to rowdy, *uncultured* Afro-Caribbean women. Eric notes of these immigrants’ wages that they were “beaten into jewelry and worn by the women for safe keeping. Each company brings a native silversmith” (83), and he thus draws our attention to them as wage-earners in the Americas who, in effect, wore their savings on their bodies. They often paid a terrible price for moving these savings with them as they asserted the right to choose or reject their intimate companions.³

With “Sojourn,” Marson invites us to place artificial silk and textile factories in Birmingham wartime and interwar imperial contexts of luxury and consumption, as well as longer historical trajectories of commerce, cloth, and servitude. Bearing out Stuart Hall’s despairing description of Jamaica -- “I come from the most exquisitely-differentiated color/class system in the world” (Akomfrah 2013) -- we can note how carefully clothing and posture are delineated, but also complexion. Thus in “Sojourn” Helen is not only “graceful” but “dark” like her

father, or “dark tan” like an “East Indian” (Marson 1931, 9-10). She is neither “almost black” like the market women whose barefoot picturesqueness is required for precisely this social anchoring of the middle-class subject, nor is she “very fair,” approximating whiteness to the untrained eye, like her mother and brother (Marson 1931, 9). In this sense skin shade and its narration constitute a sort of social attire that is attached to norms of inclusion and exclusion. Helen marks herself off from the visiting salesman, blue-eyed Sydney Hamilton: “Now, Harry, you are a boy and the gods made you fair,” she points out to her brother, who wants her to come out to the movies with the two men, “But my going out with him is another matter. I am dark...” (Marson 1931, 24). Even so Sydney is so smitten by her gentle ministrations, that on the eve of her departure, after asking her permission, he kisses her “reverently and devoutly as though she were a goddess,” before returning to England to marry his beautiful white belle, and leaving Helen to hope that “some day the joy of love would be hers” (Marson 1931, 27).

The artificial silk that Sydney has come to persuade Caribbean consumers to buy helps us to tease out connections between intimate exclusions, and the relationship between colony and metropole in this interwar period. Experiments with wood pulp, cotton waste, cellulose acetate and other material since the mid-nineteenth century by French, British, Belgian and US chemists, engineers and investors, had produced an array of technologies and brands, including rayon and viscose, that were specifically or loosely implied by the term “artificial silk,” and that by the 1920s were no longer considered cheap substitutes for raw silk, but autonomous textiles of high quality in their own right. Advertisements and articles breathlessly announced new developments: swimsuits that could withstand sea water, or fashion shows in which the bridal party was outfitted in artificial silk from head to toe. It was reported that a German company was interested in building a factory in Jamaica to make artificial silk out of sugarcane fibre, and the Jamaica Agricultural Society proposed that “ladies” with time and land could make a “nice little income” by growing mulberry trees and cultivating silk worms to make raw silk, since the Imperial Institute Advising Committee on Silk-Producing, no less, had determined that the demand for and

production of artificial silk had not affected the demand for raw silk as a “higher grade” of not just textile but, it was implied, of taste, as well.⁴

What was not always so clearly articulated was that cotton – that is to say cotton that was not combined with rayon – was severely affected by these developments. This staple of the British economy represented by its iconic Manchester and Lancashire mills was under duress. “Cotton is not played out yet,” T. Williams of Textile College in Blackburn, was reported as saying, the very declaration implying the possibility that the opposite was nearer the truth.⁵ In the very month of the publication of Marson’s story, from February 16-27, the British Industries Fair was held in the UK, and the clothing industry sponsored pavilions. The Queen visited both the British Clothing Textile Exhibition and the Exhibition of British Artificial Silk Goods, and she enjoyed the variety of colors and patterns, taking orders for fabric to be delivered to the Palace.⁶ Her interest and the demand it generated was a boon for an industry that may well have been “played out.”

All the more reason, then, for British firms to be keen on British West Indian consumer demand, and for traveling salesmen to drum up business in imperial territories. But did they take seriously Caribbean people’s tastes, as consumers who were confident about their self-fashioning? Advertising in newspapers and in journals such as Marson’s – for shirts, dresses, lingerie and home furnishings in a range of fabrics – suggested that local merchants did, and other reports suggested that it was advisable for prospective merchants overseas to do so as well. “Market Worth Attention of Manufacturers” noted the demand in Jamaica for men’s shirts in both the British style and the American “tunic” style, adding that a working-class male clientele desired cheap cotton shirts with collars, in blue, gray and brown.⁷ Because of the presence of tailors and seamstresses there was high demand for “piece-lengths” of voile, crepe de chine, georgette, gingham, cambric, and other fabrics. Although cotton hosiery was popular, there was also a demand for silk and artificial silk. In this market, embroidery had competition from the Swiss and German competition for ribbons and lace. During the war the US had gained a foothold, and Canada was also competing

for consumers of fabric. Thus, British firms needed to study these consumers with specific demands, who had other territories competing for their business.

An official from the Trinidad-based Trade Commission noted that prospective exporters to the West Indies from the UK needed to become fully acquainted with the complexity of the West Indian market.⁸ Barbadians didn't have the same tastes as Trinidadians, he pointed out, and Jamaica was nine shipping days away from Trinidad, so that you couldn't just lump the region together and call it a market. He advised firms to include instructions for proper laundering and dyeing with their orders for textiles. Echoing advice from the previously quoted article, that a single "capable man" could represent multiple firms marketing non-competing items, this piece noted that firms needed to hire a sub-agent, and that this person could combine a business visit during the winter month with a vacation.

The very first words of "Sojourn" announce this latter point as a dilemma for the prospective salesman, as Sydney's father warns him that his trip to Jamaica is for business, not pleasure. This perhaps speaks partly to the Caribbean's longstanding place in global arrangements of consumption, as the region has been perceived as facilitating *metropolitan* modernities, but forever positioned as never modern enough in and of itself; thus, travel there solely for business would be inconceivable. Later, Helen's father teases Sydney about this, too. But of course Sydney is fated, like other fictional characters in this genre, not just to go to the beach or other local attractions, but to enjoy it conspicuously, since such stories are in effect also tourist guides. But if the line between business and vacation can be blurred – if Sydney can successfully market artificial silk *and* go to Doctor's Cave Beach – what other lines might be crossed? Here it is interesting that as much as "Sojourn" is suffused with Helen's disappointment, it is the English visitor's discomfort that is also at stake. He has encountered a modernity that is incomprehensible to him because he is apparently not worldly enough to recognize and be at home in it. It is not the young stenographer and her motorcar mechanic brother living with their parents in a home with "every modern convenience" who have to figure things out. It is Sydney, the "typical

Englishman" from Birmingham, who has to learn to read signs that are new to him. This is a modernity that he was not prepared for because his putatively "national" Englishness has masked its thorough dependence on its imperial and colonial contexts, acknowledging its existence in wartime and economic crisis. Expecting monkeys and insects in a tropical environment Sydney is stunned by the "unmistakable modernity of the city" when he is in Kingston (Marson 1931, 8). He had not expected to interact with persons who are like those he would meet in "select circles" in a London drawing room (Marson 1931, 9). He marvels at the "fashionably attired women" and the "fine figures" of the "coloured [sic] girls" (Marson 1931, 24). It is Sydney who is constantly off-kilter, anxious about what to wear, worrying that he is not properly attired as he moves from one event to the other. Perhaps indicating that Helen's despair at his eventual leave-taking is not one-sided, and that intimate lines had been in danger of being more fully breached, we are given the detail that he greets his girlfriend on his return to Birmingham "without any qualms of conscience" (Marson 1931, 26).

In her discussion of the Cotton Queen contestants of Lancashire and other cities who were expected to modernize and revitalize flailing British industries from the early 1930s onwards, Rebecca Conway notes that the stereotypical clog- and shawl-wearing Lancashire Lass no longer matched the reality of the factory girl who now sported makeup and fashionable stockings of artificial silk for a night out at the cinema (Conway 2013). There is perhaps a national misrecognition of young women's desires and modes of consumption, which we want to heed the call to take seriously: "...an alternative approach to the Modern Girl's agency involves foregoing the desire to decide whether Modern Girls were dupes or resisters of consumer capitalism..." (Weinbaum et al. 2008, 22). On the one hand, this speaks to metropolitan belatedness; Marson's fictional Englishman is as clueless about the British Caribbean as are the English about changes afoot *within* so-called national English contexts. What is complicated for fictional Helen, however, is that a night out at the cinema in Kingston is circumscribed by gender and complexion in a way that it is not for "fair" Harry, Helen's brother. There is a failure here of full recognition between colony and metropole, as represented by relations between a salesman and his market or a visitor and his

host (do you know where we are? what do you know when you know us? are we just a market? can you see us?); but perhaps moreso between Helen and her own society. The prospect of a night out in Kingston signals a failure to achieve full personhood that remains unresolved.

Some two decades earlier, anticipating Sydney's experience of walking in Kingston's modern, bustling environment with "smartly dressed" men and women who are carefully, racially demarcated from each other but also from the aforementioned market women (Marson 1931, 8), the editor of Jamaica's *Daily Gleaner* had described strolling in downtown Kingston in similar terms: King Street was "the finest in all the West Indies. It is well paved, well served by electric cars, taxi-motors, and horse-cabs... [the visitor] will see every shade of complexion to be found in the island. The buggies and motor cars drawn up by the sidewalks contain dames of fair or olive hue... Girls of chocolate color, with dresses fitting them 'like gloves' step briskly along...Swarthy men, black men, brown men, fair men move up and down, not rapidly but with what after a while the visitor would come to consider a good pace, the heat considered" (De Lisser 1913, 73). Here H. G. de Lisser claims an apparent belatedness for a different, parallel cosmopolitanism from the one he imagines for his non-local readers, appealing to what Jamaica's residents *share*, even while he carefully distinguishes dark-skinned pedestrians from light-skinned carriage-riders. This is an optimistic picture but its underlying social hierarchies are reflected in three other commentaries. When, in 1916, Marcus Garvey wished to show a prominent visitor that Afro-Jamaicans were economically and psychologically damaged by colonialism, he noted that "our black girls" despised Afro-Jamaican men, and that anyone walking about would notice "hundreds of Black prostitutes" (Williams 1970, 4, 6; Smith 2013). Diametrically opposed to de Lisser's, Garvey's portrait of the city still hinged on a racialized representation of the public sphere.

In 1911 a letter-writer to the editor of the *Jamaica Times* questioned her respectable prospects in the context of being snubbed by women of a higher class when they "happen[ed] to meet downtown," even though they'd been

introduced several times. She felt "dismissed" as a marital contender by Jamaican gentlemen, despite her "unsullied" purity and "untarnished" name.⁹ These are all commentaries from the period of Marson's early youth. In the early 1930s period of "Sojourn's" publication, Amy Jacques Garvey remembers encountering a high school acquaintance in Kingston, who commented on the difference between her light skin and that of her infant son: "I haven't seen you in ages. What are you doing with this little black baby?" (Taylor 2002, 121; Garvey 2014, 22-23). In a 1937 article in the *Daily Gleaner*, Amy Bailey criticized Jamaican employment advertisements that expressed a preference for light-skinned women (Bailey 2011, 517-18). Thus women who shared the class position of fictional Helen – respectable, educated, middle-class – felt disrespected. Let us be clear. They felt entitled to the recognition denied to the barefoot market women in "Sojourn," women such as the street vendor whose alleged comments on her intention to attend the Jamaica Exhibition in Kingston in 1891 remind us of the wider social claims on silk and its capacity to confer prestige and pleasure, than "Sojourn" or its creator might allow: "When a lick on me silk frock and fling on me parasol over me shoulder and drop into Exhibition ground den you will know weder I is a lady or not."¹⁰ How would the changing social order reflect this insistence on wearing a silk frock, and should we understand Marson and members of her class to be threatened by this, given that their social and political advocacy was exactly that – advocacy, which more often than not presumes speaking for the other?

Marson encouraged Jamaican women to run for office in the municipal and legislative elections, in a February 1937 article in Jamaica's *Public Opinion* (Gregg 2005). Pointing out that there were "now sixteen women in the Turkish House of Assembly," Marson was nevertheless pointedly local: "Social work" was being done by "the older set," which she specified to mean "English people or women form Jamaica's white social circle," and she encouraged more of "our women" to get involved. Drawing on notions of heterosexual domesticity, as well as women's special role as intuitive and decisive as distinguished from "plodding" and "unimaginative" husbands, she urged women to interest

themselves in social work as “the best training for a political career” (Gregg 2005, 132).

Writing a few years earlier as “Marjorie Mensah” in the *Times of West Africa*, Mabel Dove encouraged eligible women to vote in the upcoming elections for the Gold Coast Legislative Council. Not all women could vote yet, and no women could run for office, but this didn’t mean that “our precious votes” should be frittered away. Since men were “fickle beings,” it was important not to waste votes on “the fellow who always has a lot to say and forgets it all when he gets up to speak in the Council or elsewhere, only to remember it most effectively when he is at a safe distance from the place” (Moynagh and Forestell 2012, 158). While it is easy and even appropriate to read Marson and Dove’s articles as exemplary of earlier waves of feminism, working within the boundaries of suffrage for a select, propertied few instead of trying to leverage more far-reaching gains of social equality, or freedom from capitalism, the assessment of unimaginative men, whether politicians or intimate companions, is still striking. Furthermore, in Marson’s case it is important to recognize that “social work” was a loaded racialized term originating in the transmutation of anxieties about white women’s work outside the home into “doing good works” as a respectable occupation. For Marson to propose that women like herself enter this social domain, therefore, was a breach of social mores (Gregg 2005, 41-43; Reddock 1990).

Marson’s “Sojourn” gestures towards the interiority of a female character who performs chaste femininity, who yearns, rather than being assertive about her sexual choices (since presumably any assertion risks confirming stereotypes of salaciousness), who attracts the white English foreigner, but not as his marital mate, the desired imaginable role. Dove’s “Torn Veil” does not, as we have seen, center a frock lady, which is the social role to which Marson’s Helen would more closely correspond, yet they are connected. In Dove’s story the veil and the apparition of which it is a part constitute an ephemeral *something*, an inexplicable sign of an emotional attachment that exceeds the groom and the wider society’s negligence, perhaps, or an ambivalence about value. That is to

say, if her appearance in a splendid white dress confirms that the dress does indeed have value, whereas the story had seemed to indicate its wrongheaded and painful excess, then it suggests that the woman who is passed over for someone else might desire even those things that are out of reach, impractical or which demean some feminist accounts of women's worth. The dress transforms her, literally or metaphorically. In Marson and Dove's stories, even ambiguous, unstated, impractical desires are acknowledged and affirmed.

Thus, as their peers, including colonial middle-class men, appeal to folktales, to custom, to law or to political activism to challenge British colonial imposition of institutions deemed to be unfair or "alien," simultaneously sometimes chiding women for undermining claims to respectability, "The Torn Veil" sheds light on the female desiring subject who activates patriarchal fears about colonial emasculation, about symbolic and actual inheritance, and about her wayward erotic autonomy; "Sojourn" ponders whether or not the social world is ready to accept full participation of at least some of its subjects. Partly through the prism of cloth itself we discern how selfhood is stitched together for the more public, anticolonial maneuvers of the interwar moment.

In our contemporary moment visual and performance artists attempt to come to terms with sometimes painful legacies of adornment, accumulation and dispossession, often by demystifying the notions of compensatory authenticity that retain such a hold over us. They often do so by seizing on notions of artificiality as a means of undermining narratives of authenticity. Trinidadian-Canadian artist Andil Gosine casts the cutlass in silver or in white gold in order to rework an object recalled as both murderous and loving; he also considers the "wrecking of Indian names" both as a "dehumanization of the indentured" and a dreadful opportunity, since "the distortion and changing of names also simultaneously perplexed and interrupted the caste system" (Gosine 2012; Gosine 2016, 51). British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare defamiliarizes what has come to be identified as authentic African fabric to probe Indonesian and other "origins" of "dutch wax" fabric, while Nigerian-American artist Njideke Akunyili Crosby incorporates similar textiles in ensembles of collage in order to submit

imposed itineraries and admonitions to her generation's divergent routes. In poignantly exploring British colonial subjectivity in terms of desires that must be deferred or kept under wraps, these stories from interwar Jamaica and the Gold Coast ask us to put modern women's tastes and consumption on the table alongside their respectability and activism.

References

- Abosede, George A. *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor, and Social Development in Colonial Lagos*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014.
- Akomfrah, John, Dir. 2013. *The Stuart Hall Project*. Smoking Dogs Films. DVD.
- Arendt, Hannah. 2006. [1963]. *On Revolution*. London: Penguin.
- Bailey, Amy. "The Illegitimacy Question: From the Top Down." In *Caribbean Women: An Anthology of Non-Fiction Writing, 1890-1980*, edited by Veronica Marie Gregg, 146-51. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Bailey, Amy Beckford. 2011. "Not Wanted – I." In *Feminist Writings from Ancient Times to the Modern World: A Global Sourcebook and History*, Vol. 2, edited by Tiffany K. Wayne, 517-518. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press.
- Black, Stephanie, Dir. 2001. *Life and Debt*. New Yorker Films.
- Bonilla, Yarimar. 2013. "Ordinary Sovereignty." *Small Axe* 17 (3): 152-165.
- . 2015. *Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Bourbonnais, Nicole. 2009. "'Dangerously Large': The 1938 Labor Rebellion and the Debate Over Birth Control in Jamaica." *New West Indian Guide* 83 (1-2): 39-69.
- Buckridge, Steeve O. 2004. *The Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica, 1760-1890*. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Cobham, Rhonda. 2014. "The Caribbean Digital," Barnard College. Colombia University.
- Conway, Rebecca. 2013. "Making the Mill Girl Modern? Beauty, Industry, and the Popular Newspaper in 1930s' England." *Twentieth Century British History* 24 (4): 518-541. <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwt004>
- Donnell, Alison. 2011. *Selected Poems by Una Marson*. Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree Press.
- Casely Hayford, J. E. 1969. *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation* [1911]. London: Frank Cass and Co.
- Crosby, Njideka Akunyili. 2016. *Njideka Akunyili Crosby: I Refuse to Be Invisible*. West Palm Beach: Norton Museum of Art.
- De Lisser, H. G. 1913. *Twentieth Century Jamaica*. Kingston: Jamaica Times Printery.
- Dove, Mabel. "A Woman in Jade." *Mabel Dove: Selected Writings of a Pioneer West African Feminist*, edited by Stephanie Newell and Audrey Gadzekpo, 59-90. Nottingham, UK: Trent Editions, 2004.
- . 2012. "On Suffrage in West Africa." [July 1931]. *Documenting First Wave Feminisms: Volume 1: Transnational Collaborations and Cross-Currents*, edited by Maureen Moynagh and Nancy Forestell, 157-9. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Dove-Danquah, Mabel. 1975. "The Torn Veil." *The Torn Veil and Other Stories*, edited by Phebea Itayemi and Mabel Dove-Danquah, 7-15. [1947.] London: Evans Brothers.
- Eric, Allan. 1897. *Buckra Land: Two Weeks in Jamaica*. Boston, MA: Boston Fruit Company.
- Findlay, Eileen J. Suárez. 1999. *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ford-Smith, Honor. 1986. *Una Marson: Black Nationalist and Feminist Writer*. Kingston, Jamaica: Sistren Publications.

- French, Joan and Honor Ford-Smith. 1984. "Women, Work and Organization in Jamaica, 1900-1944." Kingston, Jamaica: ISS/DGIS Research Project.
- Garvey, Amy Jacques. 2014. *Garvey and Garveyism*. Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press.
- Gosine, Andil. 2016. "My Mother's Baby: Wrecking Work After Indentureship." In *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments*, edited by Gabrielle Jamela Hosein and Lisa Outar, 49-60. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 2012. "Ohrni and Cutlass." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 6: 1-3.
- Gregg, Veronica Marie, ed. 2005. *Caribbean Women: An Anthology of Non-Fiction Writing, 1890-1980*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Gündogdu, Ayten. 2015. *Rightlessness in an Age of Rights: Hannah Arendt and the Contemporary Struggles of Migrants*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hartman, Saidiya. 2007. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Jarrett-Macauley, Delia. 1998. *The Life of Una Marson, 1905-65*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Johnston, Sir Harry H(amilton). 1910. *The Negro in the New World*. London: Methuen.
- Kang, Laura Hyun Yi. 2002. *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Kent, Rachel, ed. 2008. *Yinka Shonibare MBE*. Munich: Prestel Publishing.
- LaGamma, Alisa and Chrisine Guintini. 2008. *The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Marson, Una. 1996. "In Vain." In *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, edited by Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, 128. London: Routledge.
- . 2005. "Should Our Women Enter Politics?" In *Caribbean Women: An Anthology of Non-Fiction Writing*, edited by Veronica Marie Gregg, 131-33. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- . "Sojourn." 1931. *The Cosmopolitan*. (February): 8-10, 23-24, 26-27.
- Narain, Denise deCaires. 2002. "Literary Mothers? Una Marson and Phyllis Shand Allfrey." In *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry: Making Style*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Newell, Stephanie. *The Power to Name: A History of Anonymity in Colonial West Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013.
- . ed. 2002. *Marita, or the Folly of Love: A Novel by a Native*. Leiden: Brill.
- Patterson, Orlando. 1982. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Proctor, James. 2015. "Una Marson at the BBC." *Small Axe* 19 (3): 1-28.
- Putnam, Lara. 2002. *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Costa Rica, 1870-1960*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Reddock, Rhoda. 1990. "Feminism, Nationalism, and the Early Women's Movement." In *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, edited by Selwyn Reginald Cudjoe, 61-81. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Robinson, Tracy. 2013. "The Properties of Citizens": A Caribbean Grammar of Conjugal Categories." *Du Bois Review* 10 (2): 425-46.
- Rosenberg, Leah. 2004. "Modern Romances: The Short Stories in Una Marson's *The Cosmopolitan* (1928-1931)." *Journal of West Indian Literature* 12 (1-2): 170-183.

- Rosenberg, Leah Reade. 2007. *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rowley, Michelle. 2010. "Whose Time Is It? Gender and Humanism in Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Advocacy." *Small Axe* 31 (14): 1-15.
- Scott, David. 2014. "Preface: Debt, Redress." *Small Axe* 18 (1): vii-x.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. 2007. *The Politics of the Veil*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Smith, Faith. 2013. "Good Enough for Booker T to Kiss: Hampton, Tuskegee, and Caribbean Self-Fashioning." *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 5 (1). <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2jx0z2xq>.
- Taylor, Ula. 2002. *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Thompson, Krista A. 2006. *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Tulloch, Carol. 2016. *Birth of the Cool: Style Narratives of the African Diaspora*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Wayne, Tiffany K, ed. 2011. *Feminist Writings from Ancient Times to the Modern World: A Global Sourcebook and History*, Vol. 1. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press.
- Weinbaum, Alys Eve et al., eds. 2008. *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Williams, Daniel T., comp. 1970. *The Perilous Road of Marcus M. Garvey: Eight Negro Bibliographies*. New York: Kraus Reprint Co.

¹ For an incisive discussion of "Sojourn" see Rosenberg 2004. For Marson as creative writer see, for instance, Donnell, DeCaires Narain, and Rosenberg 2007. For Marson's biography see Jarrett-Macauley. On Marson as feminist see Ford-Smith. On Marson's important postwar career at the BBC, where she facilitated the careers of many Windrush-era writers see, for instance, Proctor.

² Findlay 171, quoting "Peticións recibidas en la Cámara de Representantes," *La Democracia*, November 30, 1918, 10.

³ As the collaborators of the digital project "Panama Silver, Asian Gold" point out, it was this accumulation by indentured immigrants, as well as by British Caribbean and Haitian migrants to Panama and elsewhere in the hispanophone Caribbean that helped to fund the education and social mobility of Marson and her generation, and the nationalist struggles and creative writers of the 1950s, even as this inheritance would be repudiated as crass, new money (Cobham 2014). Rhonda Cobham-Sander, Donette Francis and Leah Rosenberg's digital humanities project is called "Panama Silver, Asian Gold: Migration, Money and the Birth of Modern Caribbean Literature."

⁴ "A Projected New Industry for Jamaica," [Jamaica] *Daily Gleaner*, November 21, 1925, 3; "Fostering of Silk Industry in the Island," *Daily Gleaner*, March 1, 1927, 18.

⁵ "Artificial Silk," *Daily Gleaner*, January 17, 1925, 12.

⁶ "£100,000 Order Sets Up Exhibition Record," *Daily Gleaner*, March 14, 1931, 26.

⁷ "Market Worth Attention of Manufacturers," *Daily Gleaner*, October 18, 1928, 7.

⁸ "Mr. Paterson Speaks on the West Indies," *Daily Gleaner*, May 21, 1929, 19.

⁹ "Working Girl in Jamaica," *Jamaica Times*, February 18, 1911.

¹⁰ Carol Tulloch 23, quoting from Miss May Jeffrey-Smith's 1959 *Jamaican Memories*; Tulloch points out that Jeffrey-Smith, a middle- or upper-class Jamaican is recounting memories from age 9, and thus we must assess their accuracy in that context.



Romancing Jamaica: Chinese-Jamaican Women and Nationalist Aesthetics

[Amrita Bandopadhyay](#)

PhD candidate in English
University of Florida, Gainesville, USA

Abstract: My article examines depictions of Chinese women in Victor Chang's stories ("A Summer's Tale," "Light in the Shop" and "Mr. Chin's Property"), Kerry Young's novel, *Pao* (2011), and Herbert de Lisser's cultural and literary interwar magazine *Planters' Punch* (1922-45) to argue that racial and socio-economic battles in colonial and post-independence Jamaica were waged on Chinese women. In official accounts of Jamaican history and culture, Chinese women are largely invisible and their significance has been set into relief by the works of Chinese-Caribbean writers like Kerry Young and Victor Chang. An important exception was the presence of Chinese women in *Planters' Punch*, where de Lisser fashioned Chinese women as part of the myth of Jamaica as a lush tourist spot, thereby promoting the interests of the country's multiethnic business class. Chang and Young contest this myth through inclusive fictional narratives that address racial and sexual violence wreaked upon Chinese women.

Keywords: Chinese-Jamaican literature; gender; Caribbean archive; race; print media

Acknowledgements: All images from *Planters' Punch* are courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica

How to cite

Bandopadhyay, Amrita. 2018. "Romancing Jamaica: Chinese-Jamaican Women and Nationalist Aesthetics." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12: 245-268

On July 7, 1918, Fong Sue, a Chinese shopkeeper in Ewarton in the parish of St. Catherine left his shop under the charge of Caroline Lindo, his creole lover. During his absence, Corporal McDonald, a policeman, slept with Caroline. Fong Sue, however, returned unexpectedly the same night to find the two together and gave the Corporal a sound beating after which Corporal McDonald disappeared. He reappeared two days later unscathed (*The Daily Gleaner*, July 10, 1918).¹ This event sparked what is known as the anti-Chinese riots of 1918, as violence against Chinese shops spread in a matter of a few days over different rural parishes of Jamaica.² Critics like Andrew Lind, Jacqueline Levy and Howard Johnson have traced the historical development of economic and racial tensions inherent in the hostility between the Chinese and the Black population of Jamaica. The 1918 riots targeted the Chinese as a racial group as well as an economically mobile one, particularly with stereotypical rumours of the shopkeeper making pickle out of the constable. The violence was, as Jacqueline Levy points out, directed more at the property of the Chinese rather than at the persons. Another *Gleaner* article, "Twenty More Rioters Given Prison," (*The Daily Gleaner*, July 30, 1918), records how three Chinese men's shops were attacked and the goods stolen and stored in the rioters' homes.

However, central to the ethnic tension were sex and women's sexuality—Fong Sue and Caroline's relationship was one example among many between Chinese immigrant men and Afro-Jamaican women. Sexual tensions in Chinese and Afro-Jamaican relations receive nuanced treatment in fiction, and the most direct representation of the incident appears in Victor Chang's short story "Mr. Chin's Property." The story, narrated from the perspective of a young boy, captures the racialized tensions in the sexual intimacy between Mr. Chin, his assistant Miss Belle and Constable Samuels. The abuse hurled at Mr. Chin is both racialized and sexualized: 'Constable Samuels blustered, "So what, Chineeman, so what? You cyaan satisfy her, you hear, because you too small. You small and yellow like de banana dem!"' (Chang 2014). However, the racial hierarchy of sexual prowess is subverted because Mr. Chin, skilled at Tai Chi Kung Fu, delivers a series of blows to the Inspector. Initially people refuse to believe that Chin had beaten up Samuels because they undermine Chin's masculinity and physical

strength. It is only after Samuels goes into hiding that people ransack the shop presuming that Chin had murdered Samuels. The story centralizes the sexual anxieties that undergirded the xenophobic violence wreaked upon the Chinese shop.

