

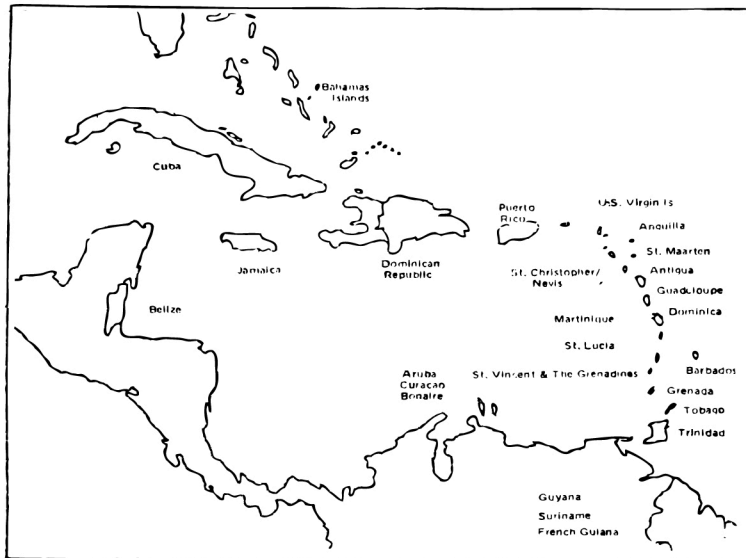
CARRA

NEWS.

NEWSLETTER OF THE CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATION FOR FEMINIST RESEARCH AND ACTION



Vol. 2 No. 4 DECEMBER 1988



AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

General Aims:-
To

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

Objectives:-
To

1. develop research priorities based on the needs of the women's movement in the region;
2. provide a supportive atmosphere for individual feminists;
3. bring a feminist perspective to bear on the work of existing progressive organisations and shatter the myth that "feminism divides the struggle";

4. provide a focal point for bringing together feminist organisations in the entire region;

5. foster greater communication and collaboration on events and issues relevant to the feminist movement;

6. develop a base of documentation on the women's movement in the Caribbean and issues relevant to it;

7. develop access to available sources of documentation which could be put at the service of women's organisations and struggles in the region; and

8. promote a continuous analysis of language in order to identify and correct the sexist assumptions embedded in its structure which are detrimental to women's expression and development at every level.

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EDITORIAL

First of all, apologies for the fact that we're late with this issue. The reason is that the CAFRA office is in the process of recovery from our first General Meeting since the formation in April 1985. Appended to the WAND 10th Anniversary Celebrations in Barbados (see p. 28) the CAFRA General Meeting (12-13 November) was both exhilarating and exhausting. It has loaded the CAFRA office with follow-up work, but what an experience it was to have so many members come from all over the region, and finally to meet so many of the women with whom we've been corresponding over the last three years. All four language groups were in evidence - members from Caribbean territories as far apart as Suriname and Belize, as well as some resident outside the region, were present to have their say. Important issues were thrashed out and a 3-year programme (1989-1991) approved. So this issue of CAFRA News concentrates on that meeting and some of the dynamic women who attended it. Marilyn Jones, a freelance journalist (and member) from Trinidad and Tobago conducted the interviews, which we think you'll agree provide a fascinating picture of some of the things happening in feminism in the region and among Caribbean women outside.

Tina Johnson

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Cafra General Meeting

The first General Meeting of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action was held at the Caribbee Beach Hotel in Barbados on November 12-13, 1988. The purpose of the meeting was to evaluate the work of CAFRA over the past three years and to formulate new priorities/directions, based on the needs of the women's movement in the region. The meeting was attended by members representing territories, of whom 17 had attended CAFRA's Inaugural Meeting, also at the Caribbee Beach Hotel, in April 1985. Representatives of several of the agencies from which CAFRA receives funding were also present.

Following on the heels of the Women and Development Unit (WAND) 10th Anniversary Consultation and Symposium, the CAFRA General Meeting started on a high note, despite the stormy weather. Diane Haylock conducted the warm-up session, which succeeded in breaking the ice, break

ing down barriers (women with red panties unite!), eliciting much laughter (recall Randy Rhoda and Rotund Roberta) and making everybody breathless.

The first day of the meeting was devoted to discussion of the Report prepared by the CAFRA Secretariat (or CAFRAteriat, as coined by Rhoda Reddock). This document, an anthology of reports really, contains inter alia the reports of the Co-ordinator; five CAFRA projects (Women in Caribbean Agriculture, Women's History, the poetry anthology, the Inter-American Legal Services Association (ILSA) survey and CAFRA News); the National Representatives (Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago); and annual financial reports for the period 1985-1987.

This was followed by a debate on Associate Membership and presentations of the status of the women's movement in the non-English-speaking Caribbean. Presentations were made by Yamila Azize (Puerto Rico), Cathy Ribas-Hermelo (Cuba), Cecile Celma (Martinique) and Gladys do Rego (Curacao).

The agenda for the second day seemed insurmountable to some, but thanks to Joan French and a small committee which met on the preceding evening to pull out the main points



for discussion, agreement was reached on several issues crucial to the future development of CAFRA. These included: CAFRA's status as an organisation or network; the role of the National Representatives; membership dues; the problems of communication; and priority research/action areas for the next three years. A summary of decisions taken is given below.

Cathy Shepherd

Summary of Meeting Decisions

A full report of the CAFRA Meeting will be sent to members early in the new year. In the meantime, for the benefit of those who were not present, the following are some of the decisions that were reached over the two days:

1. CAFRA is a network with some organisational structure(s), i.e. the Secretariat, regional Co-ordinator and National Representatives.

Report to the General Meeting of
CAFRA, The Caribbean Association for
Feminist Research & Action.
Nov. 1988, Barbados.



Designed by Tracey Johnson

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2. The Aims and Objectives of CAFRA remain unchanged.

3. General Meetings are to be held biennially.

4. National Representatives - have a degree of flexibility in their operations depending on the state of development of the national women's movement and the national membership;
- act as liaison between membership, members of the public and the CAFRA Secretariat
- should be informed of new members in their territories by the Secretariat, but do not have the power of veto; and
- should hold national meetings.

5. The category of 'Associate Member' is abolished. Full membership is open to women living in the Caribbean and Caribbean women living outside the region who support CAFRA's Aims and Objectives. However, only individuals (not organisations) can join CAFRA from the diaspora. Each member organisation has one vote (though all its members can attend meetings).

6. New membership dues (for 1989) are 25 units in the currency of residence for individual members; 35 units for organisations. Additional contributions are welcome. The money should be sent to the CAFRA Secre-

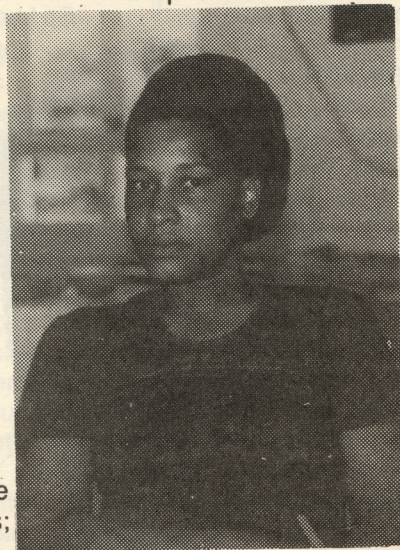
tarat. For those countries with foreign exchange transfer problems, barter can be used as a last resort with prior arrangement with the CAFRA office.

7. The newsletter is one of the chief mechanisms of communication and networking. As such, it should be available in Spanish and French, with additional translation into other languages (especially the creoles) at the national level wherever possible/wanted.

8. To help breakdown language barriers - translation of CAFRA News, focus on non-English speaking territories, use of graphics;
- use of professional interpreters at General Meetings, and reporting in audio-visual form (e.g. videos, photographs, etc.);

- intra-regional exchanges, joint projects across language groups;
- individuals should attempt to learn at least one other Caribbean language;
- ultimate consideration of sign language.

9. A provisional three-year programme for CAFRA was approved.



Cecilia Babb, on-the-ground meeting co-ordinator

Sweep on

*Everyday we wake up
it's the same condition
long time we've been working
frustration remaining
this could never be our destiny!
Life must have something else in it
for all a' we -
so - I'm going to tell a little story
about women who work
talking 'bout domestic workers
and women who are mothers
if society won't recognise us
or realise our dignity,
then the hotter the battle,
the sweeter the victory!*

*The dust will remain in the corner
till the broom sweeps it away
we're gonna sweep on, sweep on
Sweep out poverty, sweep out
slavery!*

*Time to break down the cages
we want better wages
Time to break down the cages
we want better wages.
We're gonna sweep on, sweep on
sweep out poverty, sweep out
slavery!*

*And though you may think that
I'm singing of one kind of service
and the same thing applies to
all women who work -*

*We're gonna sweep on, sweep on,
sweep out poverty, sweep out
slavery!*

We're gonna sweep, sweep

Sistren Theatre Collective

Cafra Conversations

Audre Lorde and Andaiye

In the following conversation, CAFRA News brought together two dynamic women of the Caribbean, Audre Lorde and Andaiye. Audre is a black lesbian feminist poet and author. Born in New York of West Indian parents, she is the mother of two children and a cancer survivor. Her publications include Between Ourselves, The Black Unicorn, Stolen Outsider (a collection of essays), The Cancer Journals, Zami. A New Spelling of My Name and her latest book, A Burst of Light. Andaiye is a veteran political activist of Guyana. She is a leading member of the Working Peoples' Alliance (WPA) and founding member of the Red Thread women's organisation (featured in CAFRA News Vol 2, No. 2). A former school principal, she has recently been working as a consultant with WAND.

CAFRA News: Let's talk about your involvement in the women's movement.

Andaiye: It's very recent. I've been involved in something you could call politics for a very long time. But there was a point - which explains why I changed my name - when the major issue to me appeared to be race. That was not in relation to race in Guyana - me as black in relation to Indo-Guyanese or Amerindian-Guyanese. It had to do with the recognition that although I was born and raised in fairly comfortable circumstances and went to the 'right' schools, there was still the problem of being black that I think exists for all black people, regardless of class, of the contempt that contains, both for self and as others receive you. Then for per-

sonal, political reasons, I got fired. I went away from Guyana and in the process began to read Marx, and there was recognition. I had never really thought of class before, except in general terms, so then much of my political life was disciplined by the understanding of class as a factor behind things, but still with a commitment to the question of race. But there was still something missing. So I began to scream around to individuals I knew like Joan French and Kathy Drayton, "alloyou got this woman thing and you don't invite me to nothing", and so on. There was a joke when they were organising the U.W.I (University of the West Indies) Women in Development Studies Programme Seminar, two years ago, which was for "de university intellectuals dem" but they must have some activists. Apparently when they came to the activists, the whole room screamed, "Oh God, we got to invite Andaiye, she been begging so long!" So I went, and that's the beginning of my participation in the women's movement and of my tussle now to put together what I consider to be the relationship in theory and in practice and in feeling between race, class and gender.

CAFRA News: I'd like to find out more about your change

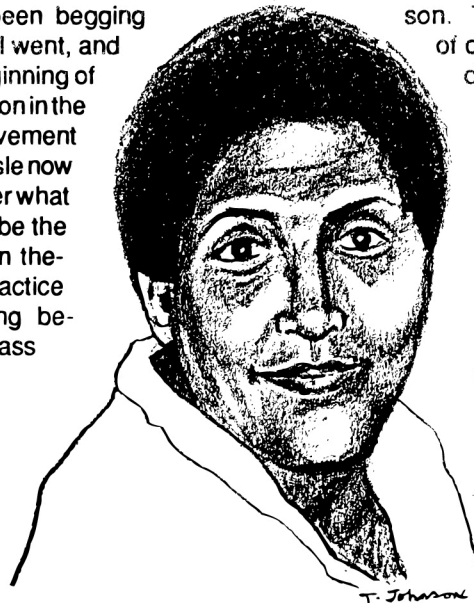
of name to Andaiye.

Andaiye: The change of name came in what can be called the Black Power period in the Caribbean. There were a number of us in Guyana who changed our names, and it was a kind of vomiting up of rage: get rid of it, get rid of all those years.

Audre Lorde: How did you get it? Naming is so important.

Andaiye: How did I find the name? A couple of us decided to have only one name, and that was symbolic. I changed my name to an African name. I do not de-link myself from this Guyana and the other large race group in Guyana by doing this. Although it's not generally true that Indo-Guyanese have one name, old-time Indo-Guyanese poor people are listed in the records as one-name persons.

So I became a one name person. The other attraction of one name was that I don't like labels and I knew I would confuse the whole world - they don't know whether to call me "Miss Andaiye", "Mrs Andaiye", "Madame Andaiye", or what. They just have to call me Andaiye, and that attracted me. So how I found it? We had a book, it was as simple as that. The book was like a little dictionary, and you looked down



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the English side until you found in English what you wanted to say; then you looked on the left side and if you didn't like how that sounded - cause it had names from different parts of Africa, from different languages of Africa - you just sucked your teeth and moved on. And then eventually I found it. The book says it means, "Daughter comes home".

Audre: You know, the process of naming is such an important one, the process of reclaiming your name, your identity. I was very interested. I wanted to ask you that all day.

CAFRA News: Audre, what about you and the women's movement?

Audre: There are two things I want to say. First of all, I know myself and refer to myself as a black feminist and that is important, because when I call myself a black feminist I am saying that I recognise that my powers as well as my oppressions come from my blackness and my womanness, and that both of these are inseparable and immutable parts of who I am and therefore these powers and oppressions must be moved on jointly. And I say this because black feminism is not white feminism in a black face. It is a genuine movement that comes out of the lives of black women, wherever we are - women of the African diaspora - and as such must be identified in terms of particular problems wherever we are. Sometimes our problems overlap with the problems of white women, and then we can work together; sometimes they are different. We must be able to recognise that and define ourselves, and this is very important, because

that whole process of self-definition is, I feel, crucial to any empowerment and this is what we are about, it is what I am about.

CAFRA News: The word 'feminist' is incorporated into the name of the organisation to which we all belong - CAFRA - yet in the Caribbean it's a label that many women don't like to ascribe to themselves ...

Audre: And a bad word!

CAFRA News: Do you see yourself, Andaiye, as a feminist and if so what informs your feminism?

Andaiye: Yes, but then I have to say something else because I am still uncomfortable, but I don't think I'm uncomfortable because of other people's responses. In a discussion today, one of the other women said to me, "But feminism does link class and gender". Her political history had been similar to mine - the Black Power movement, marxism and feminism - and we were talking about two things: do you call yourself this long thing that incorporates all of that? And whether you run the risk of leaving behind the first thing you were into. Once I was into the question of racial oppression. Do you drop that? Her position was, "No" because for her feminism, and the developing theories and practice of feminism, makes possible the link

at the level of both theory and practice. I hear her, but I don't know that yet. So, whenever somebody asks me if I am a feminist, I feel like saying, "Yes, but I is also these other things".



Andaiye

CAFRA News: What you seem to be saying, in a way, is that perhaps it would be useful if the Caribbean movement could itself define what feminism means in the Caribbean context.

Andaiye: Yes, yes, although I accept that part of what I am learning is that we are not going to define out of a book,

and we're not going to define before we are ready. So that even the process we are involved in is a process that can ultimately help us define, but we're not going to start the other way: here is the definition, now stick to it. And I think that's good. It just leaves people like me to grow old in a bit of confusion, but I think that is the right process.

CAFRA News: Audre, you were very clear on how you defined yourself. Was there a point in your development when ...

Audre: Well, let me tell you a little bit about my history. I come out of the Civil Rights Black Power movement of the sixties. This was a very important and a very dynamic time. It was a time of great vision; it was also a time of incomplete visions, and if we

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as black people cannot deal with the lessons of our history - both our mistakes as well as our triumphs - we will simply repeat them. I've written about this. I did a piece on Malcolm X: "Learning from the Sixties for the Eighties", and it deals with exactly this question. If we as black people cannot look without illusion and without romance at what the problems in our own movements are, in the same way as if we as a community cannot look at violence against women, then it is going to continue. What happened as I see it in the movements of the sixties is that the enormous female potential was sometimes used but never acknowledged, and very, very frequently squelched. It was a very painful lesson to me, trying to organise young women in '67, '68 and '69. As the seventies moved on, within the white woman's movement they borrowed from us many of the tactics, many of the visions, but black women were still unwilling to recognise, at least in the States, that we had to reclaim this as our own.

That, no, we are not white women; we do not wish to be white women; we do not wish to attack black men; but if we are going to deal with the whole concept of nationhood, then we need fully articulated black men and black women. And it has been a long time in coming. I think that that is a consciousness that is happening, and I think that, for example, what is going on in the Caribbean is a part of it. I think that Caribbean women must

define for themselves what Caribbean feminism is all about.

CAFRA News: A lot of black women in America, I remember, in the early days of the modern feminist movement, were reluctant to identify themselves with feminism not merely because it was considered to be the white woman's thing, but because, like women in the Caribbean today, they feared the label, 'lesbian'.

Audre: Yes of course, because 'lesbian' is one of those super powerful words like 'black'. You can get any

and my work is inextricably connected with a vision of the future I have for us all. You see, one of the problems, I think, of black people as a whole and black women in particular is that difference has been used against us so brutally that we have a knee-jerk reaction to any differences within our communities: kill, destroy, you're different and you can't be a part of me. But we don't have to become each other in order to work together, and what went on upstairs (the CAFRA meeting) is a primary example. CAFRA, like any other organisation, is going to have to take on full face, I

feel, the issue of difference. What structures do we build into our personal lives and our institutional lives to deal with the differences between us? If we share goals, how do we use those differences creatively?

CAFRA News: Andaiye, how do you see lesbianism insofar as it seems to be a problem for the Caribbean woman who has aligned herself with the women's movement?

Andaiye: It has not risen in this way at all in Guyana because, as I have said to people over and over during this week, to me there is not yet anything you could call a women's movement in Guyana. Never yet has there been publicly or privately in relation to my work - I don't know what goes on in people's heads, you know - the label attached. I presume it might be there because I'm 46 and I've never been married. At the same time, it is true, you know that the



Illustration: Still from 'Wallflower Order' by Marion Barling

person to shut up in New Orleans or throughout the South by intimating that maybe there is one drop of black blood... Well, it's the same thing. You can get any straight woman to totally shut up by inferring that maybe she is a lesbian, and this has been used. The reason why it has been used is because of the power of heterosexism or homophobia, so when I identify myself, I say I am a black feminist lesbian warrior mother doing my work,

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Caribbean is small and I think generally we know each other's business, and so they know my relationships are and have been with men, so perhaps not. The whole question of sexuality in relation to people who are either gay men or women who are lesbians really hasn't come on the agenda in a certain way, so part of the problem is that it still exists within the region on the level of a subterranean something. I feel sometimes that it is not even as though when women express fear that being in the women's movement they will be called lesbian .. I feel that they are not expressing the idea of being attacked, they are expressing the idea of being odd and funny.

Audre: What about lesbians in Guyana? Let me remove that word and say, what about women who work and love together, which is the meaning of zami in Carriacou . There are many Caribbean women, and I really respect this, who say 'lesbian' is not about what we do, is not about our lifestyles; 'lesbian' is a word that we do not choose because it has connotations that are not native to us. So my feeling - because I feel very strongly that naming is essential socially, politically, emotionally, spiritually - is that people have a right to name themselves, but the process of naming is what is so important. In Carriacou they say the urge to lie with women, the desire to lie with women is the urge from the mother's blood. I'm talking about the process of naming. Thirty years ago, you called somebody black in Manhattan, they punched you in the mouth, but now it's Black Power, and maybe here too, so we have reclaimed the word. What

I am saying is that women must reclaim the words that are useful to us.