Kerry Young and Victor Chang critique the dominant narrative of progressive nationalism by centering their fiction on Chinese-Jamaican women's position in Jamaican history and society. The women occupy liminal space in race and gender relations; they bear the burden of maintaining respectability and their perspective is rendered invisible in mainstream colonial and nationalist narrative. I am first considering the depiction of the Chinese-Jamaicans as it appears in *The Daily Gleaner*, the leading newspaper in Jamaica, during the 1910s and 1920s, during and in the aftermath of the anti-Chinese riots. Then, I examine the depiction of Chinese-Jamaican women in a *Planters' Punch* article, entitled "Our Jamaica Chinese," appearing in the issue of 1929-30. *Planters' Punch* was a magazine and the cultural arm of *The Daily Gleaner*. Herbert de Lisser who was one of the foremost writers of Caribbean literature, was also the editor of both *The Daily Gleaner* and the *Planters' Punch*. Next, I compare this depiction with the character of Fay Wong in Kerry Young's *Pao* (published in 2011) and Victor Chang's short stories "A Summer's Tale" and "My Brother's Keeper." I attempt to see how the two narratives—in the press and in fiction—about Chinese-Jamaican women show two divergent conceptualizations of the nation and women's roles in it. Young's novel dismantles the idea of multiculturalism embedded in the national motto of "Out of Many, One People" by revealing the racialized class fissures in the nationalist imaginary and functions as a narrative critique of Jamaican nationalist history. However, de Lisser's representation of the Chinese elides over the violence and ruptures within the Chinese community and their strained relations with Afro-Jamaicans and white Jamaicans, painting the community as a homogenous whole. Young, on the other hand, foregrounds the cultural and racial complexities and charts out a Jamaican history of the nation, through Pao's life and makes her female protagonists central to the narrative. The eponymous hero of Young's novel, *Pao*, arrives in Kingston and is initiated by his stepfather into becoming the next

“Uncle” of the Chinese protection system. His arrival coincides with labor riots and the formation of the People’s National Party. The transition to independence in 1962 serves as a backdrop to Pao’s life, which centres on his relationship with two women: Gloria, his black working class lover and his wife Fay, the daughter of a leading Chinese Jamaican businessman. Young also reveals the anxieties among different women, including Fay, (who is born of a Chinese father, Henry Wong, and an Afro-Jamaican mother, Cicely), and Ma Zhang, Pao’s mother. Chang in “A Summer’s Tale” focuses on domestic violence and sexual strife in a Chinese household that leads the battered wife to destroy the shop without any racist attacks from Afro-Jamaicans, while “My Brother’s Keeper” takes a poignant yet humorous perspective on the patriarchal prejudices of the Chinese.

Obika Gray, in *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica, 1960- 1972*, argues that oppression by landowners, threats of bankruptcy and the indifference of the colonial government led Afro-Jamaicans to protest during the period of 1920-38 against racial and economic inequality, which often manifested as xenophobic nativism and anger against local Chinese traders (Gray 1991, 15). Gray also emphasizes the importance of the militant struggle to seek racial empowerment (Gray 1991, 20), further noting that in 1963, when black consciousness was attacked, the black lower middle-class opposed Chinese overrepresentation in the upper echelons of the economy (Gray 1991, 83). These complexities are represented in literature by Chinese Caribbean authors who provide insiders’ perspectives of racial politics and their gendered impact on Chinese Caribbean women. Deborah Thomas in *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* argues that ‘the cultural policy adopted at Jamaica’s independence reflected a vision of cultural “progress” and “development” that prioritized “respectability”’ (Thomas 2004, 5), which excluded the majority of urban unemployed that comprised Afro-Jamaicans. The stratification of Jamaican society along lines of racialized classes with the upper class comprising Chinese, Syrian and Jewish nationals, and the lower class comprising Afro-Jamaicans, served the colonial purpose of divide and conquer. Resentment against colonial hierarchy was directed at

another migrant community, the Chinese Jamaicans who, being light coloured, did not suffer from the same structural violence as black Jamaicans. However, the conflict put Chinese and Afro-Jamaican women in a precarious position where they were exploited on the axes of race and gender, and often nurtured mutual hostility with tragic consequences, which is found in the conflict between Cicely and Fanny in *Pao* as well as Mae and Mei in "A Summer's Tale". The press reflected the politics of respectability through the achievements of the business class. In the 1920s and 1930s editions of *Planters' Punch*, this politics is played out by upholding young Chinese women as markers of cultural progress. The depiction of Chinese women as helpmates and supportive daughters helped the Chinese patriarchal business class to consolidate their position in Jamaican society.

The 1880s and 1890s saw an influx of Chinese indentured labourers followed by the coming of shopkeepers and businessmen in the early twentieth century. They gained a strong foothold in the retail trade through a set of shrewd business practices, such as selling items on credit and in small quantities, aimed at meeting the needs of rural peasants and workers (Bryan 2004, 17). Mr. Chin does the same in Victor Chang's story by selling "two ounces of butter or cheese as well as a half gill of cooking oil" (Chang 2014). This helped Chinese retail stores become convenient and popular among their Afro-Jamaican consumers but also fueled economic and social anxieties. As historian Patrick Bryan points out, by the end of the nineteenth century, colonial authorities were concerned about the growth of a Coloured Chinese group that emerged out of sexual and social liaisons between Chinese men and Afro-Jamaican women (Bryan 2004, 16). The colonial authorities began to allow Chinese women to immigrate in an attempt to mitigate such creolization. However, the Chinese wives often found themselves in circumstances of sexual strife where an Afro-Jamaican mistress would already be present in her husband's life. The influx of Chinese wives more or less undermined the position of the Afro-Jamaican domestic partner and therefore sexual congress between Chinese men and Afro-Jamaican women was also delegitimized, despite the long-standing social and sexual relations between the Chinese and black Jamaicans. The growing economic power of

Chinese men, in conjunction with the racism and economic disenfranchisement suffered by Afro-Jamaicans, pit the two communities, including women, against each other. These tensions are captured in fiction by pushing imaginative boundaries, something that the island's establishment press had historically left out.

According to Andrew Lind, the first group of Chinese arrived in Jamaica in 1854 from Colón, Panama. However, most of them died as paupers in Kingston and St. Catherine because their health had been completely broken by the hard labour in Panama and they could not work anymore (148). The next group of Chinese came in 1884. However, as Lind points out, Chinese agricultural labourers might have migrated in 1864 to Jamaica and later moved on to businesses.³ Lind further explains that the experience of the Panama Canal made it difficult for Chinese to adjust well to the plantation economy and many absconded due to disagreements with employers (148). The Chinese along with Indian indentured workers were considered 'godless,' not possessing Christian values (Lind 1958, 148). In 1858, the Colonial Legislature wanted to import Chinese labour, bringing forth "strong opposition, particularly from native Jamaicans" (Lind 1958, 148). But in 1884, Chinese labour became necessary because of the loss of Afro-Jamaicans and Indians who went to work on the Panama Canal (Lind 1958, 149). The Chinese in Jamaica occupied a liminal position of being an ethnic minority and an economically mobile community. Consequently, the Afro-Jamaican majority viewed them as cultural aliens and the colonial administration saw them as a threat to the plantation economy.⁴ The press played a central role in disseminating opinions about the Chinese, and reflected the contradiction between the economic power of the Chinese and their status as an ethnic minority. This can be traced in the way Herbert de Lisser represents the Chinese. In 1910, in his book *Jamaica and Cuba*, de Lisser claims that the Chinese had captured the retail trade through "masterly and judicious knavery" (De Lisser 1910, 88). This is consistent with the established rhetoric that persecuted the Chinese as a foreign force usurping the space from the local Afro-Jamaicans. Anne-Marie Lee-Loy in "World War I's Exciting Effects" elaborates how this rhetoric of foreignness was promulgated by *The Daily*

Gleaner. The tensions and violence of the First World War triggered xenophobia towards the Chinese because, as Lee-Loy argues, the press depicted the Chinese as a menace invading Jamaica and a danger worse than the Germans (Lee-Loy 2015, 49). This is evident even in sympathy expressed for Chinese shopkeepers. For example, even though Corporal McDonald was humanized in *The Daily Gleaner* article of July 10, 1918, the rioters as a whole were not excused for their actions. Yet the press did not sympathize with the Chinese as people and saw the attacks as merely the unfortunate destruction of property and not persons. A *Gleaner* article, "Paying for the Riots", expresses outrage at the expense the riots cost the colony, with the victimized shopkeepers demanding eighteen thousand pounds (*The Daily Gleaner*, December 9, 1918). The attacks are construed as an economic inconvenience rather than damage to a community or a group of persons. *The Daily Gleaner* reports on the attacks as though they existed independently of the people perpetrating them. It makes a clear divide between the material existence of the shops and the lives of the people. The press enacted the role of an objective presenter of fact and truth, and made invisible the racial and sexual aspect of the attacks. The press did not consider, for instance, the unease caused by sexual intimacies that led to the violence in the first place. The rhetoric either focuses on disturbances to law and order, or presumes burning of property as irrational violence displayed by Afro-Jamaicans.

If the negative rhetoric about the Chinese is contrasted with an article appearing in *The Daily Gleaner* on Saturday, October 29, 1921, titled "Chinese Dinner at Myrtle Bank Hotel,"⁵ it becomes evident how the press coverage reflects a rapidly changing public view of the Chinese. The anonymous shopkeepers depicted in the press coverage of 1918 are represented as honoured and wealthy merchants by 1921. The party hosted a number of influential Chinese businessmen and it clearly identifies the importance of the press in highlighting the influence of the community. The article describes the party and its guests, indicating the purpose of hosting a party particularly for the Chinese. De Lisser, as the editor of *The Gleaner*, is called upon to raise a toast to the Chinese present and his somewhat patronizing tone is evident in his speech

(The Daily Gleaner, October 29, 1921). He clearly states how the Chinese have "changed" over the years and were now an economic force to reckon with. He further commends the "orderliness" and "neatness" of the Chinese shop (*The Daily Gleaner*, October 29, 1921). Very glibly, he also claims how despite prior suspicions and resentment against the Chinese, they have become an "inherent" part of Jamaica and are no longer outsiders (*The Daily Gleaner*, October 29, 1921.).

This change in de Lisser's rhetoric is consistent with the choice to grant Chinese-Jamaican women a prominent space in his annual magazine *Planters' Punch*. They do not appear as frequently as Jewish or English and American women do. However, the fact that they are presented in similar ways as Jewish, English and American women suggests that they were being classified in the category of white women. The change in de Lisser's attitude towards the Chinese is the driving force behind the article. As Rhonda Cobham-Sander observes, the magazine itself was the "official magazine of the Jamaica Imperial Association" (Cobham Sander 1981, 80) and specifically catered to the interests of upper and middle class women across racial and ethnic identities. *Planters' Punch* represented Jamaica as rich and lush based on its depiction of diverse social gatherings, travel, and tourism. In doing so, it also created an image of Jamaica that appeared to be harmonious and productive but, in fact, excluded the fractures and tensions present in colonial society. This was largely because de Lisser's own politics were aligned with the elite classes.⁶

Planters' Punch made its first appearance in 1920 as an annual magazine that carried one of de Lisser's novels in a serialized form (Roberts 1951, 120) and featured the achievements of businessmen and the rise of their promising young sons and other professionals. It carried articles and columns on tourism and travel in Jamaica with the intention of promoting trade and commercialized tourism. Certain sections were devoted to the lifestyle of young women and to the social gatherings and parties thrown by them. The women were the wives and daughters of an elite class of professionals and traders and their lifestyles reflected a high degree of consumption. Reflecting de Lisser's political and

ideological leanings, the magazine held up the elite business class as the "future of Jamaica." There is no reference to working-class Afro-Jamaicans. Leah Rosenberg observes in *Creolizing Womanhood* that de Lisser represented the dark-skinned Afro-Jamaicans as people of easy virtue as against the moral superiority of the brown elite. Later as editor of *Planters' Punch*, de Lisser aligned himself completely with the interests of the expanded "white" class that included communities other than the British settlers and American expats (Rosenberg 2000, 110). Donna Marie Urbanowicz, referring to several issues of *Planters' Punch*, argues that de Lisser gives "non-white women within Jamaican society a shared voice alongside the white Jamaican ladies of social standing" (Urbanowicz 2013, 227) in *Planters' Punch*. She further claims that "de Lisser's conceptualization of women as a national symbol of Jamaica is not based on racial boundaries alone" (Urbanowicz 2013, 229). However, this argument sounds much more egalitarian than de Lisser's intentions. By inserting Chinese women alongside white women, de Lisser included the Chinese as part of an expanded elite class that also included Lebanese (Issas)⁷ and Jewish (Lindo and Meyers) merchants along with British settlers and American expats. Effectively, these women represented their community, not themselves, as carriers of economic progress fashioned in cultural terms. They functioned as helpmates to their fathers and brothers, and therefore participated in the emerging economic force of Chinese trade, but never stood for gender empowerment and self-determination. Moreover, the Chinese are represented as an extended "white" class due to their economic agency and not as a distinct cultural, ethnic and racial entity in Jamaica. De Lisser does not address the complexities of migration and indenture; instead, he uses anglicized Chinese women in an attempt to include the community into an elite category.

De Lisser deploys Chinese-Jamaican women as part of a colonial imaginary, omitting mention of social tension and leaving racial, colour and class hierarchies intact. In contrast, Young, through Fay, makes a Chinese woman protagonist central to an inclusive Jamaican nation-space, and presents tensions among Jamaica's different ethnic, racial, gendered, and socioeconomic groups as defining that nation. Young's novel, therefore,

functions as a counter-narrative to de Lisser's optimistic narrative of the nation. Written from a Chinese-Jamaican point of view, Pao explores the concealed narratives of racial and sexual tensions among the ethnic groups in Jamaica. The novel incorporates the dystopic ruptures in Jamaica and in doing so, undermines the utopic narrative created by de Lisser's press. De Lisser's influential voice in the press represented the interests of the business class and could not afford to make racial and economic anxieties visible. His rhetoric in the island's middlebrow press had to be optimistic and pander to common sense notions of business and national integration. For example, "Our Jamaica Chinese," published in the 1929-30 issue of *Planters' Punch*,⁸ focuses only on Chinese women, and yet they come to represent the Chinese community as a whole. He clearly emphasizes that the Chinese are hardworking and educated, and that they play an important role in nation building. He opens by declaring that he is writing for and about the West Indian Chinese who are becoming a part of the country's emergent capitalist class by contributing to economic development. At the outset, the article claims, "As the eye travels over the faces of the portraits printed in these pages, it realizes that the ladies represented belong to an intelligent and cultured class. They are either brain workers or destined to become such; they are in occupations which require intelligence and industry, and these qualities they undoubtedly display" (*Planters' Punch* 1929-30, 8). This goes to support that de Lisser cast middle-class and upper-class Chinese in the role of Jamaica's future ruling class.

De Lisser makes a generational distinction between the Chinese—he draws a clear line between the immigrants from China and the generation of Chinese-Jamaicans who were born on the island and were more assimilated. When he states in "Our Jamaica Chinese" that the Chinese in Jamaica are "Chinese in descent but Jamaicans by birth and British subjects by nationality" (De Lisser 1929-30, 8) he offers an assimilationist view of the Chinese as central to the functioning of Jamaican society. This kind of progressive modernity is then framed in terms of the way the Chinese treat their women. He makes broad ahistorical claims about how Chinese women were secluded and poorly treated in the past but were now engaging in the "male" sphere of economic and



Figure 1: Dr. Hoashoo



Figure 2: Doris James



Figure 3: Mildred Tie Ten Quee

cultural activities. De Lisser represents the Chinese community as a component of colonial society insofar as they contribute to economic growth, which he connects to cultural refinement and consumption that worked towards the establishment of a new capitalist class ("Our Jamaica Chinese," *Planters' Punch* 1929-30). The Chinese women depicted here therefore, are doctors (including an aspirant for medical school), classical vocalists, and assistants in their fathers' shops. These women represent an upwardly mobile middle to upper class: Dr. Hoashoo (See Fig. 1), for instance, is representative of bourgeoisie female emancipation that indicates women's "equal" participation in a masculinized social order. The women here appear to align their interests with the patriarchal order of upper class Chinese.

They appear as efficient contributors to the patriarchal economy and as good supportive helpmates. The women, handpicked by de Lisser, are portrayed in ways that define modernity in terms of bourgeoisie respectability. They are accomplished in fine arts like Audrey Leahong (See Fig. 6) who is a fancy work painter and Doris James, who is a vocalist (See Fig. 2). They receive a western education like Miss Mildred Tie Ten Quee, who may study medicine on leaving school (See Fig. 3). They help their fathers in creating an economy driven by high production and consumption like Fay Hendrickson (See Fig.5) and Elma Fung (See Fig. 4). De Lisser fashions a

category of people who can behave like the white elite and mimic the same economic and social structures; women's accomplishments become important insofar as they contribute to these structures. De Lisser uses the press to make an exhibition of the women, freezing them into artefacts to shape an ongoing discourse about the Chinese community mired in stereotypes.

De Lisser's portrayal of women is associated with his attempts to create an upper class group of Jamaica's first citizens, a highly successful business class. This had implications as far as racial categorizations were concerned. In *Planters' Punch*, de Lisser seeks to create a largely "white" class of businessmen and the socio-cultural accomplishments of women related to them. Leah Rosenberg defines this class as including "the long established Jewish merchants and industrialists, old white creole planter families, newly emigrated middle Eastern retail store owners, office workers, expatriate government officials and the managerial class of the United Fruit Company" (Rosenberg 2007, 110). Some of the people represented in *Planters' Punch* were business owners belonging to the Myers family, the Lindos and the Issas. In de Lisser's class construction, race was inflected by economic mobility. This was a new rising class and as Rosenberg observes in *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, with the example of Frederick Myers, many of these families were not powerful before 1880 (Rosenberg 2007, 68). In "An Historical Profile of the Jewish Community of Jamaica," Thomas August argues that by the 1890s,



Figure 4: Elma Fung



Figure 5: Fay Hendrickson



Figure 6: Audrey Leahong

the influence of planters' decreased substantially due to the rise of professional groups, which loosened the restrictions of colour so that in the 1906 Legislative Council election, there was a "legislative kaleidoscope of four Europeans, four Jews, five coloreds, and one black" (August 1987, 307). De Lisser's categorizations left out Afro-Jamaicans, and his representations were therefore, economic as well as racialized. The Chinese were accommodated as a part of this class because of their economic rise and the cultural accomplishments of selected Chinese women. However, as Patrick Bryan remarks, the Chinese were "integrated into the Jamaican community, but resisted assimilation" (Bryan 2004, 18) and de Lisser erases this fact, making a narrow and incomplete representation of the Chinese.

The news articles appearing in *The Daily Gleaner* and *Planters' Punch* are part of the archival material that reveal a particular narrative about the Chinese as successful businessmen with Chinese women occupying narrow roles as helpmates. Chang and Young, as Chinese Caribbean writers, employ fiction to create a counter archive that centres on female figures. The female protagonists of both authors remain marginal to the mainstream narrative created by the press for the first half of the twentieth century as demonstrated in the above analysis of the press. Pao and "A Summer's Tale" undermine the male-dominated history of Chinese economic success by centralizing the innate sexist violence of this success story. The Chinese community contributes to de Lisser's construction of Jamaica as a space of wealthy and cultured people whose lives centre on consumption, socializing, high culture, and commerce. By contrast, Kerry Young's *Pao*, through the character of Fay Wong (and the novel as a whole) centres precisely on racial and class violence, and dismantles the national romance de Lisser constructs. Donette Francis's idea of the antiromance in *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship* serves as an effective lens to read Fay's predicament. Francis shows how intimacies within the heterosexual romance plot "masks coercion as consent" (Francis 2010, 4-5), justifying colonization of land through the conquest of the female body. Francis draws upon Doris Sommer's idea of the national romance in Latin American fiction where national progress and the utopic vision of the free nation is developed

through the heterosexual romance plot. Young undermines the romance of the nation through the breakdown of Fay and Pao's marriage where a happy heteronormative unit of production and consumption becomes impossible.

Since *The Gleaner* is only superficially inclusive, Chinese women do not appear as complex characters who make hard choices, face unhappy domestic circumstances, or attempt to escape, all of which Fay Wong does in *Pao*. Fay, Pao's wife and the daughter of an upper class Chinese businessman and an Afro-Jamaican woman, is almost a nightmarish contrast to de Lisser's portrayal of Chinese women as loyal and placid companions. Trapped in a loveless marriage, Fay is defiant and critical of the life and profession of the family. The marriage is fractured for a number of reasons: there are insurmountable differences in class and lifestyle, but most importantly, Fay's choices are never given their due respect; she has no control over money and property, she is a mere pawn in the aspirations of Henry Wong and Pao. Further, her mother, Cicely, manipulates her and she has to contend with being the wife of a "common criminal". As Pao himself recognizes, there are vast differences in the social position of husband and wife. During their honeymoon, Pao thinks that Fay knows her place in the world. She can speak to visitors and guests at the hotel and order people around with confident familiarity that Pao cannot. However, Pao is mistaken in his assumptions because while Fay is privileged in terms of class, she is ignorant about the complex economic and social realities that affect her marriage. When Fay begins to live with her husband and in-laws at Matthews Lane, a run-down and disreputable part of Kingston, it dawns upon her that the marriage is one of sheer convenience, orchestrated to help Pao secure social stability, win respectability and build networks with powerful people through an association with Fay's father, Henry Wong. Fay realizes that she was tricked into the marriage by her parents, particularly her mother, to teach her a lesson by ensuring that Fay lives away from her tennis parties and clubs, spending a lifetime in hard labour.

Fay keeps shuttling from Matthews Lane to Lady Musgrave Road in a desperate attempt to escape her domestic predicament. She leaves Pao because she is

partly afraid of the crime that surrounds her and partly because of Pao's relationship with Gloria, an Afro-Jamaican sex worker. She realizes that Pao and Gloria's relationship is based on consensual love and support acquiring a sincerity that Pao and Fay's marriage never can. The marriage benefits the public standing of Henry Wong and Pao by their respective association with respectable business establishments and the disreputable violent protection system, using Fay as a pawn to serve their interests. Fay's bitterness and anger at being bartered among the two men show the hypocrisy and violence underneath the respectable veneer of Henry Wong's household, as it also plays up the capitalist elite's hand-in-glove association with the violent intimidation tactics of the protection system. Ultimately, Fay and Pao's relationship is destroyed when Pao rapes Fay to thwart her desire to leave with her children. It reminds Fay of her own humiliating position within the household. In de Lisser's depiction of Chinese women none of these fractures in domestic life get featured. Since de Lisser's depiction of Chinese women includes upper class Chinese women—the face of wealthy respectability—he automatically excludes women like Ma, Pao's mother, who arrives as a single mother with her sons from China. Her subsequent marriage to Zhang offers her security and respectability in Chinatown, but also exacts hard labour from her. She, and not Fay, is the perfect helpmate. De Lisser elides the labour extracted from women who aid their fathers to run businesses, even as he mentions their contribution to the economy. His focus remains on the women's class-motivated sophistication. However, Ma represents the physical labour that contributes to maintaining respectable domesticity. When Fay refuses to help Ma wash utensils and pluck duck feathers to make pillows, Ma reads it as pure laziness. Fay, on the other hand, not only looks down upon this kind of domestic labour, she is ill-equipped to do it. The clashes between the two women are along class as well as racial lines. Fay sees herself as part of the white elite while Pao and his family, despite economic force, are far from the social elite. Unlike de Lisser's representation of the Chinese as a homogenous community, Young's depiction of fraught family ties shows the community as comprised of people in divergent relations with social and economic power.

While de Lisser writes out the domestic and sexual relationships between Afro and Chinese Jamaicans, Young uses Fay's relationship to illuminate the complex divisions in Jamaican society and the prominence of gender and sex in social interactions between the different communities. While the relationship of Gloria and Pao contains some semblance of sincerity, Fay and Pao's relationship rings hollow. Fay is also victimized by Cicely because Cicely and Henry's marriage is also one of convenience where respectability is acquired solely by class aspirations. Race and class dynamics intersect making Fay's position highly precarious in her family. This becomes evident when Fay recounts Cicely's manipulative behaviour to mould her daughter according to her selfish purposes along class and racial lines. As Fay recounts "My whole life has been spent being white for Cicely to stop her feeling ashamed, and being black for Cicely to stop her feeling alone" (Young 2011, 115). Whiteness appears as a spectral presence in the relationship of an Afro-Jamaican mother and a half Chinese daughter. Cicely is quick to accuse Fay of being too "white" once she tries to exercise her own agency. Being white suggests an internalization of values, behaviour and style that contains wealth and refinement, which requires access to formal education and elite clubs. Fay grows up inhabiting these structures and casts an image of refinement; yet she is restricted from enjoying it. Therefore, Fay has to shuttle herself repeatedly between two opposing sets of values. She has to underperform in school so that Cicely feels secure and needs to regulate her behaviour to conform to Cicely's notions of "decency." On the one hand, Cicely strives to rise up the social ladder by marrying Henry Wong, erasing her identity as a descendent enslaved Africans, and on the other, she prevents Fay from outshining her. Young locates the dominant political action in Jamaica as a backdrop, and privileges the fraught and troubled narrative of Chinese Jamaicans, a prime example of which are the crippling effects of economic and personal violence on Fay. This makes Kerry Young's narrative of the nation far more inclusive than de Lisser's since she puts forth the social, economic and racial complexities of a marginalized community that de Lisser's harmonious narrative never recognizes.

The Chinese women represented in *Planters' Punch*, have their selfhood tamed in ways that could be understood through Foucault's concept of docile bodies. According to Foucault, power structures tame bodies so that they can become agents that enact power. Foucault argues in "Docile Bodies" that eighteenth-century methods of constraining the body were a matter "of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself—movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body" (Foucault 1984, 181). Foucault uses the body of the soldier as an example of the docile body. Social, political and economic institutions have historically tamed women's bodies to serve the interests of patriarchal power structures. Fay Wong is also tamed through the colonial structures of an Anglicized education and a social life comprising tennis parties and club visits. She embodies all the values that the Chinese debutantes of *Planters' Punch* do. Fay subverts the system because she refuses to be a docile body when she exercises agency and pursues the activities of her pre-marital life. Fay enacts a strong reaction against the family apparatus, which sustains itself on the docility and labour of women. Ma Zhang and Cicely sustain the exploitative structure of the family; as mothers, they enact the patriarchal power of the family, even though they do not possess any. However, Cicely actively oppresses Fay because she seeks to overcome her lower social status using Fay as an instrument of social mobility. Ma Zhang is more sympathetic because state violence forces her to leave China, and she undergoes hard labour to make a life for herself and her children.

The press's portrayal of the Chinese reflected how Chinese businessmen and traders saw themselves. A 1938 article in *The Daily Gleaner* entitled "Chinese and Royal Commission" shows how Chinese traders saw themselves as representatives of the entire Chinese community while bargaining with the colonial administration for changes in laws. The article carries the text of a memorandum signed and submitted to the Royal Commission by Presidents Lyn Ah Woo and Albert Chang of the Chinese Merchants' Association on behalf of the Chinese traders. The memorandum lists organizations such as a school, almshouse and sanatorium that contribute to the life of the community. It makes

demands pertaining to trade, taxation and immigration such as increasing the number of male Chinese immigrants and changing laws such as *The Shop Assistant Law*, no. 38 of 1937 and *The Drugs and Poisons Law* 44 of 1937. The laws were deemed to inconvenience the retail trade through restrictions on business hours and the prohibition of selling patent medicines without a licensed druggist (*The Daily Gleaner*, November 29, 1938). A fleeting mention is made of women to state that twenty Chinese women are allowed to immigrate only if they are getting married to Chinese residents in Jamaica and/or are the children of resident Chinese. It is then argued that more Chinese male traders should be allowed to immigrate as it benefits the retail trade. This reveals that the Chinese community valued its members primarily as traders, contributing to the narrative of economic success that de Lisser also promotes. Women merely feature as incidental to a largely masculine enterprise. Mei Lin in Victor Chang's "A Summer's Tale" is one such woman and the story provides the violent narrative of her life that is written out of the mainstream discourse of retail trade success.

Mei Lin, the wife of Lincoln, a Chinese shopkeeper in Jamaica, shatters, not only the family as a state apparatus by refusing to be the docile body, but destroying the Chinese shop itself. The Chinese woman, who was never allowed to be anything other than the wife or helpmate, destroys the shop, which is a site of patriarchal violence. The destruction attacks the heart of the retail trade and by extension, also symbolically undermines Chinese existence in Jamaica. The story revolves around Mei Lin who comes to Jamaica from China, to be married off to Lincoln. Her parents, who had migrated many years before she comes, had left her as a toddler with her grandparents. As a woman familiar only with the lessons taught to her by her grandparents, Mei Lin finds it impossible to adjust to her husband's demands. Lincoln, accustomed to a Jamaican diet cooked by Mae, his Afro-Jamaican mistress, deems her food unpalatable. To make matters worse, Mae thwarts every attempt Mei Lin makes to create a space for herself in the home. Mei Lin is unable to plant and grow bak choy and is harassed by Mae whenever she seeks to do housework. While Mae is disenfranchised and cannot gain the status of a wife, she has agency because of her familiarity with the island. She sees Mei Lin as an intruder and prevents her from taking any space

on the land. She is also complicit in the patriarchal power exercised by her lover. Mei Lin is brutalized and ultimately suffers a miscarriage as Lincoln throws her down the stairs. Mei Lin calmly seeks revenge and burns down the entire shop. As with Fay and Cicely, any kind of feminist solidarity is impossible because of the divisive nature of the patriarchal trade and economy. Being a suitable helpmate, a good wife or mistress, implied being co-opted into the system of brutality. Mei Lin's act of revenge returns our attention to the beginning of the paper where Fong Sue's shop is broken down and vandalized. In "A Summer's Tale," the attack on Chinese property is used as a trope to give a new layer of meaning. The circumstances of Mei Lin's exploitation have affinity with the case of Fong Sue. Both are racially charged sexual affairs. However Victor Chang, like Kerry Young, makes an inward turn to reveal the fissures in the Chinese community. The cause of the destruction of property is not ethnic or economic resentment, but the extreme violence that is meted out to Mei Lin. She attacks the inherent patriarchal structure that allows for the prosperity of the shop where the wife is expected to provide labour and keep up the pretence of happy domesticity. Chang shifts the focus suggesting that the Chinese community suffered as much from internal fractures as from external issues of ethnic tensions. Mei Lin's actions are an inversion of the attacks that took place during the riots of 1918. By reworking the trope of attacks on the Chinese shop, Chang, like Young, provides a counternarrative by privileging the Chinese woman's perspective. In a milder way, Chang's "My Brother's Keeper" also undermines the image of cultured and docile Chinese women through the character of Gloria Woo, who is a successful entrepreneur but rejects the role of the submissive and hardworking wife. Ah Go, the narrator's older brother, marries Mrs. Gloria Woo, a widow for twenty years who plays "mahjong like a man." Initially, this is a cause of attraction but post-marriage, Ah Go is horrified to find out that she uses the chamber pot, her speech is vulgar and she has a strong sexual appetite, all of which he attributes to spending long years in the proximity of the Black population. He leaves her and gradually retreats to the space of his shop, distancing himself from his brother and other Chinese women like Mrs. Lee who introduced Ah Go to Gloria Woo. While the story empathizes with Ah Go as he tries to navigate the cultural and economic landscape of colonial Jamaica,

facing prejudice from the white and black populations, it is also critical of Ah Go's own resistance to intermixing and cultural amalgamation which manifests through his quiet misogyny.