Andaiye: I would like to answer a piece of Audre's question, which was: what about lesbians in Guyana. I do not personally know any Guyanese lesbian who does not live abroad. I obviously am not saying that there are no Guyanese lesbians living in Guyana, but I do not personally know a single Guyanese lesbian who did not relate to that fact by leaving. Therefore I am saying several things. I am saying that it seemed to them to be uncopable. I am also saying that that contributes to what I was saying about it not being on the agenda, and this widespread feeling that it's a wrong thing. It's joke, it's sin, it's crime.

Audre: I think it can be because there is so much of a stigma attached. It can also be because there are issues which take precedence in terms of women's lives. It can be for a lot of reasons. All I know is that it doesn't mean there aren't any Guyanese lesbians.

Andaiye: Certainly part of it is that there is a way in which water, food, light and so on not being givens really does put a lot of other things - not just the question of sexuality - on the back burner. When you can't assume water out of a pipe or light off the switch or the bus is going to come, those become the issues.



Illustration: Gita Saxena

CAFRA News: Andaiye, do you write?

Andaiye: Girl, I don't know. I've been writing for a long time. I have all the disadvantages of, not just the old female thing of writing and hiding it away, but I have a real disadvantage because professionally I have been an English teacher and an editor, and this is fatal because I can't finish the thing. Everytime I go away, I hide these papers all over the place, not so much because I'm mortified to have them found and published, but I am mortified because people will see one poem in 26 versions, sometimes with only one word changed.

Audre: That means you really are a writer. You have to begin looking in the mirror and saying to yourself - aloud, not in your head - "I am a writer; I am a poet". You have to come out of the closet, you really, really do. And just rapidly, two ways of doing it is by starting to keep a journal where everyday you write at least three lines about what you feel. You force yourself. It's a discipline, it's an exercise. That's one way, and the other is getting a group who you can share your poetry aloud with, interchange feelings. These are two ways of keeping your work alive and developing a

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sense within yourself that this is something you want to do and examining why you want to do it.

CAFRA News: You said earlier, Audre, that your work, your writing, is directly connected to your vision of a future. Do you think feminism can meet the challenges it sets itself?

Audre: Black feminism?

CAFRA News: Black feminism, socialist feminism ... do you see feminism bringing about the changes for humanity which in theory it seeks?

Audre: Oh, I think there is no doubt about it. I have an absolute conviction and a passionate belief in the ability of us to turn this thing around, and by 'us' I mean all those of us who are working - whether we work as black feminists, whether we work as socialist feminists, whether we work as black revolutionaries, whatever we call ourselves. It takes all of us moving in very many different ways to turn around those forces - forces really of destruction, that define the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human potential.

CAFRA News: What do you see as the major challenges that the women's movement will have to face in the Caribbean in, say, the next decade?

Andaiye: Part of the problem is that we are into this thing which tries to connect what is generally called the personal, the private, the public, at the same time that we are faced with public problems of such enormity that it's difficult to hold the line against not just dealing with those. Because the

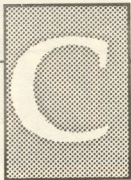
Caribbean countries either already are in severe crisis or they are entering into severe economic crisis. I think that since this is true - Walter Rodney used to talk about the Haitianization of Guyana and now people are talking about the Guyanization of the Caribbean - we have to battle against the easy solutions that our governments are coming up with, which are profoundly hostile to women: the structural adjustment, the health cuts, and so on and so forth. They're actually hostile to the Caribbean, but they don't know that. It is nonsense to consider that there is such a thing called 'productive forces' which are not in the first place human beings who, therefore, need health, education, etc. So what they're doing is wrong even in their terms, but they don't know it. But only we are so fully conscious of how profoundly wrong it is for women. And how their solutions are about the further exploitation of women economically, and then by extension in every other how. So the battle is in the first place to hold the line against that notion of solution, and the harder battle is to help develop solutions that make the Caribbean livable and viable and real.

Audre: I think the major challenges facing the black woman in the United States now are two-fold. First of all, not to descend into a kind of false complacency which is, you know, 'we've made it, we've raised issues'

because that is not true. But I think the other, and even more important challenge facing the black women's movement in the United States is to recognise to begin with that we have power. We are citizens of the most powerful country in the world and we have a responsibility to identify that power and use it in concert with other people, for our other sisters. We are part of an international community of people of the diaspora and of people of colour, and that international community represents seven-eighths of the world's population, and being black is not going to protect us much longer. I think these are very basic truths that all black people, and black women in particular need to recognise. I think if we can handle those, we will continue to work against the problems which are not only regional and local, but world-wide. The forces of oppression are very small, but very powerful. We don't have to cast very far to see that oppressions world-wide are rooted in many of essentially the same forces, and we need to hold that as part of our vision.

Andaiye: I think what we are beginning to say in the face of all this 'woman thing' and so on is that what we are arguing is that the solutions are not about the exploitation of women, are not just solutions for women, but are solutions for the region. What we are looking for are human ways of humanising the Caribbean for all of us.





Catherine Ribas-Hermelo

Cathy Ribas-Hermelo works with the America Department of the Federation of Cuban Women (Federacion de Mujeres Cubanas, FMC). The FMC was founded on 23 August, 1960 and Cathy notes that at that time "true and radical changes in the lives of not only our women but also our families began".

CAFRA News: It's a case of 'so near and yet so far' when it comes to linkages between Cuba and the rest of the Caribbean. We know so little about our sisters in Cuba. Do you see there is any possibility of strengthening the relationship?

Cathy: Yes, of course. I was talking to the CAFRA Secretariat about this. How inspiring this meeting was for me as a person coming from Cuba and for the first time meeting with so many women from different territories in the Caribbean. It has been very enriching; it has given me a great opportunity to learn about women in the rest of the territories that surround us. We're so close together geographically; nevertheless, we have barriers that separate us such as language and political views. At the same time there are so many things that unite us as women, as feminists, as women concerned about people, which I think is the most important thing. We fight for our women within the context also of fighting and struggling for the welfare of the people. Because we're fighting for fifty percent of the population, we are benefitting all the people.

CAFRA News: One of the difficulties we face in most parts of the Caribbean is that even though women care a lot about issues affecting them, there is a reluctance to see them as



Cathy Ribas-Hermelo

feminist issues, and to make a commitment to feminism. Is that a problem in Cuba?

Cathy: For some years there was a problem with the word, 'feminism', because our women in Cuba related it to radical feminists or bourgeois feminists and we didn't want to identify with those kind of people. So, you might go to Cuba and ask somebody if the person is a feminist and they would say "Yes"; another person would say, "No, I fight for women's equality".

CAFRA News: From all we hear, your women's movement in Cuba is fairly well organised. Could you give us

some idea of how it is structured?

Cathy: Yes. The Federation of Cuban Women is a mass organisation. It was one of the first mass organisations to be created in Cuba after the triumph of the revolution, and that was on 23 August, 1960. Right now, we have over 3,200,000 members. As you know, Cuba has a population of over 10 million, and the percentage of women within our organisation is 82 percent of the female population over 14 years of age. Hard work was involved in getting women involved in our organisation. Although it's a voluntary organisation, people automatically go to us and get involved. We work in different areas: health, working women, education, dissemination of information, international relations and social work. More or less, these are the fields that we go into, and it is such a broad spectrum that all kinds of women have a place within the organisation.

CAFRA News: But does this extend to all kinds of women having a place in other structures within the wider society?

Cathy: We have a problem with that, and that was very strongly stated in our fourth Congress of the Federation that took place in 1985 - our congresses take place every five years. In 1985 we had done some research on women's participation in different state bodies - Parliament, Ministries, State Committees, etc. - and there was a disproportion of women within

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the labour force and women in leadership positions. Since 1985, we have been putting special input into these issues, and we have achieved some things; others we are still working on. For instance, at the last election at the national level, we acquired over 33 percent of women members of Parliament. At the grassroots level, it's still a lower proportion, and so we have to do special work. The Communist Party in Cuba is a large party, but it's fed from the workers' movement. Usually you should be a worker, because that is the basis of the Communist Party, a workers' party. Women now account for 38 percent of the total labour force of the country, but it has also been a struggle trying to get women into the labour force and we're in a lower proportion due to this same issue. Housewives (in Cuba) are not just housewives in the sense of the word in other countries because all the work that we carry out in the grassroots is mainly done by housewives who have more time than working women. They have a great involvement in the community and they deserve also to be included.

CAFRA News: So you're working towards fair representation for women. But does this translate into a, shall I say, feminist influence on policy making, etc; a feminist vision of the world?

Cathy: This is precisely the work of the Federation of Cuban Women - to have this input in all the national policies. If the penal code is to be analysed by the lawyers or whoever is

going to do that, the Federation has an input and watches to see that there is a gender perspective in the laws. We have this opportunity to have this input in things, and this is what I was saying yesterday when I did my presentation. We have been able to achieve so much because this has not been a struggle of women alone either. We are all constructing a better land to live in and everyone has to share. We also fight for the welfare of the peasants and for our youth, and they also fight



for the equality of women, and this is an interrelated struggle that we all have. Every five years, we have the Head of State plus heads of ministries come to our congress. There are the women saying, "We don't have jobs", let's say, and the Minister of Labour has to explain why the women don't have jobs, and then women tell them what they want to do and they have to give replies. If not, Fidel Castro is there asking, and demanding that these people respond to the women's needs. We have open consultations with the leadership. Beside that, Vilma Espin, our President, is a member of the Politburo of the party and member of the State Council.

CAFRA News: How many women are there on the Politburo?

Cathy: On the Politburo there are 13 members and 3 are women: one full member, Vilma Espin, and two alternative members - one who is a member of our National Secretariat

and the other who is President of the National Academy of Sciences in Cuba.

CAFRA News: Do you think that this adequately reflects a proportionate involvement by women at high levels of decision making?

Cathy: We wish to have equal amounts, but that is not what counts if we have the quality of women that need to be there. It doesn't have to be ten. Just to have one who knows how to demand the rights within that context will be enough for us. Vilma Espin first of all was a guerilla fighter in the mountains with Fidel, and she is very much respected not only by the women in our society but by the men as well. Vilma has a tremendous personality and whatever she has to say, people listen. That is what I mean when I tell you about the quality of person that's there to represent the women in the country.

CAFRA News: What has been your main impression following this CAFRA conference, now that the lines of communication have opened up with other Caribbean women?

Cathy: Let me explain something to you. I've been working with the Federation for 11 years, and I've been working with the America Department, but specifically with North America. Now I'm dealing with women's problems in agriculture and things that are closer to me than what I find in North America, and this is what has enriched me so much: to find a commonality, not only in our concerns and in our interests, but in our culture too.



Nesha Haniff

Nesha Haniff is a Guyanese women's rights activist who spends her year commuting between the United States, where she teaches at the Center for Afro-American and African Studies, University of Michigan, and her home in Guyana. Nesha is one of a growing number of Caribbean scholars committed to the struggle for recognition of women's role in Caribbean history, a subject she addresses in her recent book, Blaze a Fire (see page 26).

CAFRA News: In terms of the women's movement, how do you define yourself?

Nesha: I would consider myself a feminist, I think, in a very real sense in that I try to live it.

CAFRA News: What kind of life would you say feminism offers?

Nesha: Actually, it doesn't offer you a very nice life. Feminism offers you, I think, a life of loneliness. Essentially, you have to make certain choices in relation to your work and your priorities which do not include a whole lot of times a husband, and even children, and I think that kind of contradiction makes your life very, very difficult. And very lonely, because things still exist on men's terms. When you have terms, the men say, "OK, that's fine, but I'm gone". I understand that they should want things on their agendas, but I want things on mine and I have to make that choice.

CAFRA News: How do you define feminism, in general and in the Caribbean context?

Nesha: Feminism for me is a kind of humanism, where everybody has a right to choice; to choose whether they want to stay home or whether they want to work. I think that the right of choice is the most important thing, and I think that it's very interesting that choice is related to democracy, is related to justice. All feminism is about in the final analysis is justice.

CAFRA News: How do you see feminism contributing to social change, in terms of the Caribbean and as an ideology the whole world can benefit from?

Nesha: Feminism argues for something called gender analysis, that is, when you're developing programmes or you're doing research or you're doing academic scholarship, the role of women is as important a mode of analysis as race and class. I think that gender provides you with a view and a reality that you don't ordinarily see, because the general analysis that we have been having so far has been a male analysis. It has not been called that, but it has been male-centred. I think defining things from a woman's perspective, seeing her place in it and seeing what she is doing about it gives us a reality and a perspective that we don't normally have. In terms of problem-solving, it

gives us an enormous amount of creativity and humaneness in a variety of arenas that we don't normally have.

CAFRA NEWS: One of your preoccupations is with the denial of women's place in our history. Can we explore this a little bit more?



Illustration : Cayenne

gives us an enormous amount of creativity and humaneness in a variety of arenas that we don't normally have.

Nesha: That's something I feel very strongly about. When I was growing up in the Caribbean, being taught in Guyana - the very "wonderful" British system, which is very classic and very rigorous - we used to read West Indian history, and the West Indian history at the time, written by West Indians, excluded women. That's a very important point: even when things become culturalised or relevant in terms of race, they still do not become relevant in terms of gender. I didn't read about myself as a Caribbean woman; I didn't know that I was an important part of the making of the West Indies. As I've gotten older, and I've gotten into very serious research, I've discovered that the reason for that is because the very paradigms

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for doing research are defined by race and defined by gender, and that they are malecentric and Eurocentric. So I decided to do something about it, and I wrote this book called Blaze a Fire, which is about the significant contribution of Caribbean women, being written from the perspective of the woman. A woman who is an outstanding cane cutter has made an equally important contribution as a Prime Minister, as in Eugenia Charles. The challenge was to first re-define what success means, and to re-define what contribution is. Also, the challenge is how to write it in such a way that school children can see that it is important, because they are socialised that the literate and the powerful and the visible are more important. So I think we're doing things, but it's hard. It took me eight years to get Blaze a Fire out.



Illustration: Fran

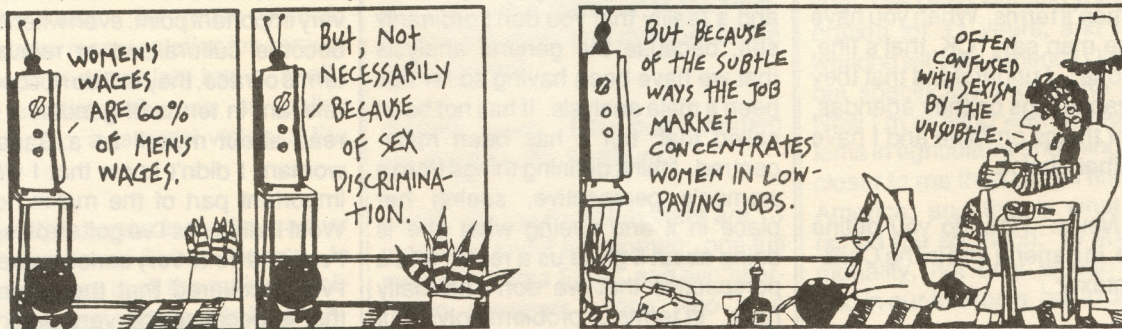
CAFRA News: Being a feminist, you are a minority person and being non-white you are in another way a minority person. Just being a woman, perhaps, in your profession I imagine you are in the category of being a minority person. How would you say this affects your life?

Nesha: In a sense, it makes you a marginal person. You're always on the margin, you're always on the periphery. I think that, although we are powerless in the indices of power, the only new ideas and new knowledge can come from us because we as women of colour have been excluded even when men of colour write; and we as women of colour have been excluded not only on the basis of colour but on the basis of gender. So that the only people I think can make new contributions to knowledge in general and ideas are people of colour and women, and that is something that really buoys me and excites me.

There's a lot to be done. Every new reality for us that is written down is a discovery, because it has not been done before. So I feel very excited about it. I don't feel negative about it at all. It's hard, but it's O.K.

CAFRA News: You spend part of your year in Guyana, and as an activist and a person very much interested in the advancement of women, you no doubt have made observations on the movement there ...

Nesha: You know, Guyana is based on a population of Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese, and I think one of the problems with the movement there has been its inability to reach women of Indo-Guyanese descent. The reason for that is that Guyanese women of Indian descent are always cloaked in an analysis of race, ethnicity and religion - which is true of most women in the world anyway, but there are very few attempts to reach those women because it is alien to them. So I thought that extra effort should have been made for them. That work is being done, I must say, by an organisation called 'Red Thread'. Their work is extremely exciting and they go out and get the women involved:



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get them involved in income-generating enterprises; get them involved in consciousness-raising enterprises. Just meeting and talking to each other outside of a religious or ritual situation is a very exciting experience for them. 'Red Thread' came out of the WPA, and I think there is a consciousness in that party that there needs to be a bridging of both races. Each racial group in Guyana has made important contributions to that society. What each group does not know is what their contribution is and the value of that contribution. The other thing that I think is important for women of Indian descent in the Caribbean is that we really have no significant female leader of those movements; that we have no woman who comes out and advocates for them, stands up and claims her Indianness. And although I myself blame the women's movement in the region for not doing that, I think there should be some advocacy from people like WAND and the other regional movements. I think it is the responsibility of women of East Indian descent to get up and start acting on it, and middle class Indo-Caribbean women are not doing anything about it.

CAFRA News: One's identity, one's heritage is very important, but there is also the case for the identification of the Caribbean person.

Nesha: That's a very important question. I have a lot of problems with people who argue for African-centredness or Indian-centred thing because both are kinds of racism but, on the other hand, people do need to understand where they come from. As a Caribbean woman, I feel very

strongly that my first identity is that of a Guyanese and I am a Guyanese unequivocally, regardless of whatever shade I am. But when I am outside the Caribbean, I'm seen as a person of colour. I'm seen often in the United States as a black person. In the Caribbean, they always think of you as something else. I think really we have to find a balance. We have to be West Indians, and we have to be Trinidadians and Jamaicans.

On the other hand, you know, the richness of the Caribbean comes from Trinidad and Guyana. The racial difference - Divali and Eid and Phagwa and Pocomania and Shango - all these things that we have are really what has made us rich, so I think we're still growing and I hope that before I die we'll see a Caribbean in which race really becomes secondary; not unimportant, but secondary.

CAFRA News: After *Blaze a Fire*, what next? How do you plan to direct

your writing in expressing your concerns about our part of the world and, of course, about women in our part of the world?

Nesha: I'm concerned about the generation of ideas as they affect what we do. What do our research experts do? What do our scholars do? What do our writers do? They go to universities in the West and they

learn theories and ideas and methodologies which are inappropriate to us. What we have to do is to de-construct that, and I am involved in that process of deconstruction in the kind of writing that I am doing. I'm about to do some work on looking at the very important journals that people have to be accepted in to get tenure at

the university, which affects all people of colour, and how that acceptance defines what you should write and what you should study and what status you get. That's the kind of stuff I'm working on.