It could be argued that both Young's and Chang's works operate in the present and therefore, have the privilege of hindsight that de Lisser did not. However, given the incidents of violence against the Chinese reported in *The Gleaner*, de Lisser could not have been wholly ignorant to the difficulties the Chinese faced. Immediate circumstances, such as his job as a prominent newspaper editor, made him ignore it because *The Gleaner* thrived upon the sponsorship of the business class, and so de Lisser could not call attention to racial or ethnic tensions in colonial society. Young and Chang also include the different communities of Jamaica and operate within the concept of "Out of Many, One People" which is the national motto. But boundaries of fiction being flexible and individual also allow the space to voice concerns that could easily be suppressed in newspapers that are only expected to provide empirical facts or at best, express concern that is assimilationist. Since the Chinese resisted assimilation for a long time, it was also not possible to get a glimpse of household "truths," which finds fictional representation in the image of bars in Chinese shops that separate customers from the counter and the back of the shop, where the home begins. The construction of the Chinese shopkeeper in Victor Chang's "My Brother's Keeper" and "Mr. Chin's Property" among others, portrays a man of very few words, who would exchange goods for money keeping an account of credit only he can follow. Hidden behind the stoic efficiency are complexities and violence that requires a "fictional" articulation.

References

Primary Sources

- Chang, Victor L. 2010. "A Summer's Tale." *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 6 (3): 117-22, 172.
- Chang, Victor L. 2014. "Mr. Chin's Property." *SX Salon* 15 (Feb.)
<http://smallaxe.net/sxsalon/discussions/mr-chins-property>.
- Chang, Victor L. 2011. "My Brother's Keeper." *Caribbean Quarterly* 57(1): 61-72, 90.
- De Lisser, H.G. "Our Jamaica Chinese." *Planters' Punch* 1929-30. Digital Library of the Caribbean, University of Florida. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00004645/00009>.
- "Ladies—An Influence." *Planters' Punch* 1929-30. Digital Library of the Caribbean, University of Florida. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00004645/00009>.
- 1929-30. "Dr. Hoashoo, M.B., One of the Two Lady Doctors in Jamaica." *Planters' Punch* 2(4): 8. Printed photograph. University of Florida, Gainesville.
<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00004645/00009>. Accessed 8 April, 2016.
- 1929-30. "Miss Audrey Leahong, Well Known Fancy Work Painter." *Planters' Punch* 2(4): 9. Printed photograph. University of Florida, Gainesville. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00004645/00009>. Accessed 8 April, 2016.
- 1929-30. "Miss Doris James, A Well-Known Vocalist at Concerts." *Planters' Punch* 2(4): 9. Printed photograph. University of Florida, Gainesville. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00004645/00009>. Accessed 8 April, 2016.
- 1929-30. "Miss Doris Chin Loy Who is Now Studying in China." *Planters' Punch* 2(4): 9. Printed photograph. University of Florida, Gainesville. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00004645/00009>. Accessed 8 April, 2016.
- 1929-30. "Miss Fay Hendrickson, Assistant in her Father's Business." *Planters' Punch* 2(4): 8. Printed photograph. University of Florida, Gainesville.
<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00004645/00009>. Accessed 8 April, 2016.
- 1929-30. "Miss Mildred Tie Ten Quee, Who will Study Medicine on Leaving School." *Planters' Punch* 2(4): 9. Printed photograph. University of Florida, Gainesville.
<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00004645/00009>. Accessed 8 April, 2016.
- Young, Kerry. 2011. *Pao*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Secondary Sources

- August, Thomas G. 1987. "An Historical Profile of the Jewish Community Of Jamaica." *Jewish Social Studies* 49(3): 303-16.
- Bryan, Patrick E. 2004. "The Settlement of the Chinese in Jamaica, 1854-c. 1970." *Caribbean Quarterly* 50(2): 15-25.
- Cobham-Sander, Claudette Rhonda. 1981. "The Creative Writer and West Indian Society: Jamaica 1900-1950." PhD diss., University of St. Andrews. *Digital Library of the Caribbean*.
<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00035010/00001>.
- De Lisser, Herbert G. 1910. *In Jamaica and Cuba*. Kingston: Gleaner Co. *Digital Library of the Caribbean*. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00080939/00001>.
- Foucault, Michel. 1984. "Docile Bodies." In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rainbow, 179-87. New York: Pantheon Books.

- Francis, Donette. 2010. *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship: Sexuality and the Nation in Contemporary Caribbean Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gray, Obika. 1991. *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica, 1960-1972*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Issa, Suzanne. 1994. *Mr Jamaica Abe Issa: A Pictorial Biography*, edited by Jackie Ranston. Kingston, Jamaica: Suzanna Issa.
- Johnson, Howard. 1982. "The Anti-Chinese Riots of 1918 in Jamaica." *Caribbean Quarterly* 28 (September): 19-32.
- Lee Loy, Anne-Marie. 2007. "The Chinese Shop as Nation Theatre in West Indian Fiction." *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 5 (June): 1-12.
<http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol5/iss1/5>.
- . 2015. "World War I's "Exciting Effects": The Construction of Chineseness and Jamaica's 1918 Anti-Chinese Riots." *Caribbean Quarterly* 61 (December): 40-60.
- Levy, Jacqueline. 1986. "The Economic Role of the Chinese in Jamaica: The Grocery Retail Trade." *Jamaican Historical Review* 15: 31-49.
- Lind, Andrew W. 1958. "Adjustment Patterns among the Jamaican Chinese." *Social and Economic Studies* 7(2): 144-64.
- Roberts, Walter Adolphe. 1951. *Six Great Jamaicans: Biographical Sketches*. Kingston, Jamaica: Pioneer Press.
- Rosenberg, Leah Reade. 2000. "Creolizing Womanhood: Gender and Domesticity in Early Anglophone Caribbean National Literatures." Ph.D. diss., Cornell University.
- Rosenberg, Leah Reade. 2007. *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sommer, Doris. 1991. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. Berkley: University of California Press. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost). <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip.uid&db=nlebk&AN=32730&site=ehost-live>.
- Thomas, Deborah A. 2004. *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Thompson, Krista A. 2006. *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Urbanowicz, Donna-Marie. 2013. "Representations of Women in Selected Works of Herbert George de Lisser (1878-1944)." PhD diss., University of Nottingham. *Digital Library of the Caribbean*. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00039783/00001>.

¹ Special thanks to the NewspaperARCHIVE.com Online Newspaper Database where all *The Daily Gleaner* articles referred to in the paper were accessed through University of Florida.

² Description of this incident appears in Howard Johnson's essay "The Anti-Chinese riots of 1918 in Jamaica." A very brief account can be found in *The Daily Gleaner* of July 10, 1918, where the corporal is sympathized with in a way the Chinese are not.

³ Lind describes this point elaborately with 1871 Census data and accounts of family history. He mentions that a family, residing in Jamaica, when he was conducting his research, told him that they traced their family back to a migrant who came to Jamaica in 1872.

⁴ Anne Marie Lee Loy's essay "The Chinese Shop as Nation Theatre in West Indian Fiction" explores the liminality of the Chinese shop and the Chinese community as a whole. According to Lee Loy, the colonial authorities regarded the Chinese shop as a threat to the plantation economy, while the Afro-Jamaicans perceived the community as competitors in the job market (Lee Loy 2, 3) making the shop a liminal space, located, at once, inside and outside the nation.

⁵ Later on, Abrahama Issa would go on to buy The Myrtle Bank Hotel which would soon become a place for American, European and Jamaican celebrities to gather and socialize riding on an image of exoticism and wealth. Krista Thompson's *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque*, has a chapter "Diving into the Racial Waters of Beach Space in Jamaica: Tropical Modernity and the Myrtle Bank Hotel's Pool" that delves into the class and racial politics of the hotel's space.

⁶ In 1910, he became a member of the Board of Governors of the Institute of Jamaica and worked with the Jamaica Imperial Association--an organization of merchants, planters and professionals, founded in 1917 and led by Arthur W. Farquharson (Roberts, 112).

⁷ Suzanne Issa's biography on Abraham Issa, *Mr Jamaica Abe Issa: A Pictorial Biography*, charts the rise of the family of Issas from shopkeepers of linen and dry goods to one of the biggest business families of Jamaica, to the extent that Abe Issa would earn the unofficial nickname of Mr. Jamaica.

⁸ The 1929-30 issue of *Planters' Punch* and all images from *Planters' Punch* (1929-30) referred to and reproduced in the article are courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica. Accessed at the Digital Library of the Caribbean through University of Florida.



Protest and Punishment: Indo-Guyanese Women and Organized Labour

[Aliyah Khan](#)

Assistant Professor of Caribbean Literature
Department of English and
Department of Afroamerican and African Studies
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

If you happen to be born into an Indo-Caribbean family, an Indian family from the Caribbean, migratory, never certain of the terrain, that's how life falls down around you. It's close and thick and sheltering, its ugly and violent secrets locked inside the family walls. The outside encroaches, but the ramparts are strong, and once you leave it you have no shelter and no ready skills for finding a different one.

—Ramabai Espinet, *The Swinging Bridge*

Abstract: The participation of Indo-Guyanese and Indo-Trinidadian women in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sugar estate strikes and in the interwar development of trade unionism has been underestimated by colonial authorities, indentured men and historians. This essay combines historiography and literary analysis to contend with gendered archival gaps. First, I chronicle elided instances of Indo-Caribbean women's participation in labour organizing, with a focus on British Guiana. I then argue that the Guyanese writer Ryhaan Shah's novel *A Silent Life* (2015) is a *jahaji bahin* — “ship sister” — narrative that recovers the Indian ancestress as she was: not the Ramayanic Sita, wifely ideal adopted by Indo-Caribbean migrants, but a woman like the historical Sumintra, a martyred woman strike leader. I show that real women's labour protests and fictional stories of their descendants speak to each other in a nonlinear, genre-defying way across the spatiotemporal gap of archival absence, reshaping traditional narratives of Indo-Caribbean women.

Keywords: Indo-Caribbean, Guyana, trade union, *jahaji bahin*, indenture

How to cite

Khan, Aliyah. 2018. “Protest and Punishment: Indo-Guyanese Women and Organized Labour.” *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12: 269-298

In 1939 British Guiana, weeder and alleged protest leader Sumintra was one of four striking workers killed at Plantation Leonora, West Coast Demerara, by colonial police for demonstrating against low pay and poor working conditions on her post-indenture sugar plantation (Ishmael 2014, 356). Sumintra, a Rajput woman (Tiwari 2013, 39), was neither the first nor last Indo-Guyanese¹ woman to play a role in anticolonial labour strikes or lose her life protesting on sugar estates in the interwar and post-World War II pre-independence periods.

As early as 1872, fifty indentured women were said to have protested alongside their husbands for better wages and working conditions in a revolt at Plantation Devonshire Castle (Roopnarine 2015, 179). In his seminal *History of the Guianese Working People, 1881-1905* (1981), labour activist and historian Walter Rodney writes of the role of a re-indentured woman named Salamea in a disturbance at Plantation Friends, Berbice, in 1903. Said one driver:

I know a bound coolie woman named Salamea. She has been on the estate for three years. I heard that she told her shipmates on the Thursday to go fight. She was at Friends before and she went to Calcutta and returned to Friends. Salamea, I hear, urge the coolies who had assembled to fight. (1981, 157)

The Pathan Salamea (Tiwari 2013, 39) was one of a minority of indentured Indians who returned to India after their initial labour contract expired, but later decided to re-indenture themselves and remigrate to the Caribbean. Female remigrants sometimes had enough of a command of English and knowledge of their legal rights to protest planters' and Indian men's treatment of themselves and other indentured women (Shepherd 2002, xxv). Plantation Leonora, where Sumintra was killed, was a major site of Indo-Guyanese female militancy and violence associated with interrelated sugar worker and independence protests: after Sumintra, there was Kowsilla, killed in a Leonora strike in 1964,² two years before British Guiana became the independent Cooperative Republic of Guyana on May 26, 1966.

The roles of Indo- and Afro-Guyanese women in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sugar estate and other anticolonial strikes, and in the development of trade unionism, are vastly understudied and underestimated. Indian women's

roles in colonial labour revolts were “doubly silenced, first by the colonial regime, and second by indentured men...their actions were recorded as supporting Indian men to carry their grievances” (Roopnarine 2015, 179). Records of women’s participation in indentured worker revolts tend to be confined to notations of the women’s deaths and injuries and passing mention of their roles in specific protests. Rodney’s attention to women workers is the most comprehensive exception. Of Indo-Guyanese women estate workers he writes:

the spirit of rebellion...revealed itself within the ranks of the outwardly placid Indian women whom management, as well as male workers, apparently expected to remain isolated from social decision making...During the 1890s, there was increased awareness of the adverse conditions under which indentured females worked—including field labor performed in advanced stages of pregnancy. From time to time, estate disturbances started in the weeding gang, which was essentially the women’s sphere. (1981, 157)

Neither plantation managers nor Indo-Guyanese men expected the involvement of women in labour disputes, even when protests revolved around gendered issues like pregnancy and sexual assault, and even though some Indian women who had completed at least a first five-year term of indentureship occupied *sadarine* plantation headwoman positions under male supervisors (Roopnarine 2015, 180).³

The familial and social consequences of Indo-Guyanese women workers’ participation in the public sphere and in labour and protest activities are also far less explicit in the archive and in Indo-Caribbean historiography than in Indo-Caribbean literature. In this essay, I combine historiographic and literary analysis to contend with archival absence. Following Anjali Arondekar, and as I have shown elsewhere in the case of performing archival “recoveries” of elided Caribbean stories like those of queer subjects (2016), we, the post-colonized search-and-rescuers, seek “salvific truths” when we might instead accept the singular stories we find as less proof of loss than evidence of a quotidian “radical abundance” (Arondekar 2015, 107, 110). Such a combined historiographic and literary method is not simply recuperative, for a rediscovered singular instance or a collection of singular instances does not necessarily constitute a historical

phenomenon, nor is a literary story generalizable or proof of the motives and life experiences of long-dead persons. Historical accounts of Indo-Guyanese women's labour protest activities and fictional stories of the haunting of their descendants by their ancestral pasts speak to each other in a nonlinear, genre-defying way across the spatiotemporal gap of archival absence.

Methodologically, what I present here is a flowering of *possibility*, and avenues for reshaping traditional narratives of Indo-Caribbean women's agency through informed imaginings of what was, what could have been, and what could be—as has always been the cultural function of the myth, the story, the fable. After giving account of elided instances of Indo-Caribbean women's participation in labour organizing, I argue that the Guyanese writer Ryhaan Shah's novel *A Silent Life* (2015) is a *jahaji bahin*—"ship sister"⁴—narrative predicated on a rejection of Indo-Guyanese heterosexist morality and the concomitant remembrance of the Indian ancestress as she was: not the Ramayanic Sita ideal of sainted mother and submissive wife adopted by Indo-Caribbean migrants, but a woman like Sumintra, a labour leader and resister of imperialism. *A Silent Life* details the haunting of a postcolonial Muslim Indo-Guyanese woman, Aleyah Hassan, by her grandmother Nani's interwar, 1930s-era story of labour organizing in conflict with marriage and Indo-Caribbean traditional cultural values. But it is not a Caribbean story that simply memorializes community suffering; instead, the novel suggests that Indo-Caribbean women's historical plantation labour activism is a precursor to their descendants' long-awaited political participation in and leadership of the postcolonial nation.

Shah's *A Silent Life* is characteristic of a growing canon of Indo-Caribbean "women's narratives," written mostly by Indo-Guyanese and Indo-Trinidadian women at home and abroad, that acts as a supplement to the traditional androcentric, exilic model of the Indo-Caribbean novel promulgated by writers like V.S. Naipaul, Samuel Selvon and David Dabydeen. Narratives that instead centre the lives and experiences of Indo-Caribbean women include fiction by Trinidadians Ramabai Espinet, Lakshmi Persaud, Shani Mootoo and Lelawatte Manoo-Raming, and Guyanese Ryhaan Shah and Narmala Shewcharan; plays

by Guyanese Paloma Mohamed; and poetry by Trinidadians Vahni Capildeo and Rajandaye Ramkissoon-Chen, and Guyanese Rajkumari Singh, Mahadai Das and Lakshmi Kallicharran.

The postcolonial Indo-Caribbean novel modeled by male writers like Naipaul—so influential and foundational is the only Indo-Caribbean Nobel Prize in Literature winner that he cannot be escaped or ignored—responds to twentieth-century Caribbean national struggles with the despair of the embittered man who is either emasculated and isolated at home (as typified by Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, 1961), or dislocated in permanent geographic exile in the cosmopolitan colonial centre (as exemplified by nearly all of Naipaul's works except his earliest, most humorous writings like the collection *Miguel Street*, 1951). The exile is emotionally and physically separated from his natal family, rarely returns to his homeland, and he and the novel offer little hope for an uncorrupt Caribbean political future. There is often an implied disavowal of the Indian indentured ancestor by his nominally civilized, urban Indo-Caribbean descendant, and “country coolies” are typically portrayed as still living in the ignorance and poverty of the village or plantation.

By contrast, narratives that revolve around the lives of Indo-Caribbean women centre the past in a familial, gendered way: women protagonists tend to remain embedded in their families regardless of whether they live or travel abroad, and women's stories almost always contend with the figure of the migrant ancestress and the intersection of her perceived sexual morality with Indo-Caribbean community (re)formation.

Shah's *A Silent Life*, like other Indo-Caribbean women's novels notably including Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* (2003), Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) and *Valmiki's Daughter* (2009), and Persaud's *Daughters of Empire* (2012), episodically moves back and forth in time and place between colonial and postcolonial periods in the Caribbean, and England (in Espinet's and Mootoo's works, Canada). Shah's later novels *Weaving Water* (2013) and *A Death in the Family* (2014) also focus on Indo-Guyanese women's stories; the former engages

with indentured women's marital and labor struggles aboard ship and on the plantation, and the latter returns to one minor theme in *A Silent Life*: the interweaving of Islam and Indo-Caribbean family identities in the present day.

As scholars and writers like Patricia Mohammed (2004), Mariam Pirbhai (2010), Peggy Mohan (2007) and Tejaswini Niranjana (2006) show, such women's narratives call implicitly for a *jahaji bahin*, "ship sister" gender politics commensurate with the heterosexual *jahaji bhai*, "ship brother" migrant story that functions, Sean Lokaisingh-Meighoo (2000) argues, as the originary Indo-Caribbean familial relationship, and thus as a totalizing historical narrative of all Indo-Caribbean people.

Jahaji bhai describes the bond formed between mostly male indentured Indian shipmates bound for the New World. This bond was sustained in the early generations of indenture and sometimes beyond, when men, and later their families, attempted to maintain relations with those "relatives" dispersed to distant plantations. I argue elsewhere that

the *jahaji bhai* narrative of survival gives Indo-Caribbean people their own heterosexual, transoceanic story of labor and racial oppression with which to counter and parallel the nationalist discourse of Afro-Caribbean slavery and postcolonial entitlement to land and rule. Indo-Caribbeans are thus maneuvered into the hybrid, ocean-crossing paradigms of Caribbean area studies because the *jahaji bhai* suffered a "Middle Passage" voyage too. (2016, 251)

In pursuit of an Indo-Caribbean origin myth, the *jahaji bhai* narrative erases Indo-Caribbean women's agency, non-marital romantic and sexual relationships, and friendships with other women, to rehabilitate the women's non-normative origins. The fact that the majority of indentured Indian women were single women travelling alone to the New World was perceived as shameful by their male contemporaries and their descendants.

Shah's novel, which won the 2007 Guyana Prize for Literature first book award, displaces the importance of *jahaji bhai* ties and legacy in favour of inventing

and incorporating the *jahaji bahin* into the story of the Indo-Caribbean, but emphasizes that the maternal ancestral legacy must be both recognized and resisted in the pursuit of contemporary Indo-Caribbean women's self-development. The novel is cosmopolitan; set in Guyana and London in the second half of the twentieth century, it exhibits the characteristic Caribbean literary engagement with London or North American exile and diaspora, as established by the earlier generation of male Caribbean novelists and Afro-Caribbean women writers like Jamaica Kincaid and Paule Marshall. But it is also a story about Indo-Guyanese women's ancestral legacy of rural plantation work, and its implications for their labour and leadership in the future.

Indo-Caribbean Women Workers in Colonial Modernity

The Indo-Caribbean was slow to gain full political participation in Guyana and Trinidad. Intra-community reassertion of gender strictures, however, began soon after Indian indentured labourers realized they would be settling permanently. I propose at least four definitive periods in Indo-Caribbean ideologies of gender in relation to labour. These periods are somewhat generalizable to both Trinidad and Guyana, with their similar and roughly equivalent proportions of Indo- and Afro-Caribbean citizens, their gaining of independence and birthing of postcolonial ethno-nationalism in the same twentieth-century period (Trinidad became independent in 1962 and Guyana in 1966), and the ongoing familial, musical, culinary and other cultural exchanges between Indo-Trinidadians and Indo-Guyanese, who also choose to live together in the same diasporic immigrant neighborhoods in London, Toronto, and New York.

First, as I will discuss, the nineteenth century from 1838 onward was defined by an extreme imbalance in the number of male and female Indian migrants that resulted in a spate of "coolie wife murders" and accusations by both white planters and Indian men of Indian women's alleged sexual immorality (Bahadur 2014); second, Rhoda Reddock points to an early twentieth-century period around 1913 in which Indian women's roles began shifting from plantation

worker to “housewife” as Indian men in Trinidad and elsewhere “withdrew ‘their’ women from wage-labour but not to look after the house, as was officially stated,” but as part of a colonial state-sanctioned patriarchal project to reproduce the labour force (1994, 38); third, in the 1960s, the major period of Anglophone Caribbean independence from Great Britain, a growing number of Hindu and other Indian women in the Caribbean began completing primary and some secondary education and working outside of the home, often to great controversy (Singh 2012, 164); and fourth, the 1980s-90s saw the beginnings of Indian women’s governmental participation—as demonstrated in Shah’s novel—that culminated in the election of Kamala Persaud-Bissessar as seventh Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago in 2010.

This last period overlaps with a first move in Caribbean feminist historiography to “recover” Indian women’s stories in an attempt to account for their differences from Afro-Caribbean women’s histories and to counteract “stereotypes of passivity” and intra-community patriarchy (Mohammed 2003, 117). Beginning with the work of Mohammed, Reddock, Rawwida Baksh (Soodeen), Nesha Haniff, and others, and culminating recently in Gabrielle Hosein’s and Lisa Outar’s groundbreaking edited collection *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments* (2016), feminist scholars of the Indo-Caribbean have shown that in Trinidad and Guyana, the bodies of Indo-Caribbean women function as the loci and repositories of Indianness, contra Africanness, in both colonial and postcolonial national rhetoric. Familial life becomes repressive, especially when Indian women and men are taught that the price of seeking recourse outside of that inflexible structure is the total loss of it. As Espinet writes in *The Swinging Bridge*, her novel of an Indo-Trinidadian woman’s coming of age during the 1960s independence period and after, “the outside encroaches, but the ramparts are strong, and once you leave it you have no shelter and no ready skills for finding a different [life]” (2003, 15).

In general, intra-group social control of Indo-Caribbean women provided a twentieth-century alternative to national political participation by producing a community that embraced its distinctiveness from the Afro-Caribbean, rather

than mourning its lack of inclusion in the public sphere. Gender-normative, heterosexual Indian women were at the centre of the idealized Indo-Caribbean familial and domestic sphere, which is typically portrayed in postcolonial Caribbean literature as a space of entrenched traditional, religion-enforced patriarchal mores that are coded by the community as racially Indian values. Adherence to normative gender roles ironically becomes the definition of being Indian in exile and the major avenue of rejection of racial and cultural assimilation into the African-majority Caribbean.

The active participation and leadership of Indo-Guyanese women workers Sumintra, Kowsilla, and Salamea in sugar plantation strikes of the twentieth century were preceded by the complicated colonial case of Jamni, a weeder and child minder, who was the purported catalyst for the 1896 indentured worker uprising at Plantation Non Pareil, East Coast Demerara, in which five Indian men including her husband were killed. Based on the accounts of his Non Pareil indentured grandfather and other eyewitnesses, Rampersaud Tiwari relates that:

The uprising began when Jamni the wife of Jangli was abducted and allegedly raped by Gerad Van Nooten, the Deputy Manager of the estate...Jamni who said that when he attempted to rape her, she struck him in his face with the heavy steel *berwas* or *karas* (bangles) she was wearing on her wrists. (2013, 40)

Non Pareil harboured several overseers and managers “who were habitual violators of immigrant women and girls on the estate” (ibid). Historically, this tale becomes one of the righteous angers of the emasculated Jangli and four other Indian men martyred by the colonial militia for protecting their women from white sexual depredations—with a few intriguing details that undermine the primacy of the gendered familial honour narrative and make it instead a story of imperialism and labour oppression.

First, the protesting men were accused by Immigration Agent Henry J. Gladwin, whom they had approached with their complaints, of being treasonous Indian deserters of the British Army and thus subject to deportation. Second, after these accusations, the men “concede[d] the uprising as an industrial one; and as a

reward for their coerced agreement, they agreed to accept certain very small increases and to return peacefully to work" (ibid). There is evidence that wage disputes, not Jamni's assault, were the underlying reason for the protest; and the agreement with Gladwin was predicated on the Indian men's tacit acceptance of Gladwin's assertion that Jamni had no cause for protest because "coolie women were living freely with overseers" (ibid). Jangli was indeed "a disbanded and exiled VCO of the Indian Army," which is perhaps why, following the temporary resolution, he and the four other Indian men were nonetheless shot and 59 others injured by cavalymen sent to arrest them (41).

Jamni reported she was capable of resisting and physically defending herself, as she struck the overseer in the face with her bangles even though he may have succeeded in raping her (that is unclear). But in male witnesses' accounts of the 1896 Non Pareil events, she is framed as a passive body and event catalyst: neither empowered protagonist nor martyr. Her husband and other indentured Indian men are the ones remembered as heroes and colonial resisters, though they were apparently willing to compromise her defence for increased pay. There is no record of what happened to Jamni after her husband was killed; presumably she remained indentured, subject to violences of various kinds.

Gladwin's impugning of Indian women's morality and the indentured men's seeming preoccupation with Jamni's honour recall that among the incarnations of the *jahaji bahin* is the *rand* or *randi*, a Hindi (Hindustani, on the estates) word that originally meant "widow" or "woman," but that in India, before indenture, tellingly came to mean "prostitute" (Hock and Joseph 2009, 231). It is the spectre of this *rand* that results in the eliding of the diverse histories of Indo-Caribbean women. The term signified, in the Caribbean plantation era, a widow, harlot, both, or simply an Indian woman of allegedly loose morals (Espinete 2003, 275). Brinda Mehta (2004) and Mohammed (2004) argue that indentured Hindu men, having already been disenfranchised in India by the upper castes, had much to gain from emigration. Nonetheless, Hindu women "had the most to gain by crossing over to different lands because their confinement within Hindu patriarchal structures in India made them victims of abusive family and

communal traditions" (Mehta 2004, 5). As Gaiutra Bahadur (2014) shows in her archival history of indentured women on Guianese plantations, the first Hindu and Muslim women migrants found themselves with theretofore-unknown freedoms, notably an extensive choice of sexual and marital partners. Indian women in the Caribbean thus acquired from both Indian men and the colonial British an early reputation for having "loose morals" (Kempadoo 2004, 38-39). Every Indian woman was automatically assumed to be a *rand*.

The Caribbean decline of caste strictures precipitated by the *kala pani* "black water" voyage often led to the unusual Caribbean arrangement of lower-caste male recruits marrying higher-caste women—but higher-caste women who were perceived as cut off from their families and irredeemably sullied. These women, including many widows, were ideal female recruits for the Indian *arkatiyas* (recruiters) hired by the British to solicit Indians into indenture in the Caribbean (including Suriname), Fiji, Mauritius, and East and South Africa. It was quite difficult to recruit Indian women, and men who were already married did not want to bring their wives. Hugh Tinker, Madhavi Kale, Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, Verene Shepherd, Bahadur, Niranjana, and other historians of indenture observe that "fallen" higher-caste women were the best British officials could hope for when "[t]he planters demanded not only more women but the 'right kind of women,' who would be not only productive labourers on the estates but also faithful wives to the male workers" (Niranjana 2006, 61). The "right kind of women" generally meant upper-caste and other non-Dalit women, as emigration agents equated lower caste with lower morality. Many women who emigrated were nonetheless not the desired Brahmin widows, as "recruiters pointed out that a better class of women could not be induced to emigrate and that, in any case, they would be no good as field laborers" (ibid).

Violence against women began as soon as ships embarked upon the *kala pani*. Not only were Indian women subject to the advances of sailors, but they "also suffered abuses at the hands of Indian men on board as domestic violence was not unheard of in instances where people tried to live as couples and families on board" (Shepherd 2002, 31). The British East India Company and its affiliates

attempted to guard their female investments from male crew, indentured men, and the women's own purported "loose" tendencies (23). As on sugar estates, sexual assault aboard ship was blamed not only on men and on the small number of women, but on Indian women's alleged promiscuity.

The disparate sex ratio of indentured labourers was of concern not just to Indian men, but to British colonial officials. There were only fourteen women among the 1838 "Gladstone arrivals" that constituted the first batch of Indian indentured labourers to British Guiana (5). By the 1890s, Caribbean planters wanted a stable domestic workforce, leading to increased attempts to recruit women and a reduction of women's indenture period from five to three years (Niranjana 2006, 59). Planters assumed that marriage and family were the keys to domesticating their male labour force, and that jealous violence against Indian women would lessen if there were enough wives to go around. The British Caribbean issue commonly referred to by planters as the "coolie-woman problem"—uxoricide and domestic violence against the small minority of Indian women on the sugar estates—was grave enough to warrant a relaxation of "standards" and admission of almost all female comers.

The statistics of Indian male violence against Indian women were grim. At the height of the epidemic of indentured violence, 70% of all murders in Trinidad between 1890 and 1898 were domestic incidents committed by Indians against Indians, with the majority of murderers being male and the victims female, including child brides.⁵ British colonial authorities blamed the "coolie wife murders" on the inherent moral defects of "jealous" Indian men and Indian women of "low character" (Carter and Torabully 2002, 52). In contrast to some European orientalist and later Caribbean stereotypes of the docile Indian woman "with no mind, personality or significance of her own" (Kempadoo 2004, 38), British planters and Indian men assumed that

many of the female immigrants were prostitutes, social outcasts, and women who had abandoned marriage and domesticity...The skewed perception of Indian women held by the British reinforced patriarchal tendencies within the Indian community in both India

and the Caribbean, which found the women not only “immoral” but corrupted sexual servants to non-Indian men (Ibid)
Indian women migrants thus faced discrimination and abuse from mutually reinforcing British and Indian patriarchies.

The violence of the plantation was not confined to abuses of plantation managers against indentured workers and to men against women. One documented response to plantation working conditions was suicide, a theme that, as I will discuss, Shah takes up in her novel. Mohammed writes that the high male suicide rate was worrisome to colonial officials, who blamed it, again, on the immorality of women (2004, 60). The indentureship legacy of suicide haunts Guyana to this day: The World Health Organization reported in 2012 that Guyana had the highest suicide rate in the world. In a nation of less than a million people, Guyana had an age-standardized suicide rate of 44.2 per 100,000 inhabitants.⁶ This phenomenon has been poorly studied, but reports seem to indicate the population at highest risk is (still) rural Indo-Guyanese men.⁷ Long before 2012, the alleged “coolie people” tendency to kill themselves—usually over family rows or failed love—was a source of gallows humour in Guyana, where Indians were said to be always “drinking Malathion” (an insecticide), and in Trinidad, where they were always “drinking Gramazone” (Gramoxone, an herbicide). Both of these poisons are older agricultural pesticides to which estate labourers had access. The substances are capable of killing all Caribbean “pests”—taking any kind of life that was an impediment to sugar plantation economics, from weeds to weevils to workers.

Today, domestic violence rates in the Caribbean, in the Indo-Caribbean and in Caribbean diasporas remain abysmally high. The first recorded murders of both 2017 and 2018 in New York City occurred in the Indo-Caribbean enclave of Richmond Hill, Queens; in the 2018 incident, 26-year-old Indo-Guyanese immigrant mother Stacy Singh was brutally killed by her abusive 46-year-old Indo-Guyanese husband Vinny Loknath, who then committed suicide.⁸ The gendered links between colonial plantation violence and high contemporary

rates of domestic violence and suicide in Caribbean communities remain undertheorized.

Indian indenture in the Caribbean ended in 1917, but many Indians remained wage labourers on sugar estates (and cocoa estates in Trinidad). The 1930s were a pan-Caribbean period of labour unrest in which strike participation of Indian women and Indians in general was newly visible in both Trinidad and Guyana. In Trinidad, Indian women, including one female organizer “Naidu” who exposed “the practice of company officials taking girls to their bungalows ostensibly to ‘scrub floors,’” (Reddock 1994, 154), were specifically targeted for their involvement in the 1934 Sugar Workers’ Strike, when, peculiarly, wages were raised for every striking Indian sugar worker in Chaguanas except persons who wore jewelry. This obvious discrimination against bangle-wearing Indian women resulted in further protest and a reversal of the wage raise exception (155).

Reddock’s work on the participation of Trinidadian women in labour activities sheds light on the fact that, though Trinidad and Guyana are often rightfully compared to each other as postcolonial Anglophone nations with large Indo- and Afro-Caribbean populations (as I have suggested, there are for example historical similarities in the way Indian women’s social behaviour is policed in both countries), there are differences in the countries’ labour organizing trajectories that stem from Guyana’s larger, continental arable land mass and ability to sustain rice farming, and the development of Trinidad and Tobago’s oil and gas industry.

During the 1898-1938 period in Trinidad,

Wage-labor relations became more generalized and replaced indentured/contract labor on the plantations[,] and industrial production, based on small-scale manufacturing and petroleum production, was to replace agriculture as the main contributor to national income. The foundations for the long-term process of proletarianization, and its eventual corollary, “housewifization,” were firmly established, facilitated by increased unemployment especially during the post-war depression. (69)

Trinidad's Education Code of 1935 explicitly re-oriented the education of girls toward a "housewife" curriculum, and except under special circumstances forbade the employment of married women as teachers (49). Trinidad was becoming a petroleum-producing country that encouraged the nuclear family model where women's role was domestic support of the masculine industrialization project, while British Guiana remained agricultural—but the crop diversified.

The pre- and interwar periods saw the development of the Guianese rice industry by formerly indentured small farmers, who were at first still part-time estate labourers dependent on sugar planters willing to lease land (Rodney 1981, 87). Between 1895 and 1920 these rice growers became a "paddy proletariat" that "fitted more closely the definition of 'proletariat' than 'peasant'" (88) and eventually became the Indo-Guyanese middle class. Rice, unlike oil and gas, was an agricultural product that even when cultivated for export perpetuated the colonial legacy of agricultural land use and labour. The large-scale production of sugar also continued on the far-flung plantations of British Guiana. In sum, before and after World War I, British Guiana remained an agricultural colony—with some timber and mineral resources—while Trinidad entered a different type of modernity with global oil at its centre. In industrializing Trinidad, women found work as oilfield domestics—though Reddock notes that few domestics were Indian, and many were from other Caribbean countries (82).

When Critchlow Got the Boys Together: Anticolonial Trade Unionism in Guyana

After Jamni, women's roles in British Guianese labour strikes and in the trade union movement of the early twentieth century continued to be subsumed into narratives of anticolonial heroism by brave Guianese men. The 1905 Georgetown dockworker strike for higher wages and fewer working hours that was the catalyst for the eventual 1919 formation of the first trade union in Guiana, the British Guiana Labour Union (also known as the British Guiana Trade Union), was characterized by organizer Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow as the story

of how he “got the working men and boys together” at the Georgetown waterfront (1945, 49). And yet, Critchlow notes,

at that time I did not know that all the estates in the country followed us and struck on account of low wages. At a particular estate, the Ruimveldt estate, they shot at the people as they came down to the town...They were shooting the people coming down from the estate. At the news of the shooting, the women started a riot. The magistrate ordered the women's hair to be cut off. They “catted” the men and sent them to prison. (Ibid)

“Catting,” as the right Reverend and Wesleyan missionary H.V.P. Bronkhurst described in 1883, was the practice of publicly whipping indentured labourers (and previously slaves) in British Guiana with the cat-o'-nine tails to deter murder and other crimes. According to Bronkhurst, who bloodthirstily and “respectfully suggest[ed] the adoption” of catting and the implementation of “decapitation” if catting did not work as a criminal deterrent, catting was a particularly effective punishment for the “Indian Coolie,” who

detests with perfect hatred and with indescribable horror the public catting in the presence of all his countrymen. He would sooner prefer death by strangulation, hanging, or decapitation, to his bare back being torn by the ‘CAT-O’-NINE-TAILS.’ So *intolerable is the disgrace, so intense the shame*. (1883, 399)

It is the affective, vengeful, and easily gendered qualities of shame and disgrace that were visited as punishment upon the free and indentured people convicted in the 1905 strike: men were to be shamed with a public whipping, and women who rioted had their hair cut off, ostensibly depriving them of a physical marker of femininity for the unfeminine actions of starting a riot and challenging the order of the colonial economic system. And there were many women involved in the rioting. Rodney attests that 41 of the 105 convicted of involvement and 19 of the 45 whose charges were dismissed were women, arguing that “the implication could well be that at least one in every three ‘rioters’ was a woman, a credible ratio given the large proportion of women in the city of Georgetown at the time” (1981, 206). Rodney is also clear that

Women from all levels of the working people were involved in the 1905 riots. Court records do not sustain the slur that even those arrested were all rowdies, viragos, prostitutes and the like. One

encounters reference to a “badly clad ‘lady’ of the centipede⁹ class” and to one “Daisy, the Centipede Queen;” but in general, the absence of such appellations is striking, because the prosecution would presumably have been at pains to point out where persons charged had criminal records—whether they were men or women. There were a few women who participated in the East and West Bank labor struggles, and these were undoubtedly genuine wage laborers. (207)

The majority of women wage labourers involved in the 1905 strike were likely domestics, as according to the 1891 census, the number of domestics was 7,432 out of a female population of 28,355, and in the 1905 riots, “it is a plausible inference that many of those who took to the streets were themselves domestics, especially in view of the fact that almost one in four women in the city was a domestic” (206). In Georgetown, the striking women were mostly Afro-Guianese; on the sugar estates, Indo-Guianese.

In the later interwar period, the worldwide impact of the 1929 United States stock market crash extended to British Guiana in the form of a “serious economic crisis” between 1930 and 1935 that caused many rural people to move to Georgetown in search of already scarce urban work. The result was vicious job competition, rioting, and strikes. Odeen Ishmael writes that “the chairman of Bookers, the main sugar company, reported to his directors in London that the strikes were organized by ‘communist agitators’” (2014, 353). This report echoed a growing U.S.-driven hemispheric narrative about the evils of communism, but early labour unions in Guiana could not be described accurately as communist or socialist. They were primarily anticolonial and anti-imperialist; Critchlow describes, for instance, his arrest in 1919 for quoting in a handbill the “two lines which were a call to arms” from the *Marseillaise* (1945, 51).

At the time of the 1939 riot in which Sumintra was killed, the 1838-1917 transoceanic period of Indian indenture in the Caribbean had ended, and though there was a nascent Indo-Guianese Georgetown middle class—led by, among others, journalist and community advocate Joseph Ruhomon, famed for

his 1894 racial uplift lecture “India—the Progress of Her People at Home and Abroad and How Those in British Guiana May Improve Themselves”—many Indians in British Guiana still lived and worked on rural plantations under the auspices of the planter group the Sugar Producers Association (SPA). Rodney and Guyanese politician and anticolonialist Cheddi Jagan observed that in the first half of the twentieth century, Afro- and Indo-Guyanese men and women were mostly united in their hostility toward the plantation system. Though the two groups were used as mutual strikebreakers by planters, Jagan argued:

Up to the mid-1920's, they had a common enemy—the white planters. At that stage, the Indian sugar workers accepted the African militant trade union leader, Hubert N. Critchlow, as their “Black Crosby;” the class struggle then tended to take on the racial appearance of black against white, and African and Indian against European. It was only when the Indians began to climb out of their “logie” environment and to compete at the middle-class level for jobs and positions of prestige that conflict began, clearly indicating the economic basis for racism. (2006, 82)

In the 1930s, the heyday of trade union formation in British Guiana, the Indo-/Afro-Guyanese racial strife that destructively characterizes postcolonial Guyanese politics was not yet the defining issue it was to become, as all workers were united in their complaints against the British.

British Guianese sugar workers' grievances were many: they worked long hours, they were underpaid, they were not informed what they would be paid before the day's work was over, and they, especially women, were subject to racist and degrading language and treatment by overseers and drivers (Alexander and Parker 2004, 347). Populist strikes on rural sugar plantations were common, and not directly orchestrated by Critchlow and other Georgetown trade unionists: “The sugar strikes of the early and middle 1930s occurred without there being in existence any organized union to direct them. Although...the British Guiana Labour Union had some influence, it had little formal organization outside the city of Georgetown” (348). The urban-rural divide meant in essence that sugar workers, who were then mostly Indian, did not have unions that directly represented their interests until the 1936 founding of the Man Power

Citizen's Association (MPCA) by Ayube Mohamed Edun, a middle-class Indo-Guianese goldsmith and writer (ibid, Benjamin et al. 1998, 41).

In their editorial preface to an excerpt of Edun's 1938 "curious and eccentric political manifesto *London's Heart Probe and Britain's Destiny*," Joel Benjamin, Lakshmi Kallicharan, et al. imply that Edun's attention to his own educated intellectual prowess and his conceptualization of the ideal post-imperialist state as one "ruled by a benign dictatorship of the intelligentsia" (1998, 41) meant the MPCA was a vanguardist organization. Edun did have a non-worker leadership role in ending the February 1939 Leonora strike; after Sumintra and three other strikers were killed, MPCA members were permitted by planters to enter the estate in an attempt to defuse the situation. Edun "was able to talk with the strikers at a nearby Hindu temple, and the following day the workers returned to their jobs" (Alexander and Parker 2004, 349).

The Sugar Producers Association agreed, in May 1935, to recognize the MPCA as the first Guianese union representing sugar workers, "for purposes of collective bargaining, giving it the right to negotiate in any case of dispute, and to hold meetings on the plantations" (ibid). The influence and membership of the MPCA expanded greatly, though by the late 1940s, amidst allegations of planter collusion and the incorporation of bauxite and other workers into the union (350), Indo-Guianese sugar workers had shifted their allegiances to the Guyana Industrial Workers Union (GIWU). GIWU was not recognized as a negotiating body by the SPA, and this and other conflicts led to the infamous June 16, 1948, killing of five striking Indo-Guianese sugar workers, the "Enmore Martyrs," as they are still symbolically called in Guyanese national discourse (Jackson 2012, 204).

Killing Men: Silence and Suicide

Salamea, who encouraged the indentured to strike, and Jamni, the proximate reason for the colonial militia's killing of five indentured men, are construed not as rebels in their own right but as responsible for the deaths of labouring Indian

men. The structuring familial “violent secret” of Shah’s novel *A Silent Life* is just that: that the Indo-Guyanese woman Nani, by dint of her anticolonial labour organizing and participation in public life, caused not simply the death, but the suicide of her husband, cursing her female descendants to a life of gendered unhappiness.

A Silent Life follows the life of Muslim protagonist Aleyah Hassan, who leaves British Guiana as a young adult on the eve of 1966 independence to study in London. She stays and marries a well-off Indo-Guyanese man in England, but she is continually haunted by the life and secrets of her grandmother Nani (“maternal grandmother”), to whom she had been very close as a child. These hauntings occur in a series of temporally disrupted, nonlinear dreams and interludes of “madness,” where Aleyah “sees” terrible historical events and family incidents. She begins to chafe at her own matrimonial bonds and oppressive husband, and eventually experiences a stereotypically hysterical feminine nervous breakdown. The breakdown causes her to divorce her husband and leave her children to return to Guyana in the 1990s, when the nation too is experiencing a time of political turmoil and transition: in 1992, after 28 years of rule amidst allegations of fraudulent voting and rigged elections, the Afro-Guyanese-dominated People’s National Congress (PNC) lost the national election to the Indo-Guyanese-majority People’s Progressive Party (PPP). Upon Aleyah’s return to Guyana, her grandmother Nani divulges the secrets of her own and her female indentured ancestress’s lives, then dies.

Through the telling of the women’s *jahaji bahin* stories, *A Silent Life* attempts to move beyond static memorialization of a *jahaji bhai* Indo-Caribbean community. As Judith Mizrahi-Barak writes, though *A Silent Life* revolves around “the disjunction and conjunction of voice and silence” (2009, 251) in the hidden history of the subaltern, the “reconstruction of self is also made possible through the written word of the text” (257). Shah’s novel is a historicizing text; characters draw together orally recovered fragments to recount and therefore (re)create female ancestral Indo-Caribbean history as they imagine it happened, as it may well have happened.

The history of the Hassan family is tied to Plantation Leonora, that traditional locus of female sugar worker resistance. Though their indentured Indian progenitors were initially sent to Plantation Versailles, the first female member of the family born in British Guiana ends up married, as a weeder and a cane-cutter, at Leonora; that woman is described as one who had a hard life but accepted it with a sort of resignation that, rather than bravery, becomes the Indo-Caribbean female inheritance. So Aleyah theorizes that her grandmother Nani got her spirit from the progenitors who actually made the ship journey, as “[t]hat would take spirit and daring—to stand at the stern of a sailing ship and watch the land of your ancestors disappear from view, possibly forever. It had to be their blood that made fists of their hands and placed the fight in her shoulders” (Shah 2005, 72). Once on the estates, the intrepid migrants revert and turn inward, raising their children to be quiet and keep their heads down.

Marriage is of primary importance in *A Silent Life*. Aleyah’s entire female lineage is haunted by her grandmother Nani’s inability to be a community-approved “proper wife,” and Aleyah herself, in leaving her emotionally abusive husband, acquires the same stigma. Though the family is Muslim, the majority Hindu Indo-Caribbean idealization of the Ramayanic Sita applies; as Sherry-Ann Singh writes, “the essentially patriarchal family system that developed during the early post-indenture period held Sita—chaste, submissive, faithful, and loyal to her husband—as the highest ideal of womanhood” (2012, 95). Valmiki’s ancient epic *Ramayana* and Tulsidas’ 16th-century Ramayanic *bhakti* (devotional) poetic retelling the *Ramcharitmanas*, in their attention to the themes of exile and overcoming material, familial, and spiritual hardship, are the most important religious texts in Indo-Caribbean Hinduism. Hindus in the Caribbean diaspora accounted for the seemingly unjust behavior of Rama, avatar of the god Vishnu, toward his wife Sita—testing her virtue and banishing her—by explaining that “Rama’s status as a king duty-bound to his subjects took precedence over his role as a husband” (135). The Sita ideal of Indo-Caribbean women persisted until at least the 1970s (96), and it is never entirely absent from discussions of Indo-Caribbean women’s public and private behavior that continue to frame the community’s self-perceptions at home and abroad.

In 1930s British Guiana, Aleyah's grandmother Nani is no meek Sita—though married, Nani is an outspoken young woman who acquires a reputation for helping poor Indian women and men sugar and rice workers by offering them the vision of organized labour. Nani acquires socialist principles from the mysterious Pandit Seecharan, a Hindu religious leader—even while fraternizing with Hindus is frowned upon for a Muslim woman. Nani is bright enough to understand workers' rights ideologies and fiery enough to electrify others when she repeats them. In her old age, she tells Aleyah that she wanted to help other women in more destitute positions and alludes to historical incidents in which “strikers were shot in the back,” requiring revenge and restitution (Shah 2005, 182).

Nani's problem is that she literally outstages her husband Nazeer, a quiet man who is talented in the implied feminine pursuit of dancing. She speaks on stage at unionizing meetings and is far more articulate than he. Despite the presence of vocal women in Guianese labour movements, in Nani's village, labour organizing is “man's work. The managers dealt with men” (24). At her final workers' rally, Nani answers political questions her husband cannot; the crowd murmurs and laughs, and Nazeer walks away. He stays out lying in a punt trench¹⁰ until dawn and his hair turns white overnight. When he comes home, Nani—then called “Baby,” a typical feminine, affectionately infantilizing “call name” (nickname) for Indo-Guyanese women—is so panicked at the idea of losing her husband, her social net, and legitimacy as an Indian wife, that she apologizes repeatedly and cries,

Nazeer, Nazeer, I'm going to stop all this now. All the books and leaflets—look, I am tearing them up. They're dead. I'll burn them. I'll bury them. I'll be a wife to you and a mother to Shabhan, that's what I'll be from now on. (27)

Burning books on colonialism burns history, and burning the promises of socialist pamphlets burns the present of labour organizing and the future of postcolonial independence. Nazeer believes it is futile to disavow reality by destroying the words that signify it. Baby's invocations fail when Nazeer refuses her promises of change, saying:

If you ever stop-up your words they'll choke you. You aren't like the other women round here who just keep to their skirts and their kitchens. I like the fire in you, but I can't be who you want. You want to change the world. Me, I just want to enjoy it. You push me how you want to go and I try to speak your words and fight your fights. Now I'm "Baby's boy." That's what the men call me. That and worse...Shame's gone deep to the roots. (28)

Personal, gendered shame has gone literally to the roots of Nazeer's hair, which turns white with inadequacy; but he also implies that all the ancestral roots of Indians in the Caribbean are besmirched by his wife's lack of submission to him. He wants to be a proper patriarchal *jahaji bhai*. Nazeer hangs up his dancing bells, takes to his room, and never emerges again. The social and marital damage has been done. Nani gives up her organizing work and goes as far as to remove Shabhan, Aleyah's mother, from school, declaring that books and learning cause unnecessary heartbreak for women. Nani's granddaughter Aleyah is in turn also bookish, causing an elderly female relative to say "It's the books that worry me...The words are heavy-heavy." They "carry the weight of the world and can 'crush and kill'" (52). That is what happened to Nani: her voice and learning crushed her husband and ultimately killed him. Women's non-adherence to traditional gender roles, it is suggested, actually causes men to die.

The great reveal of *A Silent Life* is Nani's secret that she enabled her husband to kill himself by literally giving him the rope to hang himself. It is the inverse of the plantation "coolie-wife murders," when Indian men killed their wives and sexual partners. Nazeer first threatens to kill himself when his wife Baby/Nani offers to help a poor Indian woman receive compensation from the manager of the sugar estate on which her husband had died. Nazeer is terribly offended that Baby would have the temerity to speak up to a white man. He says, "I'm not going to stand by and watch. Not this time...I'll kill myself, I tell you. I'll hang myself first" (184). The exasperated Nani, it seems, eventually hands him a rope, and he hangs himself in depression, and perhaps, spite. Aleyah's family and neighbours all know the story, but no one will repeat it until confronted by Aleyah, who experiences a dream-vision of the event the night before leaving

her homeland for London. That night she hits Nani, who says nothing. In the morning after the dream, Aleyah feels as if nothing has happened,

But as I cross the floor, I tread on something soft. I reach down and pick up a small bundle of threads. They are pale gold and coarse. Directly overhead is the beam where my grandfather threw the rope. I take these strands of rope to my room and put them away carefully in a corner of my suitcase. (57-58)

The rope represents the possibility of escape from the world via suicide, in a continuation of gendered plantation violence. Linear temporality is disrupted when women usurp their husbands' roles; the golden rope is always there, haunting women, waiting to be used by men. Indeed, in the 2018 Indo-Guyanese immigrant murder-suicide of Stacy Singh, her killer husband hung himself. In the novel, Nani goes hysterically and temporarily blind after she finds Nazeer's body, and gives up all participation in the world. She "took to her rocking chair and turned herself into an old woman, killing herself with her memories," and seeing only "a long piece of rope" (35).

The community was not without feeling: "People felt so sorry for us. A dead that got carried off with a rope round his neck is not supposed to get prayers said for him, but the moulvi came. He felt so sorry for us, and said the prayers asking Allah's pardon" (30). Individual pity for the man who committed suicide and for his bereft family—which is left without a male protector and provider—does not preclude assigning the incident to its proper place of disgrace in the community narrative. The entire township considers Nani's lapse into silence "rightful penance for her sin," and Aleyah says "they look on my mother and father as good children who are taking care of their family worries with correct fortitude: they have not bruised the neighbourhood with bitter talk, or thrown their mother out to suffer among strangers" (45). Nani and women like her are hitches in the group transformation into a spotless Indian-Caribbean community ripe for the national stage.

On her deathbed, after Aleyah returns to independent Guyana, Nani whispers to Aleyah, "Now that you are home, daughter, the rope will never again throw itself over..." and Aleyah responds, "No, no! No, Nani, not that! Never! I could never have done..." Nani shushes her, and with her dying breath, says, "Safe. We are all safe, safe, safe" (185). It is unclear who or what is "safe" in this moment. Nani may be safe in death, and Aleyah is safe because she has just finally filed for divorce from her husband and returned to Guyana, exercising agency over her own life for the first time. As the Indo-Guyanese *jahaji bahin*, inheritor of the courage of Nani and other female plantation workers who protested colonial labour conditions, Aleyah must actively take part in the nation's destiny.

Aleyah's private realization of her family history is perhaps the first step in giving postcolonial Indo-Guyanese women a voice in the public sphere. Her education, life experiences, and eloquence thrust her into a leadership role. Like her grandmother, she becomes an advocate for Indo-Guyanese women, exposing sexual crimes formerly deemed unspeakable because they intersected with racial violence. At a multi-ethnic meeting of younger educated people, Aleyah says she heard "Not just about the burning of buildings and the looting and beatings, but of Indian women being stripped in the streets while the opposition thugs—including women—stood about laughing" (164). The group falls silent and she becomes acutely conscious that she is the only woman and one of only a few Indians in the room. Finally, "one young black man says in a low voice, his head in his hands, 'It shames us all.'" Conciliatorily, those assembled then agree that racism was "the tool of the colonizers" who "taught us well," thereby absolving themselves and postcolonial historical perpetrators of responsibility (164-65). The gathered men also do not apologize for sexism.

Every social issue in this postcolonial Guyanese context is problematically reduced to race and the political struggle between Indo- and Afro-Guyanese. Aleyah, however, may have the power to overcome racial differences by becoming Ma Sita again, this time by employing the trappings not of individual wifehood, but abstract, public maternity. One young man urges Aleyah to run

for office as a potential “Mother to a troubled nation” (166). Having rejected being a mother to her sons, Aleyah is encouraged to be a mother to her people and her nation. But at the close of the novel, she remains uncertain about re-assuming the mantle of any kind of motherhood. The transition from the traditional female indentured migrant’s occupation of plantation weeder to postcolonial contender for the presidency need not be framed in gendered terms or as a return to Sita’s idealized domestic womanhood. If Aleyah is to be a politician and leader, it will be on her own terms, in the spirit of her revolutionary grandmother and other women who raised their voices in colonial protest. The *jahaji bahin* narrative of Shah’s novel thus posits Indo-Caribbean female subjects who are not defined by rupture from India or by the reassertion of traditional gender mores, but rather by a mode that is both continuity and invention, insisting on its Indo-Caribbean historical and cultural particularity while accommodating the plurality of the nation, and driven by the ostensibly invisible and powerless woman worker in the field and at home upon whose foundational presence the community and the state rest.

References

- Alexander, Robert J. and Eldon M. Parker. 2004. *A History of Organized Labor in the English-Speaking West Indies*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Bahadur, Gaiutra. 2014. *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Benjamin, Joel, Lakshmi Kalicharan, Ian McDonald and Lloyd Searwar, eds. 1998. *They Came in Ships: An Anthology of Indo-Guyanese Prose and Poetry*. Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree Press.
- Bronkhurst, H.V.P. 1883. *The Colony of British Guiana and Its Labouring Population...* London: T. Woolmer.
- Carter, Marina and Khal Torabully. 2002. *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora*. London: Anthem Press.
- Critchlow, Hubert. 1945. "History of the Trade Union Movement in British Guiana." In *The Voice of Coloured Labor: Speeches and Reports of Colonial Delegates to the World Trade Union Conference—1945*, edited by George Padmore, 49-51. Manchester, UK: PANAF Service Ltd.
- Espinat, Ramabai. (2003) 2004. *The Swinging Bridge*. Toronto: Harper Perennial.
- Haniff, Nesha Z. 1988. *Blaze a Fire: Significant Contributions of Caribbean Women*. Toronto: Sister Vision, Black Women and Women of Colour Press.
- Hock, Hans Heinrich and Brian D. Joseph. 2009. *Language History, Language Change, and Language Relationship: An Introduction to Historical and Comparative Linguistics*. 2nd ed. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Hosein, Gabrielle and Lisa Outar, eds. 2016. *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ishmael, Odeen. 2014. *The Guyana Story: From Earliest Times to Independence*. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris.
- Jackson, Shona. 2012. *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Jagan, Cheddi. 2006. "Race, Class, Color and Religion." In *Cultural Identity and Creolization in National Unity: The Multiethnic Caribbean*, edited by Prem Misir, 79-90. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Kale, Madhavi. 1998. *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration in the British Caribbean*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Kempadoo, Kamala. 2004. *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race, and Sexual Labor*. New York: Routledge.
- Khan, Aliyah. 2016. "Voyages Across Indenture: From Ship Sister to Mannish Woman." *GLQ* 22(2): 249-80.
- Lokaisingh-Meighoo, Sean. 2000. "Jahaji Bhai: Notes on the Masculine Subject and Homoerotic Subtext of Indo-Caribbean Identity." *Small Axe* 7: 77-92.
- Mehta, Brinda J. 2004. *Diasporic (Dis)locations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the Kala Pani*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Misrahi-Barak, Judith. 2009. "Ryhaan Shah's Silent Screams of a Silent Life." In *Voices and Silence in the Contemporary Novel in English*, edited by Vanessa Guignery, 249-59. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Mohammed, Patricia. 2003. "A Symbiotic Visiting Relationship: Caribbean Feminist Historiography and Caribbean Feminist Theory." In *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*, edited by Eudine Barriteau, 101-25. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.

- . 2004. "Unmasking Masculinity and Deconstructing Patriarchy: Problems and Possibilities within Feminist Epistemology." In *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*, edited by Rhoda E. Reddock, 38-67. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Niranjana, Tejaswini. 2006. *Mobilizing India: Women, Music, and Migration between India and Trinidad*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Reddock, Rhoda E. 1994. *Women, Labour & Politics in Trinidad & Tobago: A History*. London: Zed Books.
- Rodney, Walter. (1981) 1982. *History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Roopnarine, Lomارش. 2015. "East Indian Women and Leadership Roles During Indentured Servitude in British Guiana 1838–1920." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 16(3): 174-85.
- Ruhomon, Joseph. 1894. "India—the Progress of Her People at Home and Abroad and How Those in British Guiana May Improve Themselves." In *They Came in Ships: An Anthology of Indo-Guyanese Prose and Poetry*, edited by Joel Benjamin et al., 44-50. Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree Press.
- Shah, Ryhaan. 2005. *A Silent Life*. Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree Press.
- Shepherd, Verene A. 2002. *Maharani's Misery: Narratives of a Passage from India to the Caribbean*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Singh, Sherry-Ann. 2012. *The Ramayana Tradition and Socio-Religious Change in Trinidad, 1917-1990*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Tinker, Hugh. 1993. *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920*, 2nd ed. London: Hansib Publishing.
- Tiwari, Rampersaud. 2013. "The October 1896 Non Pareil Uprising: The Unknown Story." *Man in India* 93(1): 29-43.
- Waters Jr., Robert Anthony and Gordon Oliver Daniels. 2010. "Striking for Freedom? International Intervention and the Guianese Sugar Workers' Strike of 1964." *Cold War History* 10(4): 537-69.