Blaze a Fire



Significant Contributions of Caribbean Women

NESHA Z. HANIFF



Gladys do Rego

Gladys lives in Curacao, and is a founding member of the Union Muhe Antiano (UMA). She studied Adult Education and Community Development and now works as a freelance producer and writer.

CAFRA News: Is there an active women's movement in Curacao right now?

Gladys: I find that difficult to answer because in some ways there is, and in other ways there is not. Women are organised on what I call a traditional basis. The last figure I heard was about 60-70 women's organisations, but I categorise them as traditional because the main activities are social activities for their members, like tea and coffee afternoons. They do a lot of fund-raising, charity work for homes for the elderly, for handicapped children and so on. Most of them are organised in a Steering Committee, which had its origin in the International Year of Women, 1975.

CAFRA News: What about UMA?

Gladys: UMA originated in 1975 as an answer to the way we felt that not only the Steering Committee but other organisations, especially those from the U.S.A. were handling the woman question. We were more political, aggressive. We were more intellectual, doing more research. Because we were political, we were called communists, and the other familiar kinds of labels you get when you try to analyse and put things into the context of what you think are the real issues. So there has always been a differentiation between UMA, which

is not a mass organisation but a nucleus of women with an academic approach, and the Steering Committee which was led mostly by women who came out of business and professional women's clubs. Their membership consists of mostly older women. UMA introduced the commemoration of March 8, which has since become almost a tradition, and that celebration brings into focus one issue or another. Then we organised the First of May celebrations, and in the 80s we started commemorating 25 November, the day against violence. But our organisation is not as active as it used to be.

CAFRA News: Why?

Gladys: Mostly because in the 80s our organisation had some problems, which I call part of the female condition. We were younger in the 70s. Most of us were not married and still studying. Then you get married, you get your children, you get career problems, too, because being intellectual you get jobs with more responsibilities. After having the children and the jobs, you get divorce problems, emotional problems too, which quite immobilised our organisation. Also the way we were working was quite intense. It was a job beside a job. We worked almost daily

for UMA. I myself left a lot of paid jobs just to work for UMA, working virtually 24 hours a day, sleeping very little. Then I had an accident and some personal problems that kind of knocked me out of things, and that, combined with problems the other members had, stalled us. Before that we were quite active. We had the UMA women's agenda, with four major activities a year. We had a weekly radio programme; we produced audio-visuals; we brought out a newsletter six times a year. It was sometimes



Gladys do Rego

more than a double day for us to achieve all these things. The other thing that broke our back was financial problems. We were almost bankrupt. We were even selling lottery illegally just to survive and pay the debts we had.

CAFRA News: Does that mean that UMA no longer exists?

Gladys: About one and a half years ago, we had a meeting and disbanded but, you know, its like an addiction. Most of us are working on feminist projects, doing research and incorporating feminism into our jobs, and slowly we are trying to see if we can do some things together.

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CAFRA News: I'd like to shift our conversation a bit to questions of self-assessment. Do you see a relationship between your perspectives on feminism and your understanding of your own sexuality, given that in both instances you are examining your relationship with the opposite sex?

Gladys: I've recently come to some conclusions about how nature created us and what society made of us. That's why I now say that we can't talk about being liberated politically, socially and culturally without being liberated physically. We women need to start loving our bodies. We sometimes fail to realise that we have a body beyond our necks, or we only talk about the problem part of it, like when we have pain when we menstruate. One thing I realised when I ran out of energy: I realised I had a body. I was physically eliminated when I had a very bad car accident. In the first 48 hours I didn't even realise that I was dying, so when I came to, the first thing I asked was for them to go to my desk and bring the pile of unfinished work to me. They brought it for me, but they thought, "this girl is crazy". When the work was in front of me, I realised I couldn't use my hands. I was quite paralysed. I went into a rage. How could this happen to me!

CAFRA News: I suppose this was the moment when you realised you had a body?

Gladys: Two days later, I stepped into a world of real physical pain I can't describe. I was getting heroin. I was getting methoquin. I was getting valium. I was getting a cocktail of pain killers and that didn't help. That was

when I realised I had a body. I had been working so much with my brain for all those years that I wasn't aware that I had a body that could hurt physically. And that is what I'm saying, that many of us don't realise that this body consists of a lot of things that we accept as just nature-given.

CAFRA News: How long ago was this?

Gladys: Four years ago.

CAFRA News: You came out of this experience with a whole new philosophical outlook?

Gladys: Something else happened to me, that also influenced my state of thinking about myself as a woman. One of the reasons I delayed having a child was that children were not part of the scene I made for myself. I felt that I had time and that I should wait until I was 35. Well, this accident happened when I was 34, and the doctors told me that I would not be able to carry a child for the next two years because of a hip injury. I didn't make any problem of it because I had another reason to delay having a child. A year passed. Then I got pregnant. I went to a meeting in Brazil, walking on crutches. I came down with malaria while there. I was then in my sixth month and I lost the baby. Then I was really enraged when I realised what doing this feminist thing instead of staying home recovering, meant. I went to this conference with one thou-

sand, five hundred women just to be there, got malaria and lost the baby. I think that bearing a child is in some way a very, very essential part of women's realisation. There was one stage when I was part of the struggle of women against having children, but when I was pregnant I realised that this was a very profound experience that only women have. Mostly the part we hear about is this bourgeois, idealistic mother doting on the baby and how lovely it is to have a child ... you know, you just throw it away as being bourgeois propaganda. The other part you hear is that women don't want any babies any more. And we never discover this - let me call it - middle road of what child-bearing really means; seeing your body change and, really consciously, living this change that's taking place in your body. And I realised that we have to look for a balance between this thing of feeling yourself as being a woman and the philosophical part of feminism. I think that sexuality is the basis of almost everything. So I came to this conclusion about child-mother relations: in the course of history, that's the way we were enslaved, and that's the way we have to break out of this enslavement. It's not so simple as fighting for abortion or against abortion and fighting for, let's say, legalising certain things. We should start experiencing certain things; experiences we were denied; experiences we never learned to understand.





Gloria Joseph

Gloria Joseph was born in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, and educated in the U.S.A. She studied at New York University, City College and Cornell University. That was in "the troublesome sixties," says Gloria, and it was a time when she became involved in the progressive movements of the period, an experience she describes as "the radicalisation of me and my politics". Her thinking was influenced by Malcolm X in terms of "victimization, and how in America they make the victim the bad guy". Gloria is best known for her studies on capitalism and its impact on race, class and gender, and before she resigned "because they thought I was becoming too powerful," she was often referred to as the 'Queen Dean' at Cornell, where she was in charge of recruiting black students. Her works include Black Feminist Pedagogy in Capitalist White America, and Caribbean Women: Impact of Race, Sex and Class. She is also known for her critical reviews of women's literature, including works by Sistren Theatre Collective and Angela Davis.

CAFRA News: Gloria, how do you define yourself?

Gloria: I always define myself as a black feminist who views the world with a socialist perspective from an African base. As a feminist with a definite perspective on the world, all my activities are based on that ideology and philosophy. So whether I'm writing, teaching, working in the garden, travelling, attending conferences, I'm always operating from that base. I find it a very convenient, handy, valuable and worthwhile position to be in.

CAFRA News: For many women in the Caribbean, this kind of personal assessment does not seem to be so clearcut. Do you have some thoughts on this?

Gloria: Yes. In 1981, Johnnetta Cole (who is now President of Spellman College) and I got a grant and we did a photographic essay called, "Caribbean Women; The Impact of Race, Sex and Class". I did the photography and she did the interviewing. We put it together and had a very fine exhibit which we took around the U.S.A. and the Caribbean as well. At that time, when we interviewed the women, we couldn't even use the word 'black' because they would say, "I'm not black". They resented it, so we had to be very careful. The majority of women would say, "Oh, I'm not a feminist". However, once we got into conversation, we'd find out that some of their points of view were very much in keeping with the feminist outlook - yet a definite distancing of themselves from the word, rejecting the word, sometimes very strongly.

CAFRA News: True. Yet, today, there is CAFRA.

Gloria: A reason why you see CAFRA intrigued me so with its stated purpose was that black women in the Caribbean, very much like black women in the U.S.A, do not affiliate themselves or want to be associated with the women's movement.

One of the books I wrote was called, Common Differences: Conflicts in Black and White Feminist Perspectives, and I did it with a white socialist feminist from Britain, (Jill Lewis) a former colleague, and in the first chapter when I interviewed black women and asked a number of them if they thought of themselves as feminists, about ninety percent said, "No". And when I asked their reasons, they said it was a white women's movement that didn't consider their needs; they didn't feel represented. A decade has passed and the same thing is still happening. However, what is happening is that at the grassroots level, black women are forming their own feminist groups and that's why I said the stated purpose of CAFRA was so intriguing, because here were Caribbean women, predominantly black women, who were embracing a feminist perspective. In St. Croix, it's very interesting.

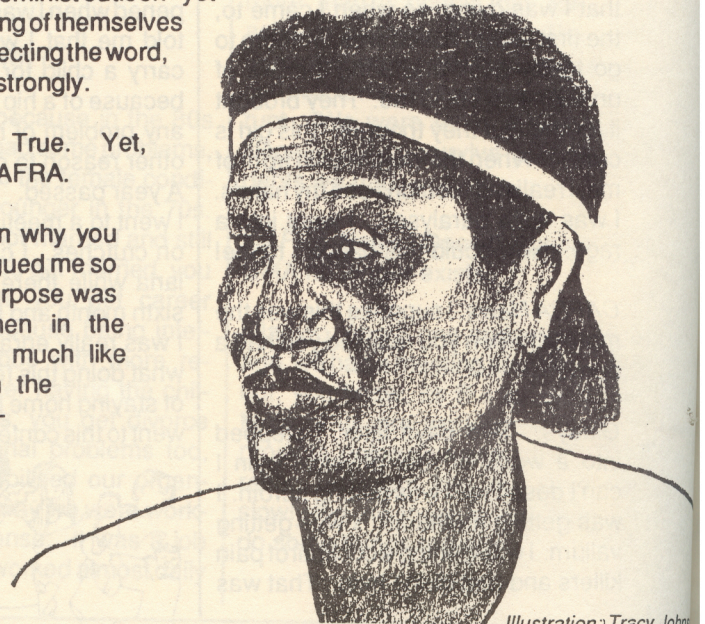


Illustration: Tracy Johns

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The majority of black women in the Women's Coalition Against Violence are States-side women who live in the islands now. We have a large Puerto Rican population, and a large number from the smaller islands and these women will utilize the services, but again they don't want the affiliation.