¹ I use "Guianese" to denote national identity in colonial British Guiana before May 26, 1966, when the country gained independence from Great Britain and renamed itself the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and its citizens "Guyanese."

² Kowsilla (also called Alice) was murdered by a later-acquitted Afro-Guyanese scab driving a tractor in 1964. Though she became known as a martyr to the causes of Indo-Guyanese sugar worker rights and national independence, she may have been a "market woman," rather than an estate worker and union member—which does not negate her involvement (Waters and Daniels 2010, 545).

³ *Sadarines* also informally supervised Indian women's affairs like the Guyanese *boxhand* or *throwing box* and Trinidadian *susu*, which were communal, peer-to-peer rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs) that allowed indentured women to pool 10 cents of their \$2.00 earnings each week, then give the sum to each woman in turn (Roopnarine 2015, 181; Haniff 1988, 43).

⁴ The term *jahaji bahin* ("ship sister"), with variant spellings, is newer to popular usage than *jahaji bhai* ("ship brother"). See Khan (2016) for further description of contemporary uses of the term.

⁵ Niranjana writes: "The prevalence of the 'wife murders' by indentured Indians in Trinidad and British Guiana in the nineteenth century was represented as due to the inconstancy of the women...Between 1872 and 1880, 27 percent of all murders in Trinidad were committed by East Indian immigrants; subsequently, East Indians accounted for 60 percent of the murders between 1881 and 1889 and 70 percent between 1890 and 1898...The majority of the murderers were men, and those killed were women who were wives, concubines, or fiancées. Although there are quite a few court cases involving men who had killed their child brides whose fathers had promised them to several men for a hefty bride price each time, many of the cases were against men who had murdered their wives for having taken up with another man. It was also not uncommon for Indian women to form relationships with overseers and white estate managers" (2006, 69).

⁶ "Suicide: Desperate Measures: When It Comes to People Taking Their Own Lives, Guyana Leads the World." 2014. *The Economist*, September 13. <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21616972-when-it-comes-people-taking-their-own-lives-guyana-leads-world-desperate-measures>.

⁷ "The 'Werther Effect' in Juvenile Suicide in Guyana." 2014. *Kaieteur News*, June 8. <http://www.kaieteurnews.com/2014/06/08/the-werther-effect-in-juvenile-suicide-in-guyana/>.

⁸ Thomas Tracy, Kerry Burke and Larry McShane, "Woman Fatally Stabbed in Queens Home, Abusive Husband Found Hanging from Tree in Suspected Murder-Suicide." 2018. *New York Daily News*, January 1. <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/queens/queens-woman-found-stabbed-death-home-article-1.3731590>.

⁹ At the turn of the twentieth century, "centipedes" described "a small quasi-criminal segment of hustlers who were resident in Georgetown—the products of rural-urban migration and unemployment both in the countryside and in the city" (Rodney 1981, 205).

¹⁰ A "punt trench" is an open tunnel filled with shallow water through which oxen and/or tractors pull "punts," flat vessels loaded with cut sugar cane stalks. They generally run on streets between the roadway and homes, and during the colonial era, stretched all the way from plantations to coastal ports. Nowadays the trenches remain but are filled with garbage and wastewater.



Negotiating Gender, Citizenship and Nationhood through Universal Adult Suffrage in Curaçao

Rose Mary Allen

Freelance researcher
Part-time lecturer in Caribbean studies
University of Curaçao

Abstract: The role of gender in (anti) colonial thought and praxis in Curaçao is a relatively unexplored area of research, and few scholars have studied the impact of the denial of citizenship to Curaçaoan women. Until 1948, women were not considered full citizens and were excluded from suffrage rights and participation in decision-making on the basis of race, ethnicity and gender. In Curaçao, similar to the rest of the Caribbean, citizenship has been gender-laden as well as class- and race-laden. This article examines the struggle for universal adult suffrage by Curaçaoan women. It explores how pioneering women in the 1940s understood citizenship and how they sought to construct new ideologies of gender within the context of the patriarchal, race- and class-based structures of Curaçaoan society. I also consider how their successful political struggle contributed in subsequent years to anti-colonialism, including both formal decolonization and popular nationalism.

Keywords: Political citizenship, gender, universal adult suffrage, Curaçao, Dutch Caribbean

Acknowledgements: The author is grateful for comments and suggestions from Peter Jordens and Lisenne Delgado based on an earlier draft of this article.

How to cite

Allen, Rose Mary. 2018. "Negotiating Gender, Citizenship and Nationhood through Universal Adult Suffrage in Curaçao." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12: 299-318

On March 17, 1948, the bill granting universal suffrage to adult men and women was adopted in Curaçao.¹ The following year, 19,601 women and 18,087 men voted for the first time in an election under universal adult suffrage. Before 1948, Curaçaoan women had been marginal to the political decision-making processes of the society, as only men over the age of 25 with a certain level of literacy and property ownership could vote. In the 1945 election, for example, all 4,000 voters had been men (Henriquez 2002, 188).²

In Curaçao, as in the rest of the Caribbean, women played an important role in the struggle to obtain universal adult suffrage. They participated at various levels in the process, including in leadership positions, and served as agents of change who empowered the other members of their gender group. By mobilizing and claiming political spaces for themselves, these pioneering women questioned the dominant patriarchal norms in Curaçaoan society. Their collective activism provides for a different image of the struggle for citizenship than the male- and Western-oriented model developed by T.H. Marshall in his classic study, *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950).

Universal adult suffrage was part of several significant changes that occurred in the first half of the twentieth century in Curaçao. In 1915, the island experienced the arrival of a major oil refinery, called CPIM, which initiated Curaçao's entry into the industrial era and slowly began to disrupt the traditional patterns of social stratification of the post-emancipation, late nineteenth and early twentieth century society.³ Industrialization led to urbanization, as Curaçaoans increasingly left the countryside to settle in the surroundings of their newly-found work in or near the capital of Willemstad. Immigrant workers likewise settled in neighborhoods surrounding the oil refinery (Römer 1979; Groenewoud 2017, 68). The substantial influx of immigrant workers of different national and ethnic origins led to notable changes in Curaçao's demographics. During the high days of the oil-refining industry, from 1925 to 1955, the island's population tripled from 37,055 to 118,858. The peak within this period was between 1940 and 1950, when the population grew from 67,317 to 102,206 or by some 35,000 people in a decade.

As historian Franklin Knight has argued, different parts of the Caribbean region have generally experienced similar stages of development, but not simultaneously (Knight 1990: xiv). When performing comparative analyses across the region, it is important to focus on the socio-historical stages in which parallel developments took place, rather than on synchronic time periods. For example, most parts of the Caribbean experienced a severe economic downturn in the 1930s because of the Great Depression. Most notably, this period was a time of significant labour unrest in the English-speaking Caribbean (Bolland 1995). In contrast, this same decade was one of economic growth and demographic expansion in Curaçao due to the development of the CPIM oil refinery. The 1930s therefore do not easily lend themselves to synchronic comparison across imperial boundaries in the Caribbean. In the context of this volume of the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, which examines how gender shaped political ferment and anti-colonial mobilization across the region, I have chosen to focus on the 1940s as a period of significant activism on the part of women in Curaçao.

My article provides an introduction to the struggle for universal adult suffrage by Curaçaoan women. It explores how these pioneering women understood citizenship and how they sought to construct new ideologies of gender within the context of the patriarchal, race- and class-based structures of Curaçao in the 1940s. In addition, I consider how their successful political struggle contributed in the subsequent years and decades to anti-colonialism – both formal decolonization (political autonomy) and popular nationalism.

Citizenship and Gender within the Complexity of Belonging and Collective Identity

As political theorist Aaron Kamugisha has argued, citizenship goes beyond the standard legal definition of the term with its fixed understanding of individual rights and also involves a wide variety of practices of belonging and identity besides relationships with institutions (Kamugisha 2007, 21). Citizenship does not

only entail a status with resulting rights and obligations, but it is also about belonging to a group or community and the social practices that enable people to participate in shaping their societies according to their own interpretations. Other scholars, too, have connected citizenship to the creation of a sense of belonging, collectiveness and general commitment: a sense of “we” that is not necessarily based only upon ethnicity and cultural identity (Kaine et al. 2016). Key questions in this literature have been: Who belongs and what does this mean in practice (Rosaldo 2003, 3)?

Historically in the Caribbean, as a result of colonialism, slavery and indentureship, large groups of people have been socially, economically and politically excluded. In the aftermath of emancipation, these groups did not enjoy the right to participate in political decision-making. An illustration of the prevailing attitude in Curaçao can be found in a publication by J.H.J. Hamelberg (1895), a civil servant during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who argued that since blacks were not equal to whites, they should not have the right to vote. Meanwhile, the socio-economic conditions of African-descended people on the island remained depressed. Such circumstances of political and socio-economic exclusion were, of course, not conducive to creating a collective sense of belonging and identity.

How was gender constructed in relation to this sense of belonging and collective identity? Answering this question means looking at what society saw as the expected, “appropriate” roles and behaviour of women and men, as well as at the colonial and post-colonial experiences that influenced gender construction. During slavery, enslaved women on the one hand performed what was typified as women’s work in the house, and on the other hand worked side by side with men doing the most arduous and strenuous work in the field. The traditional distinction between the private and public spheres, assigning women to the domestic, private arena of home and family, whereas men were expected to perform in the public realms of economics, decision-making and politics, overlooks the differences in power that dictated the social lives of men and women situated at the lowest tiers of the social hierarchy. Lower-class

women in the Caribbean, who were predominantly black, continued to suffer multiple forms of oppression long after the last enslaved women became free. Curaçao shares these historical experiences with other societies that have experienced the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery (Beckles 1999; Shepherd 1995; Scully and Paton 2005).

After abolition, which occurred in Curaçao in 1863, gender remained a critical factor shaping local society. The colonial government and the Roman Catholic Church embarked upon a “civilizing” mission toward the black lower class. With regards to women, this meant promoting values of appropriate femininity that basically relegated them to the sphere of domesticity (Allen 2007). This came together in the concept of the nuclear family, in which the woman was subordinate to and dependent upon her male partner. Dependency on men, rather than independence, was the ideal norm prescribed for women. Consequently, citizenship meant something quite different for women than for men.

The first election for political office in Curaçao took place in 1937. Before that year, a governor ruled the Dutch Caribbean colonies in the name of the Dutch Crown and political decisions were taken in The Hague, in most cases by people who did not know the colonies at all (Hoeft 2014, 47).⁴ The new *Staatsregeling* [Constitutional Arrangement], introduced in 1936, established the *Staten van Curaçao*: a local Legislative Council consisting of 10 elected men and 5 men appointed by the Governor (Oostindie 2003, 61, 62). The 1936 *Staatsregeling* gave men the right to vote and to be elected through limited census and capacity suffrage. In 1937 only 6% of the male population in Curaçao could vote (Cijntje 1999, 8; Oostindie and Klinkers 2003, 61). Hence a large majority of population, especially the African-descended and all women, were deprived of one of the fundamental rights of citizens, namely participation in political decision-making (Römer 1979, 153; Roe 2016, 98).

The 1936 *Staatsregeling*, perhaps surprisingly, gave women in Curaçao the right to stand for election but not to vote (Delgado 2014; Hoeft 2007). The Roman

Catholic Church and the colonial government opposed the right of women to vote. The latter argued that women's voting rights would go against the prevailing societal values and norms and that Curaçaoan society was too primitive for women's suffrage (Delgado 2014). The exclusion of women from the political process added an additional dimension to the social discrimination faced by women in a historically male-dominated society. It affected women of all races and classes in Curaçao, but in particular black, working-class women who faced multiple degrees of exploitation and marginalization based on class, race, ethnicity, gender and religion.

In this context, the struggle for women's right to vote in twentieth-century Curaçao was not at all an easy endeavour. It required challenging the gendered ideas that consigned women to an inferior status as well as the persistent racist ideology that asserted the superiority of one race over all others. However, the struggle for universal adult suffrage shows that Curaçaoan women indeed chose to contest the existing forms of inequality in their society and to demand the right to full citizenship.

Curaçaoan Women's Unified Struggle for Universal Adult Suffrage

In 1995, I conducted an interview with Imelda Valerianus-Fermina (1916-2005), a writer and storyteller who had been active in the women's suffrage movement in Curaçao in the 1940s. She stated that when she was growing up,

you could only vote if you had a certain amount of income. And they [the upper class] wanted to continue voting in that way to maintain their power. Once, those in power told me that we should take heed to prevent that Doctor Da Costa Gomez would allow a negro to govern us. It is the same Dr. Da Costa Gomez who provided for universal adult suffrage. I was a 37-year-old woman [sic about 32 years] when I signed the thank-you note to Mrs. Tendeloo [the female member of Dutch Parliament] who had supported the women in Curaçao in their struggle for suffrage. Many people at that time were quite upset, because politics was something new to

them, something they had never heard of (Interview by Allen with Valerianus 1995).

Valerianus' respect for Dr. Da Costa Gomez's role in attaining universal adult suffrage is evident and not surprising. Dr. Moises Frumencio da Costa Gomez (1907-1966), or simply "Dòktor" as he was popularly called because of his doctoral degree in Law, was the son of a coloured mother and a white Jewish father. At age 16 he was formally recognized by his father and received the Jewish surname Da Costa Gomez (Boeldak 2014). He was first a member of the Catholic Party of Curaçao (KPC), but, articulate as he was, he left because of the party's paternalistic and condescending attitude towards women and coloured people and founded the People's National Party (NVP) in 1948 (Boeldak 2014). His party was not religion-based but appealed to the large Afro-Curaçaoan, lower-class, Catholic population and won the 1949 election with a substantial margin of the vote (Groenewoud 2017).

Dòktor applied his leadership skills to reach Afro-Curaçaoans, especially those living in the countryside who, long neglected by the colonial government, remained socially marginalized. The rural areas on the western and eastern parts of the island lacked basic facilities such as good schools, running water and electricity in contrast to the urban area in the island's centre. Although rural workers no longer depended solely upon the old estate-owning and merchant elite for work, as they found employment at the oil refinery, a large group still relied on estate owners for access to land for residence or agriculture (Groenewoud 2017; Weeber and Witteveen 2010).

As mentioned previously, Curaçaoan society of the 1940s was one in transition. The Curaçaoan sociologist Rene A. Römer states that the old society of the 19th and early 20th centuries, organized strictly along racial lines, was slowly being replaced by a more open, class-based society that provided greater opportunities for socio-economic mobility. On one hand, the oil refinery replicated the old society's race-based hierarchy inside its corporate structure, as the employees with the lowest status and pay were male working-class

blacks, both Curaçaoans and labour immigrants from the British West Indies and from other Dutch Caribbean islands. On the other hand, a new middle class was emerging, consisting also of a group of black residents who, through improved jobs with a fixed income, could achieve a degree of financial security and have access to education, healthcare, telecommunications, electricity, and other prized resources (Römer 1973). Jaap Van Soest (1977), who studied the socio-economic impact of the oil refinery on Curaçaoan society in the twentieth century, likewise concludes that the refinery's arrival in 1915 generated more economic opportunities for Afro-Curaçaoans.

Paul Blanshard, an American author who compared Curaçao to other Caribbean societies in his foundational book *Democracy and Empire in the Caribbean* (1947), also provides some useful insights into the society during the interwar era. He describes the deeply racialized social, economic and political situation in which the African-descended working-class found themselves in the Dutch Caribbean colonies of Suriname, Aruba and Curaçao and which was comparable to the conditions on Caribbean islands under British rule.

Along with the economic impact, the oil refinery would also have an important impact on gender relationships in interwar Curaçao. It upheld the perceived separation between the public and private spheres and defined the proper social role of women to be that of caretaker within the nuclear family, with the male head as the breadwinner. The oil company provided certain fringe benefits for married couples and such employment-related policies helped to promote nuclear families (Abrahams-Van der Mark 1973, 17-23).

Imelda Valerianus was married to a blue-collar oil refinery worker and recalled that his position in the company was not quite as strong as one might think. He could be dismissed based on any suspicion of ill performance, as there was no labour union to protect the workers in those days. She was well aware of the race-based power differences and oppression that both she and her husband experienced in Curaçao's society. Children of the working class were still confined to a second-rate education in terms of both teachers and content.

Oral histories of people who lived in the countryside during this period relate that going to school was sometimes hindered as children had nothing to eat or had to first fetch water from a neighbourhood well, which often contained little water because of drought. In Curaçao, a uniform education programme based on modern academic requirements was not initiated until September 1954 (Römer 1977). As a working-class woman, Valerianus also faced gender inequality. When she became empowered and participated in the struggle for universal adult suffrage, she fought against the attitudes and ideologies that maintained women's subordination (Interview by Allen with Valerianus 1995).⁵

The struggle for the right to vote in Curaçao was not an affair of elite women only. Women from all classes organized against the traditional gender-based notions that kept them excluded from political participation. Valerianus was a member of the noteworthy *Damanan di Djarason* (Wednesday Ladies), a group that obtained their name from the fact that they used to meet every Wednesday in the headquarters of the People's National Party (NVP). They belonged to the Party's women's wing (Pieters-Kwiers 2013, 125-126; Henriquez 2002, 136). The social background of the *Damanan di Djarason* was mixed. One key member was Clarita da Costa Gomez (1890-1964), an aunt of Dòktor, who was described as a woman with *kabei na djente* (literally meaning "with hair on her teeth"), because she was quite assertive, which in those days was not commonly viewed as a positive female characteristic. Other advocates of women's suffrage in the group included Thelma Römer and Mena van West-Davelaar who were instrumental in conveying letters to the Dutch House of Representatives in support of women's suffrage in Curaçao (Henriquez 2002, 135-139).

The People's Catholic Party (KVP), which came out of the Catholic Party of Curaçao (KPC) in 1948, was also politically active on behalf of women's suffrage. Adèle Rigaud founded and became the president of the party's women's division, which had the appropriate name of *Luchadónan pa Derecho di Voto pa Hende Muhé* [Champions of the Right to Vote for Women] (Henriquez 2002). She started petitions in support of women's suffrage, which

were also endorsed by the *Damantan di Djarason*. Women were thus able to transcend party lines in the interest of a common purpose (Delgado 2014). Remarkably, they were able to obtain 1,013 signatures in favour of suffrage in just four days of canvassing.

On February 26, 1948, the suffrage movement applied the (conventional) political strategy of sending a signature petition to the Dutch Prime Minister. The petition stated that “they [women] want to give their full strength to Curaçao, not only in the family relationship, but also through the ballot box, by exercising their influence on the next election for representation” (quoted in Gibbes et al. 2015, 185). They furthermore emphasized their role in the development of the state and demanded their entitlement to citizenship by stating that “their education, employment and position were similar to those of the men and that they therefore should have the same civil rights as the men” (quoted in Gibbes 2015, 185).

The suffrage documents show that women felt that they had to address and counteract the perception that their participation in politics would be a threat to the patriarchal order of things, especially the family. They therefore stressed that women’s capabilities were meant to serve the well-being of not only the family but of the whole country. At the same time, however, these words strongly contested the traditional position of women in Curaçaoan society. Through these words they demanded a place in the public domain of politics, which had been dominated by upper-class white men who opposed the move toward universal adult suffrage on traditional gender as well as racial and class grounds.

The February 1948 petition does not necessarily reveal an anti-colonial attitude vis-à-vis the Netherlands as the colonial mother country. Rather, it drew upon the example of the Netherlands, where universal adult suffrage had been introduced in 1918 through the mass mobilization of women, Catholics and socialists among others. The petition does show a patriotic attachment to the island and its development, encompassing both women and men. Perhaps it could be said that in 1948 the primary concern of these pioneering women was

equality of citizenship with both voting men in Curaçao and voting women and men in the metropole within the existing constitutional framework.

In response to the combined efforts of different groups of women activists in Curaçao, the Dutch House of Representatives passed a law enfranchising all Curaçaoan women in 1948, a right which they turned to good avail in the 1949 Curaçao election. In that landmark election, 37,688 people voted, with women casting their vote for the first time and constituting 52% of the overall voters. Utilizing their new right, women had participated in large numbers in the island's political process.

As previously mentioned, Curaçaoan women already had the right to stand for election—without being able to vote—since 1937. However, it was not until 1949 that women actually began to run for elected office. In contrast, in the Dutch Caribbean colony of Suriname, the planter's daughter Grace Schneiders-Howard (1869-1968) became the first woman elected to the *Staten van Suriname* (Legislative Council) in 1938, a decade before Curaçaoan women pursued elective office (Hoeft 2007).

Why Curaçaoan women began to run for office only as of 1949 requires further study. One possible explanation may be that women became more empowered and motivated through their personal activism for suffrage. Following the attainment of universal suffrage in 1948, Angela Altagracia de Lannoy-Willems (1913-1983) ran for office in 1949 and L.C. van der Linde-Helmijr in 1951. They became the first two female members of the Island Legislative Council of Curaçao (Pieters Kwiers 2013, 125-126; Henriquez 2002; Gibbes et al. 2015). After 1949, women also moved up within political parties and took on important administrative functions. For instance, Adèle Rigaud became the first woman to hold a leadership position as vice-president of the People's Catholic Party (KVP).⁶

Conservative forces did not always favour women's full participation in the society and questioned the way in which women had chosen to fulfil their

citizenship through suffrage. It should be noted that legal equality does not automatically do away with the many forms of inequality that occur in society. Legislation and institutionalization of citizen participation do not necessarily lead to the protection or inclusion of women and, therefore, there remained issues that required further gender-conscious attention. After the attainment of universal adult suffrage, women in Curaçao still had to struggle against prejudice, in particular when they participated actively as vote-getters in the political arena. For example, A.A. de Lannoy was portrayed in a newspaper caricature as a naked Lady Godiva on a donkey, which, however, did not deter her from politics (Henriquez 2002, 160). Curaçao's pioneering women had to confront the dominant ideology that affirmed separate spheres for men and women. Women transgressing these traditional social boundaries were believed to go against their presumed "nature" (meaning they were solely suited for housework and caregiving) and to undermine the family institution. But by not adhering to these normative gender roles and values in their struggle for the equal right to vote and in their subsequent political actions, these pioneering women helped to gradually bring about different views of women's role and behaviour in Curaçaoan society.

From Suffrage to Anti-colonialism and Constitutional Autonomy

In Curaçao and most other Caribbean countries, obtaining universal adult suffrage predated obtaining greater constitutional autonomy or self-governance.⁷ Equality as citizens generally came first; sovereignty (or a certain degree of it) as a nation/state would come later. In a sense, universal adult suffrage probably functioned as a pre-condition or stepping-stone for the anti-colonial ferment that in subsequent years and decades would be unleashed and lead to constitutional reform or transformation throughout the region. It appears that broadening the right to vote expanded the base for political consciousness and allowed the anti-colonial and nationalist agenda to become both popularized and galvanized.

This certainly seems to have been the case in Curaçao. As mentioned, Dòktor used a strategy of empowerment and emancipation: he sought to help his followers overcome the multi-generational effects of slavery and colonialism by making them more aware of their social position. The model that he applied was one of inclusiveness. For instance, he involved women – such as the *Damanan di Djarason* – in his political party and in government. For Dòktor, empowerment also meant first becoming more autonomous from the mother country and taking command of domestic affairs, as a stepping-stone toward standing fully on one's own feet. After universal adult suffrage was attained in 1948, his party intensified the struggle for political autonomy (internal self-governance) from the Netherlands, and this was achieved six years later in 1954. In that year, the *Statuut* [Charter] of the Kingdom of the Netherlands came into force, which granted constitutional autonomy to the Netherlands Antilles, the six-island Dutch Caribbean federation of which Curaçao formed a part. Constitutional autonomy at that time meant that the Kingdom was responsible for nationality, foreign affairs, national defense and cassation, while the Netherlands Antilles were in charge of their domestic affairs.⁸ Women's role in the struggle for constitutional autonomy needs to be researched more meticulously, as it seems to be erased from the official historical record.

Various explanations have been given for the fact that anti-colonial and nationalist sentiments manifested more strongly in Curaçao after World War II than before. One plausible explanation points to a growing self-esteem among the local elites during World War II, as the island experienced an economic boom by supplying gasoline to the Allied Forces and became less dependent on the mother country, which was at war. In this way, the local elite developed a more locally grounded, creole identity separate from the Netherlands and the new Dutch expatriates who had arrived on the island since the opening of the oil refinery and had taken over many key positions (Dalhuisen et al. 2009, 95). Antoine Maduro, who had worked at the oil refinery from 1926 until 1960 and who was also an expert in the creole language Papiamentu, underscores the fact that the Dutch expatriate workers in the company had more privileges than the local/creole whites (Maduro 2015, 55-56). As a result, the refinery began to

tear away at the traditional power position of the old estate-owning elite during the interwar period. Following World War II, constitutional autonomy allowed the old elite to regain some power in the realm of politics and local governance.

Among the middle and lower classes, it is likely that the expansion of adult suffrage contributed to shifting individual discontent and resistance into collective political consciousness. Blanshard (1947) calls attention to the growing resistance to European colonial domination by coloured Curaçaoans in the 1940s. Already in the 1930s, working-class Curaçaoan authors such as Willem Kroon, Manuel Fray, Miguel Surriel and Pedro Pablo Medardo de Marchena took great pride in writing in the local creole language, Papiamentu, which can be considered a revolutionary act for that period (Broek 1989).⁹ In his writings from the 1950s, the Catholic priest M.D. Latour (1953) complained that there was a growing urge to restore and preserve *tambú*, which had been outlawed in 1936 (Rosalia 1997, 147). The *tambú* is a form of Afro-Curaçaoan drumming and dancing that has been severely condemned by the Church and the state, yet was able to persist (Rosalia 1997).¹⁰ In 1950, under the leadership of Da Costa Gomez, the Legislative Council eliminated the regulation that prohibited dance parties with *tambú* music and thenceforth such parties were allowed if a permit was formally requested (Rosalia 1997, 292). This was an important step towards the emancipation of the Curaçaoan black working class. In her recent work, historian Margo Groenewoud (2017) provides further evidence of the increasing self-awareness and resistance on the island starting in the 1940s.

One concrete example of nationalist discontent was the discourse of Pedro Pablo “Dada” Medardo de Marchena (1899-1968). He was the son of a coloured mother and a white Jewish father, and he was emotionally and financially supported in his education by his father. Medardo criticized the Roman Catholic mission and the Dutch colonial government, but he also attacked the oil company which was becoming very powerful “like a state within a state” (Soest 1977, 302-12; Broek 2011, 88).¹¹ In a 1929 publication, *Ignorancia o educando un pueblo* (Ignorance or educated a community), Medardo questioned the fact that 66 years after abolition, Curaçao still had not

produced a single black doctor, engineer or lawyer (Marchena 1929, 7). A growing group of young coloured intellectuals endorsed Medado's critique of the Church, the state and the oil company.¹²

It is not easy to find early anti-colonial discourse expressed by women, but the following *banderita*, dating back to the 1940s or 1950s, is worth mentioning.¹³ A *banderita* [literally "small flag"] is a short, written verse, generally of a few lines, printed on a small coloured piece of paper. A *banderita* expresses critical feelings about a situation or person and is often based on a few lines of a popular *tambú* (Berry-Haseth 1994; Broek 1995). According to René Rosalia, women primarily made use of this form of expression, which allowed them to confront negative stereotyping if they participated in the *tambú* (Rosalia 1997, 234). Rosa Helena Koek-Bennett, who was born in the Dutch Caribbean island of St. Eustatius but at a young age came to live in Curaçao with her mother, recalled several of these *banderitas* in a 1992 interview (Interview by Rose Mary Allen and Jeanne Henriquez). One is about a man who is challenged to take down the Dutch colonial flag in Curaçao's centre of governance. The *banderita* has an anti-colonial undertone, while also questioning male authority and ridiculing male boasting. The Papiamentu text (Koek 1992) and its translation are as follows:

Bo di bo ta balente
Ku bo tin diploma di bòksdó
Dikon bo no por rabia drenta Fòrti

Bai baha bandera ulandes
Anto e ora ei t'abo ta manda.

You pretend to be brave
And to have the diploma of a boxer
Why don't you get angry, enter the
Fort [the seat of the colonial
administrative offices]
And take down the Dutch flag
Only then can you say that you are
truly in charge.

Anti-colonialism and nationalism experienced its apex in Curaçao from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. Especially after the 30th of May 1969 Revolt, appreciation and recognition of Curaçaoan culture and Afro-Curaçaoan identity in particular grew significantly, both popularly and formally. Some of the

formal milestones of this period were the institution of a new national/island anthem in 1979 and Flag Day in 1984 as well as the proclamation in 1984 of August 17, 1795 (the date of the island's largest slave revolt) as the Day of the Struggle for Freedom. In these and other instances of anti-colonialism and nationalism, the participation of Curaçaoan women – heirs to the pioneering women of the suffrage movement in the 1940s – has been visible and often prominent. From the 1970s onwards, women continued to organize themselves on larger scales and to take leadership roles in issues regarding their own development through social movements and civil-society mobilization. Moreover, they have produced several female Prime Ministers on the political level. Their activism has at times been militant, but always dedicated and crucial.