CAFRA News: Feminism is a bad word, eh. Why do you think this is so?

Gloria: Well, for one thing, I've discovered that black women identify themselves in relation to men. There have been myths associated with the women's movement that turn off black women. They have a natural suspicion against all-white organisations - as they should have, because whites haven't done all that much for them. And they associate it with a dislike for men, you know, the myth that there are all lesbians in it; and that they are not interested in what we're about. And it's true that white feminists generally don't deal with the problems of low socio-economic peoples. They really have a middle-class perspective; they have narrow blinkers on. But most of the women in the world are not white. Most are not rich. Most also don't speak English. So you see, it's the absence of a global perspective that makes them feel excluded, and given that they think it's about not having anything to do with men and they feel their interests are not represented, it's understandable. But then there are organisations like CAFRA.

CAFRA News: So, many people seem to feel that there is some incompatibility between the ideas of feminism and the struggle of the workingclass?

Gloria: They need to get down to the basic definition of a black feminist being concerned with the oppression of women - oppression based on their sex and oppression based on their race - they used to call it 'double jeopardy'. Just like racism. Some people say, "I'm not for Black Power; I'm not for this race thing". But you have to be if you look at it in terms of racism being the oppression of one group of people by another group that has power. Sexism is the oppression of women by patriarchy, more specifically by the white patriarchy in terms of having the power. So what woman wouldn't be concerned about liberating herself from oppression? It's obvious how sexism operates, but a lot of women - and many Caribbean women - would say they don't have problems with sexism because of the positions they hold.

And it's true that they hold a lot of administrative positions. They're the principals, in labour, lawyers. But they have to realise that until all are free, none are free. I find a real problem with, "We're not oppressed, Gloria, I tell my husband what to do". Granted, but you get to another level when you get to the courts and the judges and attorneys. We're talking about institutionalised sexism, built into the structures of our governments

the same way racism is, and that's why laws have to be changed. Just recently they had to introduce a law to restrain men from beating women. The whole term 'rule of thumb' literally meant a man could beat his wife with a switch as long as it was no thicker than his thumb! The very marriage laws are sexist; the very words 'man and wife'. If women understood that the major concern in being a black feminist is liberating women from the oppressions of racism and sexism. It's dual and you can't separate one from the other. Both of them kill.

CAFRA News: You spoke about your collaborative work on Caribbean women. Is your writing all theoretical or do you write fiction?

Gloria: Most of my writings are more theoretical than fiction, although right now I'm working on a major fiction, historical fiction. I get a lot of calls to lecture and attend conferences on the basis of some writings. There was a book called Marxism and Feminism, and they had a number of people writing chapters. My chapter was called, "Marxism, Feminism and Racism: The Incompatible Menage a Trois". It deals specifically with racism as a part of marxism. Many leftists think marxism is the answer. It's not. You have to deal specifically



Illustration: Dawn Lee

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with racism. I've just finished a piece called, "Sojourner Truth, a Twentieth Century Archetypal Feminist" where I take Sojourner and all her deeds and relate them to principles in the feminist movement, because that's how I see her.

CAFRA News: And your fiction?

Gloria: The main thing I'm working on now is called, Malcolm X meets Sojourner Truth on the Glory Road, and I have the two of them up there and they're looking down. They can beam in on whatever, on all the situations around the world. They're making comments the way I feel Malcolm and Sojourner would, up there in their revolutionaries retreat. They pass by the homes of Nanny the Maroon, Fireburn Mary and Ida B. Wells and

the boys.

Ida B. Wells has a verandah where they sit and talk. Maurice (Bishop) is up there, you know, and Nanny tells Maurice, "If you had Amazon's blood in you and could catch bullets with your buttocks, you'd still be down there ruling".

CAFRA News: Finally, Gloria, a word about your vision for the future and the role of the feminist movement. Do you see the Caribbean feminist movement as having a major impact on the shaping of a better world?

Gloria: The reason why I think it will definitely include the women of the Caribbean is because I think it is definitely going to be women of colour who make this movement. I put it very simply and say the white man made a mess of things, the black man with the

Black Power movement, they had a single issue campaign and that's not going to work. The leaders of the women's movement on a formal national level did very little more than follow the white patriarchy. I really think it's going to be the women of South Africa, women of the Caribbean, women from Central America ... I think women of the U.S.A will play their role because they have the power and resources others can use, but I definitely feel that when the change comes about - I can't say 'if', I have to say 'when' - women of colour are going to be the ones. We have to have a global perspective that is absent from so much planning for the future. And it can't be run by governments, because governments are interested in keeping the status quo. So it's going to be many, many CAFRAs that do it.

Marja Naarendorp

Marja Naarendorp first became politically active as a student in Holland. She is a member of the National Women's Movement (NVB) of Suriname, which was formed in 1982 and is the only female member on the executive of one of the country's biggest trade unions.

CAFRA News: What circumstances led to the founding of the National Women's Movement in 1982?

Marja: At that time, there was a

feeling that something had to be done to restructure our country and to get women involved in the struggle for complete independence. Suriname became independent in 1975, but was still very much economically dependent on other countries, mainly Holland. We thought it was necessary for women to take part in that development so that they could participate on all levels of society.

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Marja Naarendorp

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CAFRA News: Is this organisation party-affiliated?

Marja: No, it's an autonomous women's organisation. I had been involved in women's organisations prior to that, but this one was new. We tried to analyse the situation of women in Suriname, and we noticed that in every field women were backward, so we knew that women had to be encouraged to move up.

CAFRA News: What is your group doing to help women to rise to this challenge?

Marja: Well, we try to reach women on every level. The most important thing we do is produce a magazine for women in which we deal with all kinds of questions related to women, and we try to distribute it all over the country and educate women. Then we have different projects in which we try to get women involved. Recently under a pilot project we did a survey on cervical cancer. We developed a programme where we trained volunteers to go out to communities to encourage women to have pap smears, and so on. We worked with the Ministry of Health and the Family Planning Organisation to set up clinics in various neighbourhoods so the women would not have very far to go, and there would not be too much stress. We had a good response rate, more than 60 percent. In the beginning, the Ministry thought that five, at most ten, percent would respond. Through that survey, we were able to make contact with women in their communities and learn about other problems they had. It

encouraged us to do more work on other health issues and on other problems which they had in the community.

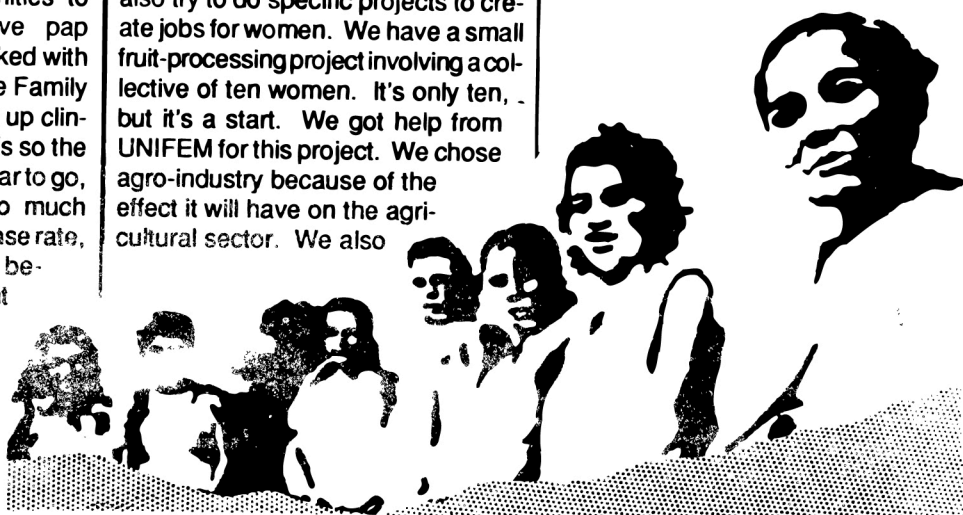
CAFRA News: Is your organisation playing a role in helping women combat the effects of economic hardship?

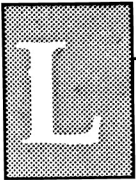
Marja: Yes. Of course, we have to explain constantly to the women what's happening, each step the government takes. For instance, the government is trying to restore its relationship with Holland, and to do so the country is really on its knees, having to accept what Holland says. We have to educate women about the nature of the relationship between the two countries: what it always has been; that we have the same dependency on the Dutch; and that nothing good came out of it in the past. On the other hand, things are scarce and there are transportation problems, etc. so people are in a position where they would accept anything, but you still have to build that consciousness. We also try to do specific projects to create jobs for women. We have a small fruit-processing project involving a collective of ten women. It's only ten, but it's a start. We got help from UNIFEM for this project. We chose agro-industry because of the effect it will have on the agricultural sector. We also

have a project where we encourage women to grow crops like paw-paw and carimbola to supply our factory. This way, we encourage women to do things for themselves and to be more independent economically. We hope to use the money from this project to start other projects in the productive sector.

CAFRA News: How do women in Suriname regard the word 'feminist'?