Conclusion

In this article I have chronicled the struggle for universal adult suffrage waged by women in Curaçao in the 1940s. Their activism can be seen as part of an attempt to give full shape to their citizenship and to achieve equality with both voting men in Curaçao and voting women and men in the metropole. The establishment of universal adult suffrage in 1948 would influence Curaçaoan anti-colonialism in indirect ways. It created possibilities for greater political engagement, participation, activism and social advancement of women as well as men and thereby served as an important galvanizing factor for the process that led to constitutional autonomy for the Netherlands Antilles (the federation of which Curaçao formed part) in 1954. It also laid the groundwork for increasing nationalist ferment in Curaçao from the late 1960s to early 1980s, which challenged hegemonic constructions of race, colour, culture and nationhood. Ultimately, the Curaçaoan case is an example of how Caribbean women's pioneering activism in the first half of the twentieth century has been an understated yet essential component of the region's continuing journey toward equality, freedom and justice.

References

- Abrahams-Van der Mark, Eva Elisabeth. 1973. *Yu'i Mama. Enkele Facetten van de Gezinsstructuur op Curaçao*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- "Actief Kiesrecht". *Amigoe di Curaçao*, April 21, 1944.
- Allen, Rose Mary. 2010. "The Complexity of National Identity Construction in Curaçao, Dutch Caribbean." *The European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies/Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* 89: 117-125.
- _____. 2007. *Di Ki Manera. A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917*. Amsterdam: SWP.
- Beckles, Hilary. 1999. *Centering Women: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers; Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers; Oxford: James Currey Publishers.
- Berry-Haseth, L. 1994. "Banderita." *Kristòf* 9(2): 1-10.
- Blanshard, Paul B. 1947. *Democracy and Empire in the Caribbean: A Contemporary Review*. New York: Macmillan.
- Boeldak, R.D. (Eugène). 2014. *Mr. Dr. Moises Da Costa Gomez: Voorvechter van de Politieke Emancipatie der Nederlandse Antillen*. Santa Barbara, CA: Publishing by the Seas.
- Bolland, Nigel O. 1995. *On the March: Labour Rebellions in the British Caribbean, 1934-39*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Broek, A. 2011. *De Geschiedenis van de Politie op de Nederlands-Caribische Eilanden, 1839-2010: Geboeid door Macht en Onmacht*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom.
- _____. 1995. "From an Oral Tradition to an Oral Literature: Vicissitudes of Texts in Papiamentu (Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao)." *Journal of Caribbean Studies* 10(3): 261-82.
- _____. 1989. "Early Prose Writing in Papiamentu: Educando un Pueblo." *Caribbean Studies* 22(1-2): 37-52.
- Chumaceiro, Abraham M. 1895. *Zal het Kiesrecht Curaçao tot Kannibalisme Voeren?* Curaçao: Bethencourt en Zn.
- Cijntje, G. J. 1999. *Electorale Instabiliteit op Curaçao*. PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam.
- Gibbes, F.E., N.C. Romer-Kenepa and M.A. Scriwanek. 2015. *De Curaçaoënaar in de Geschiedenis*. Curaçao: Stichting Nationale Geschiedenis.
- Dalhuisen, Leo, Ronald Donk, Rosemarijn Hoeftte and Frans Steegh. 2009. *Geschiedenis van de Antillen: Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Sint-Eustatius, Sint-Maarten*. Zutphen; De Walburg Pers.
- Delgado, Lissenne. 2014. *Women's Suffrage in Curaçao*. Lecture delivered at the University of Curaçao. Willemstad, Curaçao.
- Groenewoud, M. 2017. *'Nou koest, nou kalm': De Ontwikkeling van de Curaçaose Samenleving, 1915-1973: van Koloniaal en Kerkelijk Gezag naar Zelfbestuur en Burgerschap*. PhD thesis, University of Leiden.
- Hall, Stuart. 1995. "Negotiating Caribbean Identities." *New Left Review* 209: 3-14.
- Hamelberg, Johannes H.J. 1895. *Antiquarische Denkbeelden Buiten "Antiquiteiten" [in Antwoord op de Brochure van den heer A.M. Chumaceiro: Zal het Kiesrecht Curaçao tot Kannibalisme Voeren?]*. Curaçao: s.n.
- Henriquez, Jeanne. 2002. *Kòrsou Su Muhéna Pionero*. Lantèrnu Edishon 21. Willemstad, Curaçao: Archivo Nashonal di Antia Hulandes.
- Hoeftte, Rosemarijn. 2013. *Suriname in the long Twentieth Century. Domination, Contestation, Globalization*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

- _____. 2007. "Grace Schneiders-Howard: Suriname's Eerste Politica en Sociaal Activiste." *Historica* 30(1): 14-17.
- Huq, Shireen. 2004. "Gender and Development in Brief." *Bridge Bulletin* 14:1-6.
- Jonkers, A. 1953. "Hoofdtrekken van de Ontwikkeling van Suriname en de Nederlandse Antillen." *West Indische Gids* 34:113-159.
- Kamugisha, Aaron. 2007. "The Coloniality of Citizenship in the Contemporary Anglophone Caribbean." *Race & Class* 49(2): 20-40.
- Knight, Franklin W. 1990. *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Koek, Rosa. 1992. Interview by Rose Mary Allen and Jeanne Henriquez. *Bosnan Skondi*, June 6, 1992. Audio, stored at the National Archives, Willemstad (NatAr).
- Latour, M.D. 1953. *Geschiedenis van de R.K. Missie op de Nederlandse Antillen vanaf 1870, d1 I-VII*. Manuscript.
- Maduro, Antoine J. 2015. *Bida, Remordementu, Konfeshon i Krítika: Un Relato Outobiográfiko*. Curaçao: Fundashon Instituto Raül Römer.
- Marchena, P.P.M. 1929. *Ignorancia o Educando un Pueblo*. Publisher not identified.
- Marshall, Thomas H. 1950. *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McClintock, Anne. 1993. "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family." *Feminist Review* 44 (Summer): 61-80. [https:// DOI: 10.2307/1395196](https://doi.org/10.2307/1395196)
- Oostindie, Gert and Inge Klinkers. 2003. *Decolonising the Caribbean. Dutch Policies in a Comparative Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Pieters Kwiers, S. 2013. "Contemporary Women." In *Contemporary Curaçao. A Caribbean Community*, edited by Wim Kamps, Ieteke Witteveen and Guido Rojer, 125-129. Amsterdam: SWP.
- Roe, Angela E. 2016. "The Sound of Silence: Ideology of National Identity and Racial Inequality in Contemporary Curaçao". FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/2590>.
- Römer, René A., ed. 1977. *Cultureel Mozaïek van de Nederlandse Antillen: Constanten en Varianten*. Zutphen: De Walburg Pers.
- Römer, René A. 1979. *Un Pueblo na Kaminda. Een Sociologisch Historische Studie van de Curaçaose Samenleving*. Zutphen: De Walburg Pers.
- Rosalía, René V. 1997. *Tambú: De Legale en Kerkelijke Repressie van Afro-Curaçaose Volksuitingen*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers.
- _____. 2002. "Migrated Rhythm: The Tambú of Curaçao." http://kaleidoscope.caribseek.com/Rene_Rosalia/Tambu/index-print.shtml.
- Rosaldo, Renato. 2003. *Cultural Citizenship in Island Southeast Asia: Nation and Belonging in the Hinterlands*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Scully, Pamela and Diana Paton, eds. 2005. *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Shepherd, Verene S., Bridget Brereton and Barbara Bailey, eds. 1995. *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Valerianus, Imelda. 1995. Interview by Rose Mary Allen, Curacao. Audio. Stored at the National Archives of Curaçao.
- Van Soest, Jaap. 1977. *Olie als Water: De Curaçaose Economie in de Eerste Helft van de Twintigste Eeuw*. Zutphen: De Walburg Pers.
- Weeber, Leon and Ieteke Witteveen. 2010. *Banda Bou: Alma di Kòrsou. Kultura i Desaroyo den añanan 60 pa 80 di Siglo Binti*. Curaçao: 7000 Printing and Publishing.

¹ Curaçao is situated in the southern Caribbean, between Aruba and Bonaire and north of Venezuela. Curaçao was one of the islands comprising the former Dutch Caribbean federation called the Netherlands Antilles (1954-2010). In 2010, this federation fell apart and Curaçao became an internally self-governing entity or “country” with direct ties to the Netherlands.

² “Diverse berichten,” *De West: Nieuwsblad uit en voor Suriname*, July 26, 1948, 2.

³ Its original name, NV Curaçaoasche Petroleum Maatschappij, was changed to Curaçaoase Petroleum Industrie Maatschappij (CPIM) in 1925 (Broek 2011, 85). Locally, it was always popularly known simply as “Shell,” as it was a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell, the British-Dutch oil multinational.

⁴ In this sense Curaçao lagged behind some British and French Caribbean colonies where certain citizens already had the right to vote in the nineteenth century.

⁵ The quotation is part of an interview that I conducted with Valerianus. At the time of the interview, she was a well-known writer and storyteller. She had been a member of the group of working-class women who signed the petition for women’s suffrage, and she was very much inspired by Dr. Da Costa Gomez’s emancipation efforts to transform the deeply rooted self-doubt and self-rejection among the black population. In her interview, she gave a candid observation of what it meant to lack certain rights in Curaçao’s post-World War II society. For a brief biographical portrait of the Dutch feminist activist N.S.C. Tendeloo, see https://www.parlement.com/id/vg09llab3yy2/n_s_c_corry_tendeloo.

⁶ “Weg met 8 —8 uit meer dan 3.000 kelen,” *Amigoe*, December 15, 1949, 1.

⁷ The obvious exceptions are Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, which all gained independence before the twentieth century and introduced universal adult suffrage in 1934, 1942 and 1950 respectively.

⁸ On October 10, 2010, new constitutional structures came into effect. Since then, the Kingdom consists of four parts: the Netherlands (including the islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba each as an overseas municipality) and Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten each as an autonomous “country.” Autonomy for Curaçao means that it is responsible for its own domestic affairs.

⁹ Although there were and still are voices in the society that view Papiamentu as a hindrance to Curaçao’s development, the use of Papiamentu has historically functioned as an important indicator of Curaçaoan cultural identity.

¹⁰ At the time, the *tambú* functioned as an expression of subaltern resistance to the dominant class and racial values in the society; it challenged notions of what was viewed as acceptable in terms of social, ethnic and national identities (Rosalia 2002, 1).

¹¹ It should be mentioned that the oil company was a powerful institution supported by the Dutch colonial state through laws, favourable tax regulations and other facilities (Soest 1977, 302-312; Broek 2011, 88). Van Soest, who performed research in the Shell archives – for which he was later reprimanded as he published information deemed confidential by the company – states that at a certain point in time, the company even obtained a seat in government (*Koloniale Raad* or Colonial Council) and in the Chamber of Commerce and that letters from the CPIM to government functioned more as directives than as requests (Broek 2011, 88).

¹² Because of his riotous publication, Medardo was banished from Curaçao and imprisoned on the Dutch Caribbean island of Bonaire during World War II together with Germans whom the colonial government considered enemy aliens. Medardo’s state of mind was even questioned. After his internment, he married a local woman from Bonaire and did not write critical texts anymore.

¹³ Jeanne Henriquez and Rose Mary Allen, *An Oral History Project of Women*, Institute of Archeology and Anthropology of the Netherlands Antilles and Centrum for the Development of Women (SEDA), July 1992.



“She Came as a Stranger and Made Herself One of Us”: Two Irish Women and Anti-colonial Agitation in Trinidad, 1938-1945

[Bridget Brereton](#)

Emerita Professor of History
The University of the West Indies
St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago

Abstract: In 1938, two young Irish women, Catherine (Kay) Donnellan and Eleanor Francis (Frank) Cahill, arrived in Trinidad to teach at a Catholic girls' school. They soon got involved in working with the new trade unions and with young anti-colonial intellectuals who put out a monthly magazine. For these activities, they were first dismissed from their teaching posts, and then interned without trial in early 1941 under wartime regulations. Donnellan committed suicide a few months later while Cahill remained a detainee until early 1945. This article will examine how their gender intersected with their ethnicity, nationality, class, religion, age and sexual conduct to ensure that their admittedly brief involvement in radical politics in Trinidad just before and during World War II transgressed all the norms of colonial Caribbean society.

Keywords: Catherine (Kay) Donnellan, Eleanor Frances (Frank) Cahill, Trinidad, labour movement, World War II

How to cite

Brereton, Bridget. 2018. "'She Came as a Stranger and Made Herself One of Us': Two Irish Women and Anti-colonial Agitation in Trinidad, 1938-1945." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12: 319-344

In 1938, two young Irish women, Catherine (Kay) Donnellan and Eleanor Frances (Frank) Cahill, arrived in Trinidad to teach at the girls' secondary school run by Catholic nuns, St. Joseph's Convent. They soon got involved in working with the new trade unions which had emerged after the "Butler Riots" in June 1937, writing for their publications and occasionally speaking on their platforms. As a result, they were dismissed from their teaching posts in May 1940. Yet they decided to stay in Trinidad, and up to March 1941, continued their anti-colonial, pro-labour public activities. Both Donnellan and Cahill helped to edit and wrote for *New Dawn*, a socialist monthly founded by several young intellectuals, and Donnellan briefly edited the *Vanguard*, the weekly organ of the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union (OWTU).

In March 1941, in an extraordinary abuse of power, Donnellan and Cahill were arrested and interned without trial under the emergency wartime powers granted to all British colonial governors. In June of that year, Donnellan committed suicide. Cahill remained in internment until the war was nearly over (she was freed in February 1945 and left the island).

This remarkable story was first briefly told by the pioneering historian of women in Trinidad & Tobago, Rhoda Reddock (1994, 283-287). In 2010, Susan Campbell published a well-researched article about them (2010, 75-104). This article will expand and extend Reddock's and Campbell's work. I will consider how Donnellan and Cahill's gender intersected with their ethnicity, their nationality, their class, their religion and their age to ensure that their admittedly brief involvement in radical politics in Trinidad transgressed all the norms of colonial Caribbean society.¹

The article is based mainly on the Trinidad newspapers and journals of the 1938-45 period, especially the left-wing, pro-labour press. These papers are a rich source for investigating Trinidad's history during this period, and are virtually the only primary sources for the activities of Donnellan and Cahill, but there are clear limitations in using them. The establishment dailies (the *Trinidad Guardian* and the *Port of Spain Gazette*) rarely reported in any detail on the meetings or

other activities by union or left-wing leaders; the pro-labour press of course did better in this regard, which is why I have used them so heavily. Even these papers, however, often noted that meetings were held but failed to report on the speeches, or did so very briefly, and no other sources are extant for them. For instance, Donnellan and Cahill both spoke at an "indoor meeting" of the Negro Welfare, Cultural and Social Association (NWCSA) held in September 1940, but the weekly which reported this gave no details on the content of their speeches. I have failed to locate the one publication that I know was authored by Donnellan, a pamphlet titled 'War, Food and Health' which apparently appeared late in 1940. The official archives, whether in the National Archives in Port of Spain, or the British National Archives in London, are frustratingly silent on the reasons for Donnellan's and Cahill's internment, and on Cahill's situation during her four years of detention.

These two women aligned themselves in Trinidad with the new trade unions and with young anti-colonial intellectuals; nearly all the leaders of both groupings were men, mostly of African or of mixed (African/European) ancestry. There was a fledgling 'women's movement' in the colony when they arrived in 1938, as Reddock has amply documented in her pioneering research. The middle-class wing was dominated by the African-Trinidadian Audrey Jeffers and her Coterie of Social Workers; her election to the Port of Spain City Council marked the entry of women into formal politics in the colony. I have not found any evidence that Donnellan and Cahill worked with Jeffers or the Coterie, whose political positions were feminist but not left-wing (Reddock 1994, 164-181, 238-239).

Though the unions formed in the aftermath of the Butler Riots of June 1937 were heavily male-dominated, women certainly did participate in their activities in the years just before and during World War 2. Donnellan and Cahill were close to the OWTU and other unions based in the south of the island under the influence of A. C. Rienzi, John Rojas and Ralph Mentor, and Reddock again has documented how a few women were important in the early years of the OWTU (1994, 259-63). Though I have no direct evidence that Donnellan and Cahill

specifically worked with these (and other) women, I think it very likely that they did forge links with them.

There is clearer evidence of their links with women involved in the Public Works and Public Services Workers Trade Union (PW&PSWTU), a union based in Port of Spain, the colonial capital located in the north of the island. This union had female members and a Women Workers branch. It ran a school for workers which taught domestic science among other subjects, obviously targeted at women, and Donnellan and Cahill were among the teachers in 1939-40, as *New Dawn* recalled after the former's death. The only other person detained with them in 1941, Dudley Mahon, was the 'Organiser' of the PW&PSWTU.²

The most important socialist, working-class organization active in Trinidad just before the war was the NWCSA, formed in 1935. Its main leader was Elma Francois, and other women were also front-line speakers and activists; its base was the capital and the north of the island. It is almost certain that Donnellan and Cahill knew Francois and her comrades of the NWCSA, and we know they occasionally spoke at its meetings. While they shared with Francois a strongly anti-colonial and anti-fascist political position, they differed on the question of support for the war. The NWCSA refused to support the Allied war effort and condemned the whole business as an imperialist conflict in which colonial subjects should not participate (Reddock 1994, 290-291; Reddock 1988, *passim*). While Donnellan and Cahill probably privately agreed with this position—and we will see that they passionately defended the neutrality of the Irish Free State (IFS)—in public they followed the line taken by most of the union leaders, including Rienzi and Mentor: critical support for the Allies to ensure the defeat of Hitlerism and Fascism was a must. This was also the position taken by the pro-labour press throughout the war (Brereton 2015 & 2016). It is interesting that while they were interned, along with Mahon (who was a member of the NWCSA as well as Organiser of the PW&PSWTU), neither Francois nor any of her NWCSA comrades were.

Of course, many hundreds of Trinidadian women took an active part in various war-related activities, and some joined the uniformed services, as Karen Eccles has fully documented (2013, *passim*). Donnellan and Cahill were not part of these efforts by women to support Britain and her allies in their struggle, but they made their bitter hostility to Hitlerism and all it stood for abundantly clear in their writings and speeches.

Teachers and Activists

Kay Donnellan and Frank Cahill arrived in Trinidad in February 1938, with contracts to teach at St. Joseph's Convent, an elite Catholic girls' secondary school in Port of Spain, the colonial capital. Donnellan held an MA and Cahill a BA—unusual for Catholic Irish women in the 1930s (Campbell 2010, 75)—and the former also taught part-time at the Catholic Women's Teacher Training College. Like so many young, well-educated Europeans in the 1930s, they were socialists, and they had been deeply influenced by the Irish struggle against Britain and the ensuing civil war in the years between 1916 and 1922, when they were teenagers and young adults in what was (in 1938) the IFS. They came to Trinidad, therefore, with left-wing views and a distinct lack of deference for Britain as a colonial power.

That their nationality, as citizens of the IFS, was a key element in their anti-colonial activism is made clear by several articles which Donnellan wrote on Irish history and politics, and especially, about her country's neutrality during World War 2. In an article published in the *Vanguard* in January 1940, she passionately defended the IFS's decision to remain neutral, as a sovereign nation free to control its destiny even though George VI was nominally still its king. Donnellan outlined the history which led to the partition of the island, and expressed guarded sympathy for the Irish Republican Army, which was illegal in the IFS as well as in Northern Ireland and England and was fighting for re-unification. Above all, she looked towards a socialist future for both the IFS and Britain: "When the world grows sane—as we must hope it will—and national

sovereignties cease to capture men's reason and imagination, the workers of the world will unite...no one will starve in the midst of plenty and men's brains will be used to build and not to destroy... But the day will not come as rain from heaven, we must work for it, study for it and prepare in love and not hate for it".³

An unsigned article in *New Dawn* at the end of 1940 was clearly by either Donnellan or Cahill. Again, the defence of Irish neutrality was a key theme, for this steadfast policy infuriated the British government at a time when Britain stood virtually alone against the Axis powers. The article noted that the IFS leader, Éamon de Valera, had refused to allow Irish ports to be used by the Royal Navy, but had offered to provide a refuge for British women and children menaced by German bombing. It was untrue that German U-boats were being refueled off the west coast of Ireland, it continued, but if de Valera had allowed British warships access to the ports, it would have meant entry into the war and a civil war as well. Much as he, and all the Irish, hated Hitler, his first duty was to defend his country's interests.⁴

The most deeply personal piece on Ireland, by Donnellan, was published by *New Dawn* just before she was detained. She wrote that only knowledge of her country's history over hundreds of years could explain why the Irish, famous for being "foremost among the freedom-loving nations of the world", refused to enter the war. That history ensured that any idea of Irish loyalty to the English crown or government was "simply nonsense". Despite the terrible danger facing England (this was February 1941), the Irish could never forget the Famine of the 1840s, the millions of deaths from starvation and the massive emigration of the hopeless survivors, the political oppression, the Black and Tans period of recent memory. Nor could they forget the denial of democracy in India and the Empire. During World War 1, many Irish people were jailed and some were executed; in 1941, Jawaharlal Nehru was in jail in India, Alexander Bustamante in Jamaica, and Uriah Butler in Trinidad. Ireland sympathised with the English suffering from German bombs, but could never join England in the war—at least not as long as partition still existed. This piece, published when Britain faced invasion and defeat, may well have struck the government as 'seditious'.⁵

From articles and reviews which they wrote about education, it seems clear that Donnellan and Cahill were knowledgeable and progressive teachers genuinely interested in their salaried jobs, especially Cahill. In the first issue of *New Dawn*, Cahill wrote a long piece on primary education in Trinidad. It was an indictment of the ugly, overcrowded buildings housing these schools, the “bedlam” caused by several classes in the same room, and the lack of books and equipment. There was no point in training teachers in progressive methods, said Cahill, if they had to teach in such conditions. All this was responsible “for the two-fold crime of intensifying the strain upon the teacher and wasting his powers, and retarding the development of the child mentally and physically”. The recommendations of a commission on education in 1933—decent modern buildings, with a garden and a play space, proper equipment, and classes of 25 not 60—must be implemented “before the teacher, however ardent, can teach, and the child, however intelligent, can learn”.⁶

In the second issue of *New Dawn*, Cahill returned to the attack in an article which would be relevant if published in 2017 instead of 1940. She taught at a Catholic girls-only “grammar school”, but she wanted “modern secondary schools” on the UK model, which should be free (no fees), co-educational and relevant (no Latin!). Cahill wrote that she knew from her recent experience at St. Joseph’s Convent that little attention was given to critical thinking: children learned by rote in order to pass their exams. As a result, even the “certificated” were easy prey for propaganda from the radio, cinema and newspapers; they became “if not the slaves of a Hitler, the slaves of a system like Capitalism”. Instead, the schools must create “questioning and free intelligence for a free, a democratic world”.⁷

Cahill made many of the same points in a later article in the same journal. Her critique of secondary education as it was practiced at St. Joseph’s Convent—the narrow curriculum, the irrelevance of Latin, the cramming, the rote learning, the poor English writing skills—and her advocacy of the modern secondary model show her to be fully informed on progressive views of the time. In addition, she argued the case for a West Indian university for those secondary

school graduates who wanted a tertiary education—which should not be “the privilege of the few scholarship winners and others whose families can afford to send them abroad”. And shortly before her detention, Cahill reviewed *The Caribbean Readers* by A. J. Newman and P. M. Sherlock, a series of primary school readers plus a teacher's manual. Her long review shows that she was well versed in up-to-date ideas about teaching the very young, especially reading.⁸

But Donnellan and Cahill did not confine themselves to teaching, or even to writing about education and Ireland. They soon linked up with trade union leaders and young left-wing intellectuals, worked with them, and occasionally spoke on their platforms. The result was their abrupt dismissal from their teaching posts, at St. Joseph's Convent and the Teacher Training College, in May 1940, just over two years after their arrival.

Their allies in the labour movement formally protested their dismissal, evidence of their importance to the union leaders. First, the Executive Committee of the Trinidad & Tobago Trade Unions Council (TTTUC)—the umbrella organisation of the leading unions under Rienzi's presidency—passed a resolution in June 1940 condemning the dismissals. It stated that Donnellan and Cahill had “won the sympathy and support of the rank and file of our movement; their sincerity in the educational advancement of the peoples of the Colony have already made them a symbol of that white section of the Colony that is genuinely interested in the education of the people”. Wondering if the governor could have known “such Hitlerite actions are taking place in Trinidad” when Britain was fighting for democracy, it called on him to enquire into the dismissals.⁹

At this point, the PW&PSWTU, whose leaders like Rupert Gittens and Dudley Mahon were close to Donnellan and Cahill, asked that the resolution should not be sent to the governor until it had approached the authorities of St. Joseph's Convent. The Union asked the Mother Superior to see a delegation which would include Gittens, George McClean who was a founder of *New Dawn*, and Rienzi. She replied declining any interview “as I am not accountable to either your Unions or to the Oilfield Workers' Union”. So the TTTUC resolution was sent to the

colonial secretary, who predictably responded that the government had no say in the matter as the Mother Superior was solely responsible. He failed to respond when the TTTUC pointed out that both St. Joseph's Convent and the Training College were public institutions aided by the state, except to say that teachers in denominational secondary schools were not paid by the government. So the matter rested towards the end of 1940.¹⁰

In July 1940, *The People*, a pro-labour weekly, interviewed the two dismissed teachers. They said they had excellent relations with the Convent authorities, had been kindly treated, and had been asked to renew their contracts after the initial three years would end early in 1941. The abrupt dismissal therefore came as a great shock. The only explanation offered by the Mother Superior was that "their political associations were frowned on by some important outside authority". Donnellan and Cahill were sure that she had acted "on instructions", but from whom? They had no idea that there could be any objection to their speaking about education and related issues on the platforms of "responsible" unions. "We very much regret that we were forced to give up our work in which we were both keenly interested, especially in a term when some of our pupils were preparing for their final exams". The reporter commented that they both seemed "bewildered and upset" at the inconvenience to their pupils and to the school caused by a clearly "high-handed action". In an editorial, *The People* commented that it knew too little to pronounce on the issue, but felt sure that there should be an enquiry. The Mother Superior's reply was "open to criticism" and the TTTUC was right to insist that anything related to education was a public matter.¹¹ Whoever "instructed" the Mother Superior, whether a government official, or the Catholic archbishop, or powerful members of the planter and business elite, the expectation clearly was that, out of a job, Donnellan and Cahill would leave the island. However, they did not. They continued their work with the unions, helped to found *New Dawn*, and spoke and wrote on behalf of progressive causes.

Donnellan, it seems, wrote a pamphlet 'War, Food and Health', which was published by the TTTUC and argued for subsidies on food. This was an important

theme in the major speech she made at a public meeting in Port of Spain in February 1941—it may have been the immediate trigger for her detention early in the following month. “Comrade Donnellan’s” speech was reported over several columns in the *Vanguard*. She moved a resolution calling on the government to subsidise essential food and clothing in view of the rising wartime prices and chronic shortages. Donnellan stressed the issue of malnutrition, which had been significant before the war and had become far worse: “We have always been paid a starvation wage”, but now, with few getting a war bonus or a cost of living allowance, even relatively well-paid workers could barely manage to feed their families. The estate workers, with four or five months work and wages of between 40 and 50 cents a day, were in a miserable state. No wonder infant mortality was so high, she said, no wonder a doctor told the Forster Commission that he’d never seen malnutrition as bad as among Trinidad’s Indian population.

Donnellan, the only woman speaking at the meeting, said she was pleased to see a few women there, “but not nearly enough”. There was not a single female on the Legislative Council’s 1935 Wages Advisory Committee, she noted, yet it was women who had to struggle to feed their families. If working-class women sat on such committees, she said, the reports would be more sensible than the one from the 1935 Committee. In these brief remarks, Donnellan signalled her awareness of the special difficulties experienced by housewives and mothers during the war, and her recognition that even the unions, far more the colonial legislature and government, had failed to bring women fully into their activities.

Turning to the war, Donnellan said that “one man” did not start it; Hitler was responsible for a great deal, but Germans backed him because they had been badly treated after World War 1. The causes of the war were uncertain, but the people of Trinidad were surely not responsible; they suffered from it but had no control over events. It is possible that this last part of her speech may have struck the government as ‘seditious’, especially coming from one who had publicly and robustly defended the neutral IFS.¹²

Editors and Writers

Donnellan and Cahill were co-founders of the monthly *New Dawn*, which first appeared in November 1940, and sat on its four-person editorial board; the others were Rupert Gittens and George McLean, with Leo Gittens listed as its publisher. No one was named as chair of the board. They both wrote many signed articles and reviews, and no doubt several unsigned editorial pieces, up until the April 1941 issue (they were detained in March 1941).

We have already noted pieces by Donnellan and Cahill on Ireland and on education, but they wrote on other issues too, including local politics. In *New Dawn*'s first issue, Donnellan attacked the war censorship which discriminated against people involved in the unions. In her own case, all her overseas mail, and all of Cahill's, was opened, a practice that began the same week of their dismissals. Despite the recommendations of the Royal Commission, all those who worked with the unions were under suspicion. "What a tragedy if Britain's fight for democracy should be nullified in the eyes of millions by anti-labour and semi-Fascist methods in the Colonies". Cahill's article 'Might is Right' attacked the local daily papers, both pro-establishment as a rule, for "championing the cause of minorities and might as against majorities and rights". They never failed to shout about the war effort and the defence of the rights of man yet ignored the scandalous wages and conditions of Trinidad's agricultural labourers, and the suppression of democracy at home. They championed the planters' cause but ignored the workers' demand for a war bonus or a cost of living subsidy.¹³

Shortly before her detention, Cahill wrote a long article about London's tactic of sending out commissions to delay reforms and buy time, a piece revealing that she was well informed on West Indian history. Both the Norman Commission (1897-98) and the Olivier Commission (1929-30) had recommended peasant settlement and improvements in the housing and wages of plantation workers. Yet, no serious changes were made: "The vile barracks and hovels of the rapidly increasing masses still steamed in the hot sweat of closely huddled humanity..." The Marriott-Mayhew Commission (1931-32) made excellent recommendations

on education, but now, ten years on, nothing had been implemented—it was more important to punish praedial larceny with floggings. The Forster Commission (1937-38) repeated many of the recommendations made by the Norman and Olivier Commissions; between Olivier and Forster, the oil and sugar companies had modernised their machinery and methods but had done nothing for their workers. Now the Moyne Commission had visited in 1938-39 and its report, not yet published, would no doubt join all the others “on the file”. Would the next one, Cahill asked provocatively, come from Washington not London?¹⁴

Cahill managed to turn a piece on a recent agricultural exhibition into an indictment of colonial policy. At the Irish agricultural shows she had attended, local farmers were deeply involved and interested in all the activities, but it was different in Trinidad. For in that “outpost of empire and home of vested interests, where the land that might house and feed and clothe a sturdy farming community is held fast in the grip of a few big men”, there were no real “farmers”, only big planters and labourers. People were being told to grow more food—on what land, with so much under “diseased cocoa” or sugar or swamp? They were being told to ensure their children get nutritious food—on starvation wages and no garden plots? Interestingly, this article by Cahill was re-purposed into an unsigned editorial piece published in the *Vanguard* during Donnellan’s brief stint as its editor.¹⁵

In addition to their signed articles, and almost certainly unsigned pieces too, Donnellan and Cahill both contributed book and film reviews to *New Dawn*. Among the books Donnellan reviewed were Malcolm Muggeridge’s *The Thirties*, memoirs by British leftists Harry Pollitt and William Gallacher, a biography of Nehru, and a collection of essays by Harold Laski. She also wrote on films. In a review of *Pastor Hall*, about a Christian pastor executed in Nazi Germany, she recalled the tyranny of the Black and Tans in the Ireland of her youth. She once visited a British concentration camp where her friend’s brother had died in its hospital. “No one cried, no one did in those days till one had escaped from the eyes of the sentries and assassins”. She often left school to the sound of gunfire

from the British soldiers, “war-maddened wretches sent to keep law and order in Ireland!” In Ireland the people resisted, but not in Germany, so the Nazis triumphed. The film’s lesson, Donnellan concluded, was that it was “the duty of every honest man and woman to do his utmost against injustice, victimisation or discrimination wherever they occur, in Germany, Ireland or the West Indies”. Donnellan reviewed local plays, and a recital by a local pianist, Kathleen Davis (later to be famous as a radio and TV host, ‘Aunty Kay’).¹⁶ Indeed, she seems to have been the principal book and film reviewer for *New Dawn* up to her detention.

Early in 1941, Donnellan became editor of the OWTU’s weekly, the *Vanguard*. It speaks to her standing in the labour movement that a young, white, foreign woman was entrusted with this task by Trinidad’s most powerful trade union. The weekly had not appeared for the second half of 1940, but reappeared in late February 1941. She was responsible for two issues as editor; the second was published on March 1, 1941. She presumably wrote, or perhaps helped to write, the editorial articles in that issue, which dealt with the conditions for the US bases being built in Trinidad, with immigration of workers which the planters were demanding, and with racist actions by American sailors. But after just two issues edited by Donnellan, she was arrested before the appearance of the next issue (8 March 1941).¹⁷

Detentions and Death

This issue of the *Vanguard* was signed by Ralph Mentor, a top official of the OWTU and the TTTUC. A brief note on the front page, headed ‘An Unusual Call’, stated that Donnellan, its editor, was told by a senior police officer on March 7 that she was “wanted” by the police in Port of Spain (the paper was based in San Fernando in the south of the island). No reason was given. She left immediately with the officer. At this stage, the paper seemed either uncertain about what was happening or was unwilling to say. But the pro-establishment daily, the *Guardian*, in its issue of the same day, stated it had been “officially

informed" that Donnellan, Cahill and Mahon had been detained under the Defence Regulations. Of course, this paper had good connections with police and government sources in the capital.¹⁸

By the next issue of the *Vanguard*, on March 15, the situation was clear: the three had indeed been detained under the wartime emergency powers. No charges had been announced—and under the Regulations, there was no obligation to do so. Appeals might be heard by a special tribunal, and appeals for the three had been filed. The weekly outlined the activities of Donnellan and Cahill since they came to Trinidad "from a country that has carried out a ceaseless struggle for the last 700 years for the right of freedom, independence and social justice". They became active in the "Educational work of the Trade Union Movement", leading to their dismissal from their teaching posts. Since then, "they have toured the Colony" helping in educational and propaganda work "for the removal of the slums, the filth and the poverty in the midst of plenty"; they tried to understand the people and encouraged them to seek their rights. Ralph Mentor, the weekly's new editor, felt sure that the three detainees were "loyal and patriotic to HM the King Emperor, his throne and person", far more so than the bosses and war profiteers of Trinidad—though in fact Donnellan and Cahill had made it clear that they were anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist but hardly loyal to George VI and his government.¹⁹

In a signed column, Mentor noted that the whole trade union movement was united to protest the detentions. A public meeting held in Port of Spain on March 14, representing "every shade of Trade Union opinion", had demanded that they be released and that the Defence Regulations making such detentions without trial possible be revoked. It passed a resolution stating the meeting's conviction that the three were "loyal and patriotic, but sympathetic to the workers, and their arrest can only indicate that educated, cultured and fair minded people who take up the workers' cause may be liable to be detained". Mentor pointed out that the three had been "outspoken critics of the Young-Huggins administration" and frequent speakers on union platforms, but at no point had they sought to undermine the war effort.²⁰

The three detainees appealed; the *Vanguard* announced that Rienzi, a lawyer and the leading trade unionist of Trinidad, was to appear for Donnellan and Cahill, and E. P. Bruyning for Mahon. It also informed its readers that Mahon was being held on Nelson Island, along with Butler, while Donnellan and Cahill were at the detention camp in St. James, a suburb of Port of Spain, with interned enemy aliens.²¹

Because the appeals tribunal met in secret, and the local government was under no legal obligation to reveal the charges against the three, it was only when the matter was taken up in the British Parliament that an official statement was made. On April 10, 1941, the Labour MP D. N. Pritt asked a question in the Commons about the detentions. The Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, G. H. Hall, replied that they had been “engaged in anti-British and anti-war propaganda calculated to diminish the war effort in Trinidad and to encourage the use of violence”. The *Vanguard* commented that this would be news to “the thousands who had the privilege of hearing their speeches or reading the writings of Misses Donnellan and Cahill”. They had never encouraged violence and they were bitterly anti-Nazi; there could be no evidence to support this official declaration by Hall. The editor conceded that some restrictions were necessary in wartime, but at the very least, the appeals tribunal should be held in public. In June, the *Vanguard* returned to the issue, noting that three months after their detention, no information had come from the local government on their cases. The appeals were held, in camera, and the only word was that “judgement was reserved”. Public feeling was strong against “this hush-hush business”.²²

For *New Dawn*, the loss of Donnellan and Cahill, founding editors and prolific writers, was a huge blow—indeed, shutting down this strongly anti-colonial monthly may have been one of the objectives behind their internment. *The Teachers Herald*, another progressive monthly, commented that they were the best writers appearing in *New Dawn*, well informed, up to date, practical and sympathetic. Obviously the local authorities found their writings too well informed, educational and advanced, it said, and sought to protect the

population from their views. Their writings were missed by many, the monthly concluded, looking forward to their release "when the world is less mad".²³

In its April 1941 issue, *New Dawn* announced the detention of two of its editors, along with Mahon. It thought that the "last straw...for the reactionary groups and others more powerful" was their involvement with the monthly, and Donnellan's recent acceptance of the *Vanguard* editorship. Neither they, nor the "old militant" Mahon, deserved to be detained, and thousands agreed. Reacting in the next issue to the statement in the Commons, the remaining *New Dawn* editors insisted that there was not a shred of evidence that the three had ever encouraged violence or tried to undermine the war effort. A Parliamentary enquiry was necessary; as it was, it seemed "that to believe at all strongly in democracy, to be eager to see it applied here, to have been anti-Fascist long before most people, is to be suspect". The monthly noted that *Public Opinion*, a progressive Jamaican journal, had expressed its amazement at the detentions which could never be justified, it thought, by anything published in *New Dawn*.²⁴

The tragic death of Donnellan on June 24, 1941, three months after her detention, came as a shock to all her colleagues and friends. It was first announced by the *Guardian*. Her body had been found in the sea near the Cocorite airport (for Pan-American sea planes), about a mile from the St. James internment camp. The report, obviously based on a police source, noted that there was a gash on the right side of her neck which bled when the body was brought ashore. It also stated that Donnellan was a native of Galway in the IFS and was about 40 years old. And it added: "After her identity had been made known yesterday [June 24] morning, the Government revealed that both she and Miss Cahill had been offered their release from internment on May 26, on condition that they both return to Ireland at once but they both refused". The post mortem was to be held that day (June 25) and an inquest later on.²⁵

The *Vanguard* expressed its shock and sorrow in a long article published soon after her death. It noted that it was only the day after Donnellan's death that it learned, from the *Guardian*, of the offer to release her and Cahill if they left

Trinidad at once. Whatever her mental state at the time of her escape and death, "her name will be indelibly impressed upon the suffering masses of this country...for whom she suffered martyrdom". The same sentiment was expressed in a letter from an OWTU official, Lucas Nunez, who wrote that she dedicated her life to Trinidad's people and died for them. She was, he thought, "the first woman who died here for love of Trinidad working class emancipation" despite her Irish birth. And the Fyzabad branches of the OWTU and the sugar workers' union held a joint memorial service for her in September, describing her as a dear friend and comrade, a great soul and martyr, and offering prayers for Cahill and Mahon.²⁶

In a moving tribute in its August 1941 issue, *New Dawn* called Donnellan's death a "grievous loss" to Trinidad's working-class movement. "She came as a stranger to these shores and made herself one of us...confident in the righteousness of the cause she never flinched nor faltered". None of her comrades and colleagues ever imagined, when she was arrested, that they would not see her again alive. "She too probably never thought that her last resting place would be so far away from her beloved Eire and her own stout-hearted people". But "her name will be enshrined in the annals of the West Indian working-class movement...She has died but her spirit lives. Working men and women of Trinidad who read her writings and listened to her addresses, those who sat at her feet in the Workers' School, will inspire their sons and daughters with the fervour of this late friend of ours, this valiant daughter of the Irish countryside". The monthly reported that workers, some former St. Joseph's Convent pupils, some Irish nuns and two priests took part in her funeral procession to the Mucurapo cemetery near the camp; she was "always a dutiful child" of the Catholic Church.²⁷

In its October 1941 issue, *New Dawn* revealed that the National Council for Civil Liberties, a British watchdog group, had considered Donnellan's case in August. It had pronounced her death especially tragic because the grounds for her detention were very questionable. The secret appeals tribunal asked her about every article in *New Dawn*, not just her own, and all her public speeches, but the

Council's case worker had studied the monthly and had found nothing which was "anti-war" or even anti-British, quite the reverse. Moreover, Donnellan's speech in June 1940, at a 'Win The War' campaign meeting, was proof of her support for the war effort. The Council intended to have questions asked in the Commons about Donnellan's detention and death, and Cahill's continuing internment. (In November 1941, the Labour MP Dr. Morgan, who had been born in Grenada, asked about Donnellan in the Commons; the written reply merely said that the Secretary of State had received from the governor a copy of the inquest record and it was available at the Colonial Office).²⁸

The full tragedy of Donnellan's death was revealed during the inquest, which was extensively reported in the *Guardian*. It was typical of this daily that it headlined its first report 'Irish Ex-Teacher Was Expectant Mother'—neither the *Vanguard* nor *New Dawn* mentioned this distressing fact. The inquest revealed that Donnellan had made two earlier attempts at suicide while in the camp, but had been stopped by Cahill's intervention. On the night of her death, she had cut her wrists with a razor, then escaped from the camp and walked down to the sea at Cocorite. (Cahill was unable to intervene on this occasion because she was in solitary confinement for a breach of the camp rules). On the shore, she had gashed the side of her neck, and entered the water. Death was by drowning, but the medical witness thought she may have been unconscious from loss of blood before she drowned. The post-mortem revealed a fully formed male foetus of 5 to 6 months.²⁹

After this tragedy, and the loss of her friend and companion, it seems especially brutal that Cahill was not released. But she was not, and she was refused visits. In its last issue, *New Dawn* noted that Nehru and other Congress leaders in India had just been released, and so had Bustamante in Jamaica (this was early in 1942) and called for Cahill, Butler and Mahon to be freed "in the name of justice". They had been interned when everyone was "panicky" but there had never been any evidence that they planned violent actions, they had never been formally charged or tried in the courts.³⁰ The end of *New Dawn* about a

year after the detentions was certainly due in part to the loss of Donnellan and Cahill.

With *New Dawn* out of action from March 1942, it was left to a rather similar progressive monthly, the *Teachers Herald*, to remember Cahill's plight. It attacked Governor Hubert Young who had detained her and Donnellan; the governor had deemed "noble and liberal spirits" like them "dangerous to Empire peace and security" for no just cause. In May 1944, a columnist in the monthly noted that Cahill remained in the internment camp "for what it has not pleased Government to say in open trial by her peers". She enjoyed "the respect of the West Indian Community", except the reactionaries who had influenced Young; had the new governor (Bede Clifford) outgrown such influences and did he now subscribe to the "Four Freedoms" endorsed by Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill in the Atlantic Charter? If so, he was obligated to review Cahill's case. There was never any evidence that she had sought to retard the war effort. The columnist said that Cahill had done a year's course in medicine but had failed an exam because she was not allowed to practice as an intern in a hospital. He (or she) nevertheless hoped that she would "persist in her noble work for humanity, as Patriot, Teacher and Healer", and ended in an appeal for her immediate release.³¹

It was not until February 1945, when the end of the war in Europe was only three months away, that Cahill was released, following a review of her case by the Advisory Committee. (Butler and Mahon were released a few weeks later). She went to London, where she was visited in the late 1940s by Lloyd Braithwaite, one of the *New Dawn* founders and writers. He told Susan Campbell decades later that she had not really recovered from her wartime experiences in Trinidad (Campbell 2010, 90).³²

Transgressions

Kay Donnellan and Frank Cahill transgressed the norms of colonial West Indian society of the period on several grounds, or in several ways, all of which intersected. Most obviously, perhaps, they undermined the racial premises of British colonialism when, as 'white', European persons, they took such an active and public part in trade union and left-wing movements. This was clear to their allies and comrades in Trinidad. As the *Vanguard* put it, "they have fraternised with Negroes and Indians as few 'Whites' have done in this Colony"; and, "unlike other white teachers who have come to this Colony", they had agreed to lecture for the unions on education and related issues. Only people like them, thought the *Teachers Herald*, could "bind the Empire of Black and White together" and give meaning to the new concept of a 'Commonwealth'. And *New Dawn* summed it up: "In Trinidad, it is not considered proper for Europeans to identify with the people's cause, and they do not; our colleagues, true Irishwomen moved by the plight of the underprivileged workers, transgressed".³³

Trinidad had a small but visible community of Irish descent; the Creoles among them, nearly all Catholics, had intermarried into the larger 'French Creole' group. With few exceptions, by the 1930s they were part of the colony's business, professional and planter elite (De Verteuil 1986). Irish nuns, priests and teachers also served in Trinidad, but, again with few exceptions, their brand of religion and their kind of politics were conservative if not reactionary in this period. (Of course, this was broadly true of the higher echelons of the Church in the IFS itself). As white Irish women, and apparently devout Catholics, Donnellan and Cahill took an entirely different line. Their public defence of IFS neutrality during the war, such a grievance to Britain during the terrible months after the Fall of France, and their anti-British attitudes honed in the Irish struggle that they had lived through, must have further distanced them both from the local Irish-descended community and from the colonial authorities.

It's clear, too, that their gender only magnified their "transgression". White women, whether Creole or European, took little part in public life in the colonial

Caribbean at this time, outside church and charitable activities. A rare exception in Trinidad was Beatrice Greig, a married Scottish/Canadian woman who was involved in several public causes in the early 1900s and was, along with Audrey Jeffers, a candidate for the Port of Spain City Council in 1936 (Reddock 1994, 167-168.) Those few women who did try to enter public and political life in Trinidad, like Jeffers, did not get involved in the trade unions or left-wing groups, preferring to create middle-class social workers' groups as their vehicles (Reddock 1994). Again, the two Irish women transgressed. The fact that they were fairly young, in the mid to late thirties, magnified their offence. To the best of my knowledge, they were the only women interned in the British Caribbean colonies for anti-government activities during World War 2 (as opposed to women interned as enemy aliens, simply because of their nationality).

They were young, unmarried, Catholic women, and the revelation that Donnellan had been sexually active before her internment was, perhaps, a final transgression. It was not by chance that the *Guardian* trumpeted the fact of her pregnancy in its report of her death. While white men, including Europeans, were generally free to conduct extra-marital affairs and father children outside marriage with little public disapproval, the double standard as applied against white and upper-class women was quite rigid in the colonial Caribbean in this period. The inquest as reported in the *Guardian* revealed that the father of her child, George Fereira, had recently come to Trinidad from Madeira. Assuming he was in fact Portuguese, this was not an inter-racial union, which would have been a further transgression, but people of Portuguese descent or nationality were considered to be only marginally 'white' in Trinidad at this time, certainly not generally a part of the island elite. For class, too, played a part: Donnellan and Cahill were not only white and European, they were university-educated women holding teaching posts at a posh girls' secondary school where most of the pupils were from upper or upper-middle class backgrounds. By education, occupation, place of birth and ethnicity they should have joined the colony's upper class; but they defied all this in their public identification with the unions, the workers and the young leftist intellectuals.

Bridget Brereton: “She Came as a Stranger and Made Herself One of Us”: Two Irish Women and Anti-colonial Agitation in Trinidad, 1938-1945

These two Irish women, one of whom died in Trinidad, defied the norms of colonial society, norms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual conduct, class and religion, in their brief career in the island's radical politics between 1938 and 1941. Though largely forgotten today, their story is well worth remembering.

References

- Anthony, Michael. 2008. *Port-of-Spain in a World at War, 1939-1945*. Port of Spain: Paria Publishing.
- Brereton, Bridget. 2015, 2016. "A Loyal Opposition? Trinidad's Left-Wing Press and World War 2". Parts 1 and 2. Papers presented to UWI Departments of History Cross-Campus Seminars.
- Campbell, Susan. 2010. "Kay Donnellan, Irishwoman, and Radicalism in Trinidad, 1938-1941." *Journal of Caribbean History* 44(1): 75-104.
- De Verteuil, Anthony. 1986. *Sylvester Devenish and the Irish in Trinidad*. Port of Spain: Paria Publishing.
- Eccles, Karen. 2013. "Trinidadian Women and World War 2." Unpublished PhD thesis, The University of the West Indies, St Augustine.
- Neptune, Harvey. 2007. *Caliban and the Yankees*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Reddock, Rhoda. 1988. *Elma Francois, The NWCSA and the workers' struggle for change in the Caribbean in the 1930's*. London: New Beacon Books.
- . 1994. *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago: A History*. London: Zed Books.
- Singh, Kelvin. 1994. *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State: Trinidad, 1917-1945*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.

Abbreviations for newspapers/journals (all published in Trinidad):

G: *The Guardian*

ND: *New Dawn*

P: *The People*

TH: *Teachers Herald*

V: *Vanguard*

¹ The best work on Trinidad in the late 1930s/early 1940s is Singh 1994. For Trinidad during World War II, see Singh 1994: 186-222; Neptune 2007; Anthony 2008; Eccles 2013. See also Brereton 2015 & 2016.

² ND Aug 1941, p.2, 'Her Spirit Lives On' and Reddock 1994, 277-279.

³ V 6/1/40, p.7, 'The Future of Irish Politics' by 'Kay Don.'

⁴ ND Dec 1940, p.17, 'Anglo-Irish Relations', unsigned.

⁵ ND Feb 1941, pp. 12-15, 'As the Irish See It' by KD. The 'Black and Tans' refers to the British soldiers in Ireland in the 1919-21 period leading up to partition and the founding of the IFS.

⁶ ND Nov 1940, pp. 5-7, 'Some Needs of Primary Education' by FC. It was the Marriott-Mayhew Commission which reported in 1933.

⁷ ND Dec 1940, pp.10-12, 'Education for Democracy' by FC.

⁸ ND Jan 1941, pp. 15-18, 'By Way of Contrast' by FC; ND March 1941, pp. 18-20, Review by FC of 'The Caribbean Readers'.

⁹ V 28/6/41, pp. 7-8, 'Published Correspondence'.

¹⁰ P 20/7/40, p.3, 'Dismissal of Convent Teachers'; and n.8.

¹¹ P 20/7/40, p.5, 'The People Interview Miss Donellan and Miss Cahill' and pp. 6-7, 'Alleged Wrongful Dismissal' (edit.).

¹² For this and the preceding two paragraphs, V 1/3/41, pp. 2, 7, 'Historic Meeting at Prince's Building'. The Forster Commission (1938) came to Trinidad to investigate the 1937 riots. The pamphlet, which I have not been able to locate, is mentioned in V 28/6/41, p.4, 'Another Martyr'.

¹³ ND Nov 1940, pp.12-13, 'Trade Unions and the Censorship' by KD. The Royal Commission was the Moyne Commission, whose 1939 Report recommended that trade unions in the British West Indies should be encouraged. ND Jan 1941, pp. 7-8, 'Might is Right' by FC.

¹⁴ ND March 1941, pp. 9-12, 'Those Royal Commissions—So What?' by FC. See ns. xii and xiii for the Forster and Moyne Commissions.

¹⁵ ND March 1941, pp. 16-17, 'The Agricultural Exhibition' by FC; V 8/3/41, p.4, 'Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition' (edit.).

¹⁶ These reviews were published in ND Dec 1940, Jan 1941 and Feb 1941. See n.v for 'Black and Tans'.

¹⁷ 1/3/41, pp. 1, 4, edits. The earlier issue of 25/2/41, also edited by KD, is missing in the bound volume of V for 1940-41 in the Trinidad & Tobago National Archives, Port of Spain.

¹⁸ V 8/3/41, p. 1, 'An Unusual Call'; G 8/3/41, p. 1, 'Irish Teachers Detained'.

¹⁹ V 15/3/41, p.4, 'Editors and Trade Union Organiser Detained'.

²⁰ V 15/3/41, p. 5, 'Candid Comments' by R. Mentor. Hubert Young was the governor and John Huggins the colonial secretary of Trinidad at this time.

²¹ V 22/3/41, p. 5, 'Appeals Against Detention'. Nelson Island is a small island off the north-

²² V 19/4/41, p. 4, 'Truth Stranger Than Fiction'; V 21/6/41, p. 4, 'Those Detentions'

²³ V 19/4/41, p. 3, Excerpt from TH, n.d.

²⁴ ND April 1941, p. 3, 'Enforced Absences'; ND May-June 1941, p. 1, 'We Are Amazed'.

²⁵ G 25/6/41, p. 3, 'Irish Ex-Teacher Found Dead'.

²⁶ V 28/6/41, p. 4, 'Another Martyr Passes Away' (edit); V 23/8/41, p. 7, 'Tribute to the Late Kay Donnellan' by L. Nunez, 17/8/41; V 6/9/41, p.7, 'Fyzabad Workers Hold Memorial Service'. Fyzabad is a small town in the oil belt in south Trinidad.

²⁷ ND Aug 1941, p. 2, 'Her Spirit Lives On'.

²⁸ ND Oct 1941, p. 18, 'Those Detentions'; G 21/11/41, p.11, 'Inquest into Miss K. Donnellan'. Campbell quotes Donnellan's speech in June 1940 (Campbell 2010: 79).

²⁹ A verbatim report of the inquest is in G 29/6/41, p. 3, and 4/7/41, pp. 3, 11. Campbell says the father is unknown, but the inquest report makes it clear that George Fereira, a recent immigrant from Madeira, "confessed" that he fathered the child, and Cahill testified that she knew Donnellan was "very fond" of him. (Campbell 2010, 100, n. 125).

³⁰ ND Aug 1941, pp. 2-3, 'Striking Commentary'; ND March 194, p. 1, 'Free Them All'.

³¹ TH April 1942, p. 5, edit; TH May 1944, pp. 21-23, 'Pepper Pot' by 'Note-Taker'.

³² G 1/2/45, p. 3, 'Interned Teacher To Be Released'.

³³ See notes xix and xxvi; TH May 1944, n. 31; and n. xxiv.



Writing New Histories of War and Women's Activism in Jamaica: An Interview with [Dalea Bean](#)

[Reena N. Goldthree](#)

Assistant Professor of African American Studies
Princeton University

This interview took place at Princeton University (USA) in May 2018. The interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

How to cite

Goldthree, Reena N. 2018. "Writing New Histories of War and Women's Activism in Jamaica: An Interview with Dalea Bean." *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, issue 12: 345-362

Reena Goldthree (RG): In your new book, *Jamaican Women and the World Wars: On the Front Lines of Change* (2018), you explore the roles that Jamaican women played in World Wars I and II, tracing their efforts in Jamaica as well as overseas. What fuelled your interest in this topic and in the broader field of Caribbean women's history?

Dalea Bean (DB): So, I did my PhD a couple hundred years ago it feels like! Actually, it is a funny story in terms of how the topic came about. I went to The University of the West Indies, Mona for my undergraduate years and I just knew I wanted to do history. I didn't have a clue what I wanted to research, however. When I completed my graduate courses, I spoke to one of my lecturers and I had some ideas in mind. I wanted to do education, and he just said one thing that changed my mind.

He said, "During the war, women started to wear pants." I don't know how he even got there, but he said, "Yes, during the war, during the Second World War, that's when the fashion changed and women started to wear pants." I said, "Interesting." My mom had done an MA in History a couple years before on the ways in which Jamaica's *Daily Gleaner* newspaper fashioned the public response to World War II. So, I started going through her thesis, which I had at home, and wondered, "Okay, is there anything about women in there?"

She had a few little snippets – maybe overall about three pages of information on women – and that's where it started. And really the rest is history. At first I thought in terms of the same narrative that we have of European history during the Second World War in which men go off to participate in combat and women start working outside of the home. So, I thought that's what I would find for Jamaicans, too. I was pleasantly surprised to find something more complicated.

RG: Your book contributes to a new wave of scholarship on women's activism in the interwar Caribbean. What important insights does your research provide about gender in Jamaica between World Wars I and II?

DB: Before my book, there have been some papers and MA theses that deal with Caribbean women's involvement in conflict situations generally. For example, many people know about Mary Seacole and her unique role in the Crimean War as a Jamaica woman. However, my research for World Wars I and II opens up lines of inquiry that were previously unknown. Specifically, my book documents the fact that Jamaican women participated on various fronts during both wars.

Women from Jamaica are participating in the Global North. They're going to the United States. They're going to Europe. Crucially, they are contributing to the military mobilization effort in Jamaica by recruiting men for warfare. Women's active engagement with the war effort changes fundamental aspects of the gender discourse in Jamaica. We primarily see a public gender discourse during the wars regarding the changing expectations of men and women. My book provides detailed information about these women's lives and chronicles their efforts to organize public events for the war effort. Given the gender norms of the early twentieth century, we can't take for granted that middle and upper-class Jamaican women at this time would have previously have been organizing their own public charitable events or other patriotic activities. Planning military recruitment rallies and other war-related gatherings constituted a whole new type of activism for women on the island.

The war years also brought many women to the fore in terms of public writing, including poetry and literature. For instance, Jamaican Amy Bailey is well known for having written a great deal generally, but she also specifically wrote on World War II. During the First World War, a lot of elite white and near-white women were making their own voices heard. In my book, I wanted to acknowledge the role of these women in Jamaica's war effort because, in the field of Caribbean women's history and twentieth-century Caribbean history

more broadly, we tend to focus on black and other working-class women. This is understandable; however, there is a space for looking at these elite women who were also on the fringes of history, in a way. Certainly, when we study elite white women during this period, their activism was shaped by the construct of their class and by their own racial and gender contradictions. Yet, they were very present and important in women's wartime activism, even though we must situate their work in conversation with working-class women in Jamaica as well.

Overall, I think that my research addresses Jamaican women's experiences from many vantage points. Of course, my book couldn't do everything, and so I hope that it will encourage a new line of inquiry for scholars working on race and class in the interwar period generally. I also believe that many of the advancements made in the post-colonial era were shaped by women's forgotten labour during the interwar years. Scholars often include male Jamaican veterans as part of the political watershed of the 1950s and 1960s, but we do not think about the long-term consequences of World Wars I and II for women. We write about the role of men with the trade union movement and returning soldiers from the two wars, but there was a movement for women as well, and that is hardly spoken about.

RG: One of the things that I found incredibly impressive about your book is the range of sources that you use to explore the lived experiences of Jamaican women during the world wars. Could you say a bit about the specific sources and archives that you found most useful as you were writing the book?

DB: As you've said, I brought together quite a few different types of sources in my book. In terms of archives and repositories, I mainly worked at the Jamaica Archives in Spanish Town. I also conducted extensive research at the National Library in Jamaica and at The University of the West Indies' Mona Library. Outside of Jamaica, I found valuable sources in England at the UK National Archives in Kew and the Imperial War Museum in London. Most of the photographs for the book came from the Imperial War Museum, while I found a

great deal of private correspondence and other written materials at the UK National Archives. Finally, Jamaican newspapers were invaluable in terms of sources.

Two sources that I discovered during my research were particularly revealing in terms of race, gender, and class. While conducting research at the UK National Archives, I reviewed the files dealing with recruitment for the Auxiliary Territorial Service during World War II. The files addressed the internal debate among officials in the UK concerning the enlistment of women from Jamaica and the wider British Caribbean. I don't think I've ever seen such blatant lies and cover-ups and retractions! Those files were my first introduction to what really happened among imperial officials and the impact of race and class prejudice in this time period. Of course, we know it's there. We speak about it, but to actually see them writing things and scribbling over it and changing correspondence – that was really an eye-opener for me.