Marja: We do not use the word 'feminist' in Suriname because there is a big misunderstanding about it. We talk about 'the women's movement'. That doesn't mean that the ones who started it don't have a feminist perspective. We know clearly through our political analysis what feminism means. We know that no change can come for women if the economic system, the political system, the system of dependency on other countries and women's dependency on men are not changed. We know that it's a much wider struggle in which men have to be involved.





Linda Edwards-Romain

Linda Edwards-Romain was born in Trinidad and Tobago and returned home in 1983 after living in North America for fourteen years. As a freelance writer, she contributed numerous articles on feminist issues to the Trinidad and Tobago press, the regional newspaper *Caribbean Contact* and feminist magazines such as *Woman Speak!* She now works with a regional organisation in Antigua.

CAFRA News: There is a certain amount of risk in sticking your neck out and becoming involved in feminist issues in the Caribbean. How do you see women overcoming this problem? Do we remain silent on feminist issues or do we speak out?

Linda: I don't think we should ever remain silent. Once I had an article in the newspapers on sexual harassment, and the next day I received a memo from someone 'up above' (in the organisation in which I worked). They didn't mention the article, but said that they had asked me to change my behaviour and my behaviour had remained unchanged. The only thing

they could have been talking about was the article on sexual harassment.

I had received information from a person about six ranks below me in the organisation that she was being harassed by her boss. It was the kind of thing that, as a woman, I couldn't remain silent about.

When a feminist or another person in society sees an injustice, they have a moral responsibility to speak out. Even if they pay for it with their jobs, I feel that in the long run they will be better off because they took a stand on something they believed in. I think that what we need to do is band together and support each other. It's unfortunate that when I felt that I needed support from various people in Trinidad and Tobago it wasn't there. Only one person consistently wrote letters to the press supporting the positions I took. There are a lot of other

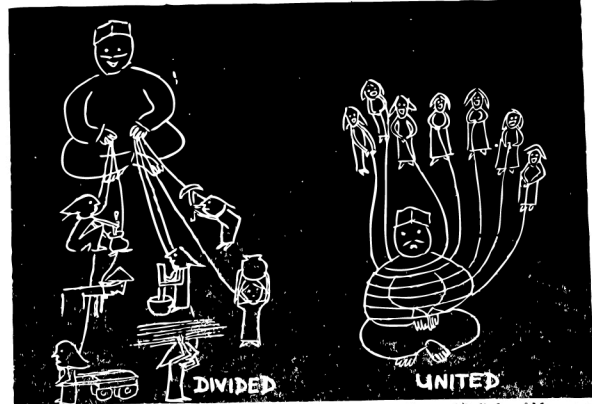
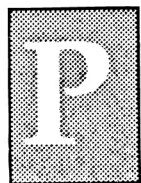


Illustration: Kali for Women

feminists in Trinidad and Tobago, but they didn't see it as necessary to speak out, so that society got the impression that people like me were almost alone. When people think you are alone they treat you differently from when they think that you have a constituency, and I think that women working in the feminist movement in Trinidad and Tobago and other places need to recognise this. If they are not openly supportive of each other, they are exposing each other to savagery, and as such they are guilty.



Palmira Rios

Born in Puerto Rico, Palmira now lives in New York where she is Deputy Director of the Center for Immigrant and Population Studies, College of Staten Island/CUNY. At the CAFRA Meeting, she was particularly forceful in arguing for the abolition of the category of Associate Member,

because of the various compelling factors which cause Caribbean women to live outside the region (political, economic, etc.). The change in membership status was subsequently approved by the meeting.

CAFRA News: One of the challenges

that we face is the challenge of unity because of language barriers, because we are distanced by water, high air fares and other factors. How do you see us dealing with this?

Palmira: I think we must congratulate the Caribbean women's movement for their consciousness and sensitivity in recognising the problem and making a very serious and systematic attempt to bridge these differences. Here in CAFRA I was able to

Continued on following page

Cont'd

experience this, and see that women from the whole region were present and were able to work together along the lines that bind us. Rather than stressing the differences, we try to work using the things we have in common. When you study the migration phenomenon historically, you'll see that Caribbean people have been migrating to places where they do not know the language; the culture seems to be different, but somehow we always manage to integrate and make a contribution and overcome those difficulties. I think that when you study those experiences, for example, of Jamaican workers going to Cuba, or now Haitians going to the Dominican Republic and Puerto Ricans to the Bahamas, we see how those people try to survive and have been able to build bridges. I guess we have to look at those experiences to see where we can learn. Another fortunate thing is that there are modern technologies we can use, for example videos, to communicate. But more important, our cultures are very similar. Regardless of whether it is Spanish or English or French, that basic African culture that is it in the whole region is something that we all have in common. Everywhere I go, things are very familiar to me. I see the same things, things that I grew up with in Puerto Rico, when I go to Haiti and I can relate to that part of the culture. When I come here to Barbados or go to the Dominican Republic or Cuba, I see that. I think if we started looking more carefully at that culture and that experience of mobility that we've had throughout the years, we're going to see that there is

much more that binds us than actually divides us, and the women's movement in the Caribbean has been very much in the forefront of that kind of struggle. In addition to promoting the interests of women in society, I would say that the women's movement in the region has been instrumental in bringing real Caribbean unity, and that has been a major contribution of the movement towards the region as a whole.

CAFRA News: Tell us something



Illustration: Cayenne

about the forthcoming conference (March 1989) at the Schomburg Centre on 'Survival and Resistance: Black Women in the Americas'.

Palmira: It's a preliminary step towards an exhibition in 1991 on the same theme. We think it will be a major contribution, because we hope to bring together black women from Latin America and the Caribbean and from North America. We hope we can come together and recognise the commonalities of our experience, regardless of national origin, and also look at the differences, not as a way of dividing us further, but rather as a way of bringing us together. The exhibition will highlight the contribution that black women have made, and are still making, to our continent. I think it is significant because many of

our nations are now engaged in the celebration of the so-called 'discovery' of America, and that has been posed in a kind of Western European perspective: white Europeans discovered America, and somehow we managed to get here. And when it comes to women, they're not even mentioned. We want to bring it to the forefront that black women played a key role in the making of this continent, in the reproductive process, not only biological but cultural and social, and that this can be documented in each and every country of the Americas.

CAFRA News: Your theme, 'Survival and Resistance', is probably quite appropriate for these times, when in the Caribbean economic crises are demanding great strength.

Palmira: Well, the crises highlight once more the ability of the black woman to survive under crisis; that under circumstances of scarcity and stress, she is always able somehow to manage resources and make possible the survival of our people. That is often ignored by scholars, policy makers, etc. who in their ignorance often make it harder for us because our work is not taken into account. So when they are devising policies supposedly to deal with these crises, they are often putting obstacles to those very same methods that we use to survive. When you look back, you realise that we've always been putting things together in very unorthodox ways, and that is part of a tradition. So when we confront a new crisis we are using that historical tradition to deal with the new problem.

Linda Carty

Linda Carty is a Canadian-based CAFRA member. Born in St. Kitts-Nevis, she is now resident in Toronto. She has recently completed her thesis, on Gender Relations at the University of the West Indies, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

CAFRA News: Are you actively involved in the women's movement in Canada?

Linda: Yes, I belong to the Black Women's Collective, which actually came out of a conflict that took place around International Women's Day in 1986. The conflict was over how we (black women) would like to work on our own behalf and what we perceive as working together in the struggle with white women, without them dictating to us.

CAFRA News: Have relations improved? Have you now as an independent body found that you are better able to communicate on these issues?

Linda: We don't perceive the problem as our problem. We think that we are all in the struggle together, but we think that black women must be able to identify what they perceive as problems around racial issues and should be able to talk openly about racism without worrying about white women saying they're so offended and they're so hurt - you know, it's our struggle. That has been our reality in those white, capitalist countries, so we formed our collective and we do our work, because we consider ourselves having a lot of work to do in the black community.

CAFRA News: What is the basis of your work in the Black Collective? Where do you place most emphasis?

Linda: Well, it's praxis and theory combined. The collective has academic women, grassroots women, community workers - it is a cross-section of black women in Toronto. There's a lot of activism and we pick up on any issue that we believe to be working against black women in Canada, and particularly in Toronto.

CAFRA News: There's a massive migration from the Caribbean to Toronto. Do you find that you are able to interest the majority of these women from the Caribbean in participating in the work of the collective?

Linda: No, not really. People are involved in their own personal struggles and, I'm sure you're aware, life is an eternal struggle for people who migrate to these places. People are caught up with their material conditions, and that is their primary focus. But of course you can't have everybody as part of a struggle, you know. That's a struggle in itself. We work with whoever is interested. Getting the work done is the essential thing right now.

CAFRA News: Feminism is still a bad word in the Caribbean, carrying with it many negative connotations. Do you perceive yourself as a feminist?

Linda: Oh yeh, but I went through that stage too, of being involved and being

part of the struggle and doing my activism, and then never saying I was feminist. But being a black woman in North America, that has a context. The women's movement was perceived as being white. It had all kinds of connotations that I couldn't relate to. It didn't include racism, refused to look at issues of race and class, so I couldn't relate to that. If that was what feminism was going to be, then I wasn't going to be a feminist. So, for me, labels became secondary. I didn't care what they called themselves. I was concerned about the work that I was doing as a black woman, how I was advancing the struggle for black women. I think that one thing that must be credited to black women was to introduce gender, race and class as a component in the (women's) struggle



particularly because of the Eurocentric ideas in the struggle in North America. As black women in a white society we have to look at race and, of course, class. Now there are a lot of white women who are feminist and who are part of the struggle who still refuse to look at it that way, but there has been an advancement in that area. Now I have no qualms about being called a feminist. If what I do is feminist, then so be it.

R

eports from the region

The following are extracts from two of the reports presented to the CAFRA General Meeting from the non-English-speaking Caribbean.