The materials I found on wartime prostitution were also illuminating. They are actually my favourite body of archival sources, but I decided not to use them in the book. I had a chapter in my PhD thesis on wartime prostitution, but I left it out of this work because I would like to expand that as a separate follow-up project. In my next book, I will look at the way women's bodies were policed in countries that had U.S. military bases during the Second World War. Throughout the war, there was a discourse about which women were thought to have gonorrhoea and syphilis, and which women were spreading venereal diseases wantonly among military men, compromising military efficacy.

RG: At its core, your research highlights the variety of roles that Jamaican women played in the war effort—both on the home front and overseas. You specifically challenge the gendered stereotype of women as pacifists by documenting how Jamaican women of all classes and races overwhelmingly supported military mobilization during World Wars I and II. What specific kinds of work did Jamaican women perform during the world wars on the home front?

DB: On the home front, women mainly did what was called the making of “comforts.” It started very small, particularly during the First World War. We have to think of the general context – this is the first time that Jamaica would have been pulled into an international conflict of this magnitude. So, there was a little uncertainty as to how to lend support. The longings of empire would be very strong, and every loyalist – man, woman, boy and girl – wanted to find a way to lend their hand. We know the famous line: “Go ahead, England. Barbados is behind you.” It was important to the people of Barbados, and people in the region more broadly, that they were standing behind England.

There was this general interest in being helpful, and in being recognized as such. In their war work, women used skills that they were using anyway – such as knitting, sewing, making preserves and so on. They made a lot of warm garments and other comforts, which would have been sent to soldiers in cold climates. In order to produce and ship these comforts, women developed new networks and linkages with local manufacturers because they had to have shipping linkages and so on to transport the goods. Women also took a leading role in local fundraising campaigns through Empire Day parades and other events. They donated money for planes, ambulances, and other items for troops at the front.

During World War II, women once again made comforts for soldiers and organized fundraising campaigns. They also organized efforts to increase the production of food crops locally. There was a campaign to get women to help save the nation from starvation by using their private kitchen gardens to grow staple foods. Because shipping was severely curtailed, there were extensive shortages of food and women mobilized to grow crops to replace imported goods.

RG: You also explore the gendered discourses around military recruitment and the ways in which recruitment—which is often understood as a male-centred

process—depended on women's labour. Can you tell us about the Jamaican women who helped to lead the recruitment campaign?

DB: Annie Douglass was a common denominator in several efforts. She was a nurse with the British Red Cross. She was a white/near-white Jamaican, and she would have been to previous conflicts on her own as a nurse. She embodied a contradiction because on the one hand she's female and therefore has a second-class status in this male-dominated colonial milieu. But, on the other hand, she had actually been to war, and so she embodies the possibilities of glory and returning home with military medals. Interestingly, she does not use her power to recruit women for the war effort. Instead, she was particularly vocal about the need for men to join the army and shaming those who refused to do so.

For instance, she carried a skirt to a meeting in St. James and held it up and said: "I've carried this skirt to put on the noble men of St. James. Are you going to wear it?" And, of course, they cried, "No." And she said, "No, I know you won't because you're brave men," and so on. So, we see there that she is toeing the line between the deprecation of her own sex while also lording the fact that she has been to war and participated in the defence of the empire. She would also not only organize and speak at these rallies, but she went into the crowds, and she would pull men out of the crowd. You had an instance where, after one meeting, 12 men from a rural area were immediately sent to an urban military training camp. I can just imagine Annie Douglass there in her nurse's uniform preaching to those men that they should be ashamed that they were not doing more for King and country.

RG: In some ways, Annie Douglass reminds me of the women who participated in the white feather campaigns in Britain during World War I. Women like Douglass played a crucial role in policing masculinity during the war years.

DB: Definitely.

RG: In addition to analysing the home front, your research also uncovers all of the ways in which Jamaican women served overseas, including as soldiers during World War II. How did women from Jamaica come to enlist in the British armed forces?

DB: As I said earlier, one of my favourite bodies of sources that I used for the book dealt with the process of recruiting Jamaican women for military service. When I started my research and I looked for relevant literature, I found Ben Bousquet and Colin Douglas's book, *West Indian Women at War: British Racism in World War II* (1991). As I discovered in my own work, the actual origins of the recruitment campaign for the Auxiliary Territorial Service is muddled in terms of the exact sequence of events. Generally, posters would have been posted in urban areas in Jamaica and elsewhere in the British Caribbean asking for women to volunteer for the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

Significantly, military officials did not expect black women to enlist. They only wanted white women. The controversial question was: "How do we keep the white women and shelve the black women?" In my research, I uncovered that officials did not want black women in England and they also did not want black women as part of the army, even if they were serving at home in Jamaica or other Caribbean territories. Ultimately, some members of the Auxiliary Territorial Service and other units of the British Army did serve in their home countries. But there initially was this colour issue, and colourism really took centre stage as to whether British military leaders wanted black Jamaican women in uniform at all representing the army anywhere.

The female volunteers from Jamaica were young, middle-class women who had secretarial or teacher training and were ready for adventure. I had the opportunity to interview some of the volunteers, and I assumed that they would have been afraid to enlist, given the type of sheltered life most women would have had at that time in their class. However, they weren't afraid. They were

very ready to go experience the world, and the war was their opportunity to do so and to get higher education as well. They applied to the War Office to serve in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, and the initial applicants had to wait about a year before being accepted – again, because of this back and forth that was taking place behind the scenes, which they did not know, between the Colonial Office and the War Office. The Colonial Office, as you know, erred on the side of expediency because they didn't want another Morant Bay [rebellion] or a repeat of the Tramcar riots of 1912. In contrast, the War Office, being very distant from the kind of political massaging that it takes to keep the colony in its place, was very reluctant to mobilize black women from Jamaica. The war between the Colonial Office and the War Office took place for about eight months. What finally broke the stalemate was that there was a Bermudan woman whom they accepted into the Auxiliary Territorial Service thinking that she was white. By the time that they realized that she was black, it became too obvious and too difficult to keep black women out. So, they took black women into the army to serve in their home bases or in England, and they took white women for military duty in Washington, DC., and they blamed the U.S. colour bar for their inability to assign black Caribbean women to posts in America.

RG: How did the experience of serving in the Auxiliary Territorial Service impact these women's understandings of the British Empire and of womanhood?

DB: Jamaican women's experiences in the Auxiliary Territorial Service varied, and I was really pleased to have been able to speak to some of these women to gain a deeper sense of their unique reflections on military service. I interviewed six female veterans, and I got two or so other interviews that were published by the Imperial War Museum. Some Jamaican women had really awesome experiences in the Auxiliary Territorial Service in terms of limited racism and very little experience with sexism. Some went on to marry Caribbean men who were also serving, and they lived in England, and so on. As a result, their assessment of colonial military service was akin to their expectations—

acceptance and openness, inclusiveness, and making a life for themselves in that space.

There were others who faced discrimination, racism, and sexism. Connie Mark, for instance, swore until her death that she did not get a specific service medal because she refused to clean the houses of the white female officers in the Auxiliary Territorial Service. Some of the black women in the service had to do those jobs, and she refused to do that because she had a maid at home! Her experience with that sort of open discrimination within a space where she expected to be considered elite—not only because of her class back at home in Jamaica but now because she was serving in the British Army.

Ultimately, Mark was not accepted in the ways that she expected as a British subject from Jamaica. Then, she got married after the war and she encountered the racism and hostility that was typical for Caribbean people in England in the 1950s, where signs like “No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs” appeared in London. For Mark, those experiences were a slap in the face, and they made her realize that England was not a “mother country.”

In terms of womanhood, many female members of the Auxiliary Territorial Service did not think about gender roles at the time because they enlisted for adventure, not necessarily to prove themselves and their capabilities as women. But, in reflecting on their service after World War II, many did say that it changed the course of their lives. As I have said, they mainly were middle-class women. They would have likely got married and they would have had to leave the civil service if they had jobs. Most likely, they would have become housewives. But, because of this opportunity to work and then study in the United Kingdom, many became trained administrative assistants or professionals. One of Jamaica's first female judges, Ena Collymore-Woodstock, was trained in the United Kingdom as a result of her wartime exposure and experience. So in looking back she and others said, “Obviously, this would never have been my life.” And in her case in particular she did have this view like, “Anything men can do, I can do as well – if not better.” So, in reflecting, they do recognize that it was critical to their

advancement and liberation as women – but not necessarily so much when they were initially enlisting for service.

RG: How did Jamaicans respond to seeing these generally middle-class young women go off to war as soldiers? What was the public reaction to women's participation in what has traditionally been a deeply masculine sphere?

DB: I think that's an important question, and it's not something I've been able to gauge well enough. During the war, women became far more prominent in the print media as a result of various wartime exigencies. Many of these women writers are applauding their sisters who are going off to war – or who are involving themselves in this male-dominated space. If you review copies of the *Daily Gleaner*, which was appealing to an urban, middle-class readership, then you will find poetry by women lauding other women for their service. In terms of getting a feeling from the average person on the street, that is not forthcoming in the archival sources that I examined for the book. I suspect the newspapers at the time would have been focusing on either military strategy and outcomes or the economic and sociopolitical ramifications of the war in those periods, rather than popular opinion about female military service.

RG: One consequence of women's activism in Jamaica during World War I is that some women are enfranchised. As you explain in your book, around 3,000 women gained the right to vote in 1919. How did the suffrage movement develop in Jamaica?

DB: The context of women's suffrage in Jamaica has to be seen in light of the suffrage campaign in the United Kingdom before and during World War I. As scholars have noted, the suffrage campaign in the UK took a “nasty” turn with the suffragette vs. suffragist battles and the violent campaign that took place. In Jamaica, the *Daily Gleaner* had a habit of covering pretty much everything that happened in this campaign. The events of the British suffrage campaign

were portrayed in the Jamaican landscape very negatively. As a result, we see that powerful men actually initiated the campaign for women's suffrage in Jamaica, and that the fight for women's right to vote was not led by women in the initial stages. Two well-known men – councilman H.A.L. Simpson and *Daily Gleaner* editor H.G. de Lisser – were at the forefront of the effort.

On the one hand, these men wanted to recognize the important labour that women performed on the home front during World War I. On the other hand, they supported granting some women the right to vote to buttress the political power of their socioeconomic class. Furthermore, they did not want Jamaican women to mirror what was happening in England in terms of the suffrage fight. They knew if the demand for suffrage came organically from local women, then every class of women in Jamaica would be swept up in the campaign. It would not be an elite movement. Instead, it would be a mass movement and a movement for the masses of women. Therefore, Simpson and de Lisser wanted to nip it in the bud before the bud even started to grow.

Simpson and de Lisser made two arguments in favour of women's suffrage: women had performed crucial work during the war and they were taxed without any political representation. Simpson and de Lisser proposed that middle-class women who were at least 25 years of age and paid taxes annually should be able to vote.

Initially, Jamaican women were slow to respond to the local suffrage movement. It wasn't coming from a woman, and it didn't have any female leadership. Eventually, Nellie Latrielle, who was a white English-born woman who lived in Jamaica, roused some women to action and argued that, "Jamaican women need women leadership. If men are going to lead us, women are not going to respond." From that point, the movement really just snowballed.

In opposition to the movement, some men espoused negative views about women having the vote and argued that voting would be a slippery slope in terms of women's demands for political power. If women are able to vote,

opponents claimed, then it means they're going to want to be voted for, which is exactly what happened. Women's suffrage, which was enacted for middle-class and elite women in Jamaica in 1919, was one of the key political outcomes of the war years. By the end of the movement, it became a female-driven and gendered battle, but I argue in my book that it really did not start that way.

RG: What are some of the other significant political consequences of women's participation in the world wars?

DB: As we just discussed, there's a clear line between World War I and suffrage in 1919 for selected women in Jamaica. There's also a clear line between women's suffrage in 1919 and the election of Mary Morris Knibb in 1939 as the first female councilwoman in Jamaica. Her campaign was female-led and targeted female voters. So, there is a clear line between the political consequences of World War I and Knibb's initial venture into politics in the 1930s. Mary Morris Knibb's election offers a clear line that you can draw through history in terms of a landmark political outcome of World War I. But I think the lines that are a little more zigzag and blurry have less to do with deliberate political outcomes and more with shifting views because of women's work in the wars – particularly visibility. Some women gained visibility as public figures in Jamaica either because of their elite status or because of their particular profession. For example, Amy Bailey did social work and Una Marson came to prominence because of her literary and journalistic writings.

In a collective sense, the war effort made women far more visible than they had previously been in Jamaica. When you open a newspaper and you see women on a speaker's platform at a major recruitment rally, it shifts the narrative and the possibilities in terms of women having a political voice. Those are the types of political ramifications that are a little harder to track, but the impact of shifting conceptions of women as leaders and political actors was overwhelming by the 1960s and '70s.

Furthermore, I believe the fact that women were trained as soldiers had an impact on their work in the independence era of the 1960s. The first police women in Jamaica would have been trained in the Auxiliary Territorial Service and other branches of the British Army during World War II. In this regard, wartime service changed the labour market. It also changed women's aspirations. These labour shifts also would have political ramifications because if you're going to serve in the army or in the police force, then you are breaking into male-dominated fields. Again, these things are less perceptible in the archival record and are harder to trace, but I think equally important when looking at long-term political ramifications.

RG: To what extent are Jamaican women's contributions to the war effort remembered today? Is there a sense of local pride and awareness about this history, particularly given the fact that some of the World War II veterans that you discuss in your book are still alive?

DB: Many of the female veterans from World War II are still living, but that entire generation of women and men is fading quickly. In Jamaica, there are some specific groups that honour them and have annual services on Veterans Day. To raise funds, we always sell the remembrance poppy in November and February.

Beyond these events, public memory about the world wars is very scarce in Jamaica. I think the reason is multi-faceted. In the first instance, Jamaica generally is not a militaristic society. While we have a high rate of violence, and our police force is quite active, our army is sidelined in terms of national security. In fact, many will argue, "What's the purpose of Jamaica having an army?" The armed forces are not very well recognized or integrated into our daily culture, in contrast to the United States where celebrations of veterans and militarism are daily occurrences. It's not that for Jamaica.

The other thing is that our history, generally, is undervalued by the average person on the street – and even by our leaders. We have our national holidays – like Independence Day and Emancipation Day – where we publicly reflect on Jamaica's history. But, overall, we are very centred on current issues and the future. Looking back is not something we do very well or very often. Our culture comes to us through grandparents, our food and the way we speak, but in terms of a deliberate effort to be able to understand the forces that got us to this point, it is not very well appreciated. This context helps to explain why Jamaicans do not even know that there is such a rich history of women's involvement in the movements in support of World Wars I and II.

I really hope to change the lack of knowledge about women's roles in Jamaica's war efforts. I would love for the information to be accessible in interviews, documentary films, or in other visual forms like comic books for children. For little girls growing up in Jamaica, I think it's important to know that women made remarkable contributions during the world wars and they were determined to serve. There's so much more that needs to be done in terms of memorializing all veterans in Jamaica and, in particular, women.

RG: Before we conclude, I have one final question. In your position as a Lecturer at the Regional Coordinating Office (RCO) at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, UWI Mona Campus, you offer courses on feminist theorizing and contemporary gender-related issues in the Caribbean. What lessons can twenty-first century feminist activists in Jamaica learn from female activists from the interwar period?

DB: That is an excellent question. It is not often a connection I give great consideration to, but I think there are many lessons that can be learned. Firstly, that activism can be expressed in multiple modalities. While some will physically participate in rallies and have a visible presence in the streets, others will use creative writing, newspaper articles or other forms of expression to make their voices heard. Once an issue is of import to you, it is vital to use your specific

strengths and aptitude to bring that message across. Theorizing about feminist and gender concerns is not relegated to an elite few; many young women have the tools, voice and vision to make their mark in determining their life chances. I believe the experience of those women who enlisted for service should serve as a reminder that the world is our oyster and that some risk and chances should be taken to ensure empowerment. This may not mean travel to fight a “white man’s war”, but the point is we should not be limited by current circumstances, which are often dictated by patriarchy, racism and classism. Opportunities should be created and seized. In so doing, further cracks to the proverbial “glass ceiling” will be made. There are many other take-away points, but I believe these are two critical lessons that can be learned from wartime and interwar activism.



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



ISSUE 12

Gender and Anti-colonialism in the Interwar Caribbean

Contributors

[Rose Mary Allen](#) studied Anthropology at the University of Nijmegen, and obtained her doctorate degree at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands. She has been conducting oral history interviews on the islands of the Dutch Caribbean. She is working as a freelance researcher and as a part-time lecturer in Caribbean studies at the University of Curaçao. She has co-published, edited and published several books and articles on the cultural and social history of Curaçao with special attention on cultural traditions, migration, gender studies and cultural diversity.

In 2015, she was awarded the Cola Debrot Prize, Curaçao's most prestigious national award in the area of culture, art and science. At the moment, she is setting up a program of Cultural Studies at the University of Curacao. She is the local coordinator of the research program *Traveling Caribbean Heritage*, a four-year project of the University of Leiden, Erasmus University of Rotterdam, University of Aruba, UNESCO Bonaire and the University of Curaçao. She is also the local coordinator of the project *Cultural practices of citizenship under conditions of fragmented sovereignty: gendered and sexual citizenship in Curacao and Bonaire*, of the University of Curaçao and the University of Amsterdam.

Amrita Bandopadhyay is a third year PhD candidate in English at the University of Florida, Gainesville, USA. Her doctoral dissertation is on Indo-Caribbean women's literature, with a particular focus on the refashioning of women's identity, education and cultural practices through migration and travel. Her doctoral research explores how women imagine resistance and create narratives of negotiation in the context of racial and patriarchal conflicts in multiethnic societies. Her research interests include narratives of the South Asian and the Asian Diaspora, women's literature, travel writing, Global Anglophone literature and digital humanities. Her dissertation also makes use of archival materials, particularly from the Digital Library of the Caribbean and archives in Trinidad and Tobago.

Amrita previously received her MA and M.Phil. in English from Jadavpur University, Calcutta, India. Her M.Phil. thesis focused on nineteenth century Anglophone literature by women where she examined English novels of Swarnakumari Devi. Amrita is also an active member of the graduate students' union (Graduate Assistants United) of the University of Florida. She also loves to cook, paint and write creative fiction.

Dalea Bean is a Lecturer and Graduate Coordinator at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, Regional Coordinating Office at the University of the West Indies. Before working with the IGDS, she taught in the Department of History at UWI in the areas of women's history and Caribbean history. She pursued a Bachelor of Arts at UWI in African and Caribbean History and Political Science and graduated with a first class honours in 2002. She then completed her PhD in History on the topic "Jamaican Women and World Wars I and II". She has been the recipient of awards for scholastic achievements, including Inaugural Robert Marley Scholarship and Walter Rodney Prize for African History.

Her general research interests include women and gender justice in Caribbean history, women in conflict situations, and gender relations in the Caribbean hotel industry and Caribbean masculinities. She has written book chapters, journal articles and has presented numerous lectures internationally on these and other topics. She has also conducted gender equity and gender mainstreaming training regionally and has been engaged in research with the IGDS that facilitates gender mainstreaming in education, history writing, and masculinity studies. Her first single authored book:

"Jamaican Women and the World Wars: On the Front Lines of Change" was published by Palgrave MacMillan in 2017.

Dr Bean serves on the Editorial Board of *Identity Papers: A Journal of British and Irish Studies* and is also the reviews editor for *Jamaican Historical Review*. She also sits on the Board of Directors of the Kiwanis Club of Young Professionals Jamaica, which allows her critical engagement in youth advocacy and service to children and vulnerable communities in Jamaica.

Nicole Bourbonnais (PhD, University of Pittsburgh 2013) is an Assistant Professor of International History at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. Her research interests include reproductive politics, transnational activism, social history, gender history, and the history of public health. Her first book, *Birth Control in the Decolonizing Caribbean: Reproductive Politics and Practice on Four Islands, 1930-1970* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) explored how family planning campaigns in Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, and Bermuda intersected with the politics of nationalism and working class women's efforts to control their reproductive lives in the context of decolonization. She is currently working on two new projects. *The Gospel of Birth Control: Prophets, Patients, and the Transnational Family Planning Movement* will explore the networks and strategies that linked together birth control campaigns, family planning activists, and reproductive rights movements across the globe from the 1920s onwards. *The New Woman, the Race Mother, and the Working Girl: Sex and Gender in the Early 20th Century Anglo-Atlantic World* will examine the connections between activist movements and debates over sex, family, and gender roles in the UK, North America, and Anglophone Caribbean from the 1920s-1960s.

Bridget Brereton is Emerita Professor of History at UWI, St Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago. She is the author of several books on the history of the Caribbean and of Trinidad, including standard works such as *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870-1900* and *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962*. She is the editor or co-editor of several more (including Volume V of the UNESCO *General History of the Caribbean*), and the author of many journal articles, book chapters and book reviews. A university teacher for many decades, she has taught history courses to undergraduates and

postgraduates, and has successfully supervised many doctoral and master's theses and research papers. She is a former Head of the Department of History, Deputy Principal, and Interim Principal, all at the St Augustine Campus of UWI. She has also served as Chair of the Board of NALIS, Chair of the Trinidad & Tobago Nominating Committee for the ANSAMcAL Caribbean Awards for Excellence, and Chair of the Cabinet-appointed Committee to consider the Trinity Cross and other National Symbols and Observances, among other public service positions.

Kaysha Corinealdi is an Assistant Professor of History in the Institute for Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies at Emerson College. Her research interests include twentieth century histories of empire, migration, and activism in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States. Her current book manuscript, *Defining Panama: Diasporic Possibilities, Nationalism and U.S. empire in the Americas*, focuses on the activism of Afro-Caribbean Panamanian journalists, teachers, labor union organizers and civic association leaders as they navigated imperialist and hyper nationalist policies of racial exclusion, xenophobia and disenfranchisement spanning from the interwar to the early Cold War periods. Dr. Corinealdi's most recent work includes the essay "Creating Transformative Education" (*International Journal of Africana Studies* Fall-Winter 2017), which explores questions of empire, segregation and pedagogy as they pertain to Afro-Caribbean Panamanian public school educators in the Canal Zone and New York City during the 1950s and 1960s. Her reviews and essays have also appeared in journals such as *Western Folklore*, the *Hispanic American Historical Review*, and the *Global South*.

Natanya Duncan is an Assistant Professor of History and Africana Studies with an affiliate status in Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Lehigh University. A historian of the African Diaspora, her research and teaching focus on global freedom movements of the 20th and 21st centuries. Duncan's research interests include constructions of identity and nation building amongst women of color; migrations; color and class in Diasporic communities; and the engagements of intellectuals throughout the African Diaspora. Her current book manuscript, *Crossing Waters and Fighting Tides: The Efficient Womanhood of the UNIA*, focuses on the distinct activist strategies enacted by women in the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which Duncan calls an "efficient womanhood." Following the ways women in

the UNIA scripted their own understanding of Pan Africanism, Black Nationalism, and constructions of Diasporic Blackness, the book traces the blending of nationalist and gendered concerns amongst prominent and lesser-known Garveyite women. Duncan's publications include several works that explore the leadership models of UNIA women. Her research has appeared in the *Journal of Liberty Hall* (2017), the *Journal of New York History* (2014), and *The American South and the Atlantic World* (University of Florida Press, 2013).

Reena Goldthree is an Assistant Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University. She earned her B.A. in History-Sociology from Columbia University and her M.A. and Ph.D. in History from Duke University. During the 2008-2009 academic year, she was a Fulbright fellow at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

As a historian of modern Latin America and the Caribbean, Goldthree's current research explores transnational social movements, labor and migration, black intellectual history, and gender and feminist theory. Her current book project, *Democracy Shall be no Empty Romance: War and the Politics of Empire in the Greater Caribbean*, examines how the crisis of World War I transformed Afro-Caribbeans' understanding of, and engagements with, the British Empire. Beyond the book manuscript, her research has appeared in the *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, *Radical Teacher*, *Caribbean Military Encounters* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) and *Global Circuits of Blackness: Interrogating the African Diasporas* (University of Illinois Press, 2010). Her research has been supported by fellowships and grants from the American Historical Association, Coordinating Council for Women in History, Ford Foundation, Mellon Foundation, Woodrow Wilson Foundation, Social Science Research Council, Mustard Seed Foundation, and Fulbright.

Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz is an Associate Professor and Director of the Undergraduate Studies Program in the Sociology Department at Binghamton University. She has a PhD in U.S. Women's History from Binghamton University, 1994. She was a Gaius Charles Bolin Fellow in History at Williams College, 1992; a Ford Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellow, 1998 and President of the Puerto Rican Studies

Association, 2009-10. She has published numerous articles on race and representation among Latinas; Puerto Rican women's history; Puerto Rican Popular culture and Nuyorican artistic production. She is currently working on two manuscripts: *"A Storm Dressed in Skirts": Race and Women's Suffrage in Puerto Rico, 1898-1929* and *Womanhood, Race, and the National Question in Interwar Puerto Rico*. Before Professor Jiménez came to academia she was a public school teacher in Puerto Rico working in schools located in some of the most socially-economically depressed areas in San Juan. She was also a union organizer and a founding member of "Encuentro de Mujeres," a feminist activist group that organized workshops on popular education, anti-sexist, anti-homophobia and trans-gender issues in poor communities in San Juan during the 1980s.

W. Chris Johnson is an Assistant Professor in the Women and Gender Studies Institute and the Department of History at the University of Toronto. An interdisciplinary writer and historian of black diasporas, his current research and teaching interests orbit themes of black feminisms and black freedom in the 20th and 21st centuries. Chris is currently completing a transnational history of gender and black liberation. Using postwar Black Britain as a point of departure, the book traces the interwoven itineraries of revolutionaries who lived, loved, dreamed, and struggled for solidarity at the conjuncture of diasporas.

Aliyah R. Khan is a native of Guyana and an Assistant Professor of Caribbean Literature in the Department of English and the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She is also a board member of the Arab and Muslim American Studies Program at the University of Michigan. She holds an M.F.A. in Fiction Writing from Hunter College of the City University of New York, and a Ph.D. in Literature and Feminist Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her current research areas are postcolonial Caribbean literature, and contemporary Muslim and Islamic literatures, with emphases on race, gender, and sexuality. Khan's academic and nonacademic writing appears elsewhere in venues including *GLQ*, *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en littérature canadienne*, *The Rumpus*, and *Agents of Ishq*. She is currently working on a book on 19th-21st-century literary representations of Islam and Muslims in the Anglophone Caribbean and

Suriname, during and after the transatlantic African slave trade and Indian plantation indentureship.

Tyesha Maddox is an Assistant Professor at Fordham University in the Department of African and African American Studies. She received her PhD in History from NYU in 2016. She is currently a 2017-2018 Scholar in Residence at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture as a Ford Foundation/Mellon Foundation Fellow. She received a BA in History and Africana Studies and a MPS in Africana Studies both from Cornell University. Her research and teaching interests include the African Diaspora, Caribbean, Black Atlantic, Women and Gender, African American History, Race, Transnational Communities, Migrational Movements, Immigration, Black Identity Formation, Social and Cultural History.

Her current manuscript, "From Invisible to Immigrants: Political Activism and the Construction of Caribbean American Identity, 1890-1940," examines the significance of early twentieth century Anglophone Caribbean immigrant mutual aid societies and benevolent associations in New York. It explored how immigrant social organizations played a vital role in the formation of transnational identities and facilitated in community building, arguing that participation in these organizations created kinship networks that both empowered immigrants to form a collective "Caribbean" identity and unleashed a political activism among immigrants fighting alongside African Americans to insure their equality in the tumultuous era of American Jim Crow.

Janelle Rodrigues is an assistant professor of English Literature at Auburn University, Alabama. Before that, she was a postdoctoral research associate at the University of Bremen, Germany (2015-2018), specialising in postcolonial literary and cultural studies. Her first monograph, under contract with Routledge press, is tentatively titled *Tracing Obeah's Margins in Twentieth-Century Anglophone West Indian Fiction*. Her research interests include Obeah, and other African/Caribbean syncretic religious praxes; trickster studies; Afropessimism and Afrofuturism; Migration and diaspora; and Black Atlantic studies.

Grace L. Sanders Johnson is Assistant Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. She received her doctorate from the University of Michigan in the Joint History and Women's Studies Program. Sanders Johnson has been awarded fellowships from the Thomas J. Watson Foundation, the Andrew C. Mellon and Ford Foundations, the Canadian Embassy, and was awarded an Emerging Scholar Fellowship from the Haitian Studies Association. She has worked with various archival projects including Concordia University's Oral History Project *Histoire de Vie* (Montreal 2011). She has published work in several journals and books including *Reconstruction, The Journal of Haitian Studies, Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History* (University of Toronto Press, 2016; edited by M. Epp and F. Iacovetta), and *Caribbean Military Encounters* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2017; edited by S. Puri and L. Putnam). She is currently completing her first book manuscript entitled, *White Gloves, Black Nation: Gender and Citizenship in Early Twentieth Century Haiti*. In addition to her study of gender and politics in Haiti, she is the founder of *Harriet's Hike* – an ecological literacy program for girls and elder women in North Philadelphia.

Faith Smith teaches African and Afro-American Studies, English and American Literature, and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Brandeis University in Massachusetts. She is the author of *Creole Recitations: John Jacob Thomas and Colonial Formation in the Late Nineteenth-Century Caribbean* (2002) and the edited volume *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean* (2011). "Strolling in the Ruins: The Caribbean's Non-Sovereign Modern in the Early Twentieth Century," is a book manuscript that tracks the silences and fantastical resolutions of that era's novels, and the complex responses to photography, to examine Caribbean people measuring the growing imperial interests of the USA against the fortunes of their particular European empire, in the wake of the Spanish American and Boer Wars. Another manuscript, "Dread Intimacies," is a study of 21st-century Caribbean fiction and visual culture.



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