Puerto Rico

The contemporary feminist movement in Puerto Rico began its renewal at the end of the sixties. We must remember it was a world-wide phenomenon. The increasing number of women in the labour force in the formal and informal sectors of the economy brought out the still existing inequalities in salary and other job regulations. The amount of women seeking an educational degree also increased dramatically, and the typical family structure experienced a radical change when more and more women got separated or divorced and became family heads. The Puerto Rican society shared all of these situations which definitely contributed to the creation of an appropriate climate for the rise of feminism.

We must also underline the importance of historical research that, at least in Puerto Rico, rediscovered a forgotten and ignored past of feminist struggles. In my opinion, this reconstruction has helped to consolidate a movement by giving it a historical dimension that was traditionally neglected in almost all of the dominant historical discourse.

As a result of all these factors, the feminist movement began to consolidate. New organisations were formed, like *Mujer Integrate Ahora* (MIA - 1972) and *Federacion de Mujeres Puertorriquenas* (1977); and new journals

and magazines were started (*Tacon de la Chancleta*, *Palabra de Mujer*). In 1974 the government inaugurated the Commission for the Improvement of Women, recognising that there were a lot of things to improve in women's status. During its first years, it did important research on sex stereotypes in education, publishing several instructional supplements in order to improve women's presence in educational materials. The first Conference on Puerto Rican Women was held in 1977, with a large representation of women from almost all sectors of our society. That same year the first shelter for battered and raped women was also inaugurated, followed by others of the same kind during the next years.

During the 80s, there was an important achievement for the feminist movement when the first women's centre was established at the University of Puerto Rico. Though it lasted for only two years, it was a first step that opened the door for other centres established later. Outside the University, in 1983, *Feministas en Marcha* was founded. One of the most important contributions of this organisation has been the annual celebration of the "Golden Pig Awards", to denounce and criticise the sexist and denigratory advertising frequently seen and listened to on television, radio and in the newspapers. Together with FEM there is another feminist group of scholars and professional women

called the *Organizacion de la Mujer Trabajadora* that occasionally sponsors conferences and is engaged in some research. During these years, the governmental "Commission of Women" has been mostly engaged with the topic of sexual harassment, fighting hard for the approval of a new law - passed by the legislature last March - that prosecutes sexual harassment in the workplace. This law, presented by a woman legislator, had very strong opposition inside the House of Representatives, but it was finally approved due to the strong networking support of the feminist organisations in Puerto Rico.



Finally, I must underline the importance of the feminist work that is going on at the University of Puerto Rico. On the Rio Piedras campus, there is a group (CERES) attached to the Social Research Centre, mainly devoted to academic research. On the Cayey campus is the Women's Studies Project. (Note: this project - *Pro Mujer* - was described in the last issue of *CAFRA News*, ed.)

These groups (the ones inside the University and outside it) are of tremendous value to the feminist movement. Feminist ideas are already a part of our daily life, but we still lack effective and strong ways to educate more men and women on our issues. In a society like ours, with tremendous technological developments and one of the highest consumption pat-

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terns in the Caribbean, we must emphasise that progress and development involve more than "economic prosperity". There is no development when there is not fair and equal treatment for all human beings. In this sense, research, dissemination and education are three of the most important tasks that feminist groups have ahead.

Yamila Azize

Guadeloupe, French Guiana and Martinique

The period immediately following World War II (1944-47) fostered an awareness in women of their roles in society, and they began to reflect on their condition as women.

At that time, a group of women, among whom were certain active communists like Jeanne Lero from Martinique and Gerty Archimede from Guadeloupe, created the first feminist-type organisations to exist in those islands outside the political parties. These organisations were the Union des Femmes de Martinique (UFM - Union of Martiniquean Women) created in June 1944, and the Union des Femmes Guadeloupeennes (UFG - Union of Guadeloupean Women) established in July-August 1947.

The women's liberation movement in Europe, the globalisation of women's problems with the International Women's Year (1975) and the U.N. decade brought about the creation of some women's groups and associations, and dynamised others, nota-

bly: the Mouvement des Femmes de Guyane (MFG - Movement of Women of French Guiana), in 1974; the Comité Permanent de Soutien aux Femmes Agressées (CPSFA - Permanent Committee of Support for Battered Women), in 1978; the feminist centre 'Femme Avenir' in Martinique, which has renewed activities since 1978; the creation of service clubs such as the Soroptimist Clubs in the three territories; the emergence of groups of female managers in Martinique and Guadeloupe; and working groups structured around problems concerning women in the Family Planning Association and the Family Centre for Study, Documentation, Information and Training of the Family in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

The UFM began as the Martiniquean section of the Union of French Women, but has been functioning as an autonomous organisation since the 1960s in Fort de France and other districts, and produces a newspaper, Martiniquan Women. Its activities are centred around the defense of the rights of women, children and the family; the political, economic and social situation in Martinique; and international solidarity and the struggle for peace.

The UFG manages a permanent women's education centre, the 'Solitude Centre', established with the help of the city of Pointe-a-Pitre. This is one means that the organisation has of disseminating information. It also develops its main themes in a newspaper, Madras. These are: conscientisation of women and women's specific problems; changing life in our society - the political,

economic and social situation and the problem of decolonisation in Guadeloupe; and the struggle for peace.

The MFG was created in 1974 at the time when some Guianese were being held prisoners in the Prison de la Sante in Paris. Their newsletter, Guyanaise, is centred around such priorities as the struggle against unemployment and the high cost of living, cultural identity and the life of women in rural areas.

The CPSFA was created in 1978 in Martinique following two cases of crimes of violence against women. The association struggles against the numerous violent crimes against women in Fort de France and surrounding areas. It also mobilizes around specific women's problems and has given new impetus to the celebration of 8 March in Martinique. All of this is done through its newspaper, Fanm Leve, Fanm Doubout.

The achievements of the feminist movement in the French West Indies can be considered positive. Women have benefitted legally through measures that have been taken by the French government following pressure by French women and action taking place in our territories. However, inequalities remain flagrant from the point of view of qualifications, professional training and job access. Sexual information is far from general, and the macho concept is still very strong.

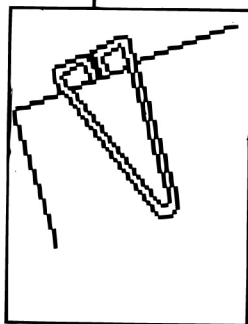
The priorities of the four organisa-

Continued on following page

M Meetings Conferences, Fellowships, etc.

MARCH 1989

Survival and Resistance: Black Women in the Americas, March 1989, Schomburg Centre, New York. A regional conference on the contribution of black women to the making of the Americas is being held by the Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture, which is engaged in collecting, preserving and promoting black culture world-wide. The conference is intended to identify the areas which should be addressed by an exhibition of the same name to be held in 1991, to collect materials and information and to network with women and women's groups for the purpose of sourcing suitable material for exhibit. For further information, contact Miriam Jimenez Roman, Research Co-ordinator, Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture, 515 Malcolm X Boule-



vard, New York, NY 10037, U.S.A. (and see p. 21).

MAY 1989

Creative Writing Seminar The CAFRA Women's History project is holding a 2-week Creative Writing Seminar in Trinidad and Tobago in May 1989

(exact dates still to be finalised). The seminar is meant to help struggling writers focus on their medium, in particular poetry, the short story and oral histories, through intensive tutoring and workshops by published women writers. Available funding can accomo-

date a maximum of 20 participants. Interested women should submit an application which includes a background of efforts at writing and examples of work done. The deadline for applications is 15 March, 1989.

MAY - JUNE 1989

Summer Institute on Gender and Development Saint Mary's University and Dalhousie University will offer a Summer Institute on Gender and Development, May 29-June 23 1989, as part of their joint International Development Studies programme (IDS). The Institute is funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Ottawa. The course will discuss the subject of gender and development in developing countries and in Canada. It aims to help students develop their theoretical understanding, research skills, and policy analysis in this field of study. The course is open to honours and graduate students as well as to non-degree participants who meet the course qualifications. Applications should be received by February 1, 1989. Scholarships for Third World students are available on a competitive basis. Contact Women and Development Unit, International Development Studies, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3H 3C3.

French Caribbean

continued from previous page

tions, therefore, are: the education of girls; professional training of women; the creation of day-care centres and nurseries with appropriate hours; creation of recreational facilities; improvements in housing; and the defense of battered women and children.

However, over the past two years, we have witnessed a certain stagnation in the struggle of women. Why is this?

Is it due to the fact that successive French governments have integrated some of the demands of the feminist movement into their policies? Or is it due to the fact that our societies are slow to change and discourage the attempts of the many middle class women who started the movement? Or is it due to women's lack of confidence in their own sisters (no women having been elected to posts of high responsibility)?

The future of the women's movement

seems to be in the trade union movement. The social sectors that are dynamic are those that are entirely or mostly dominated by women, such as the hotel industry, domestic employment and the public service.

However, despite this, the problems of mobilization remain real.

Cecile Celma (translated by Jasmine Huggins)

Statement on Grenada

The Women's Forum, a recently formed Barbadian group (see p. 31) has issued the following statement on the 5th anniversary of the invasion of Grenada:

The Women's Forum uses the fifth anniversary of the violent break-up of the People's Revolutionary Government, and the equally violent invasion of Grenada, to record our dissatisfaction with developments since the invasion and to make recommendations for change.

The Women's Forum, a group of women dedicated to analysing and working towards progressive change in the Caribbean, directs attention to the urgent need for national and regional action on events shaping Grenada's future. Following the overthrow of the PRG, the United States of America confiscated and continues to hold critical documents belonging to the government and people of Grenada.

Absence of these documents creates a vacuum which is unjustified and socially damaging especially to young Grenadians growing up with experiences only of annual celebrations of the landing of American troops, and no record of the gains made by Grenadians during 1979-1983.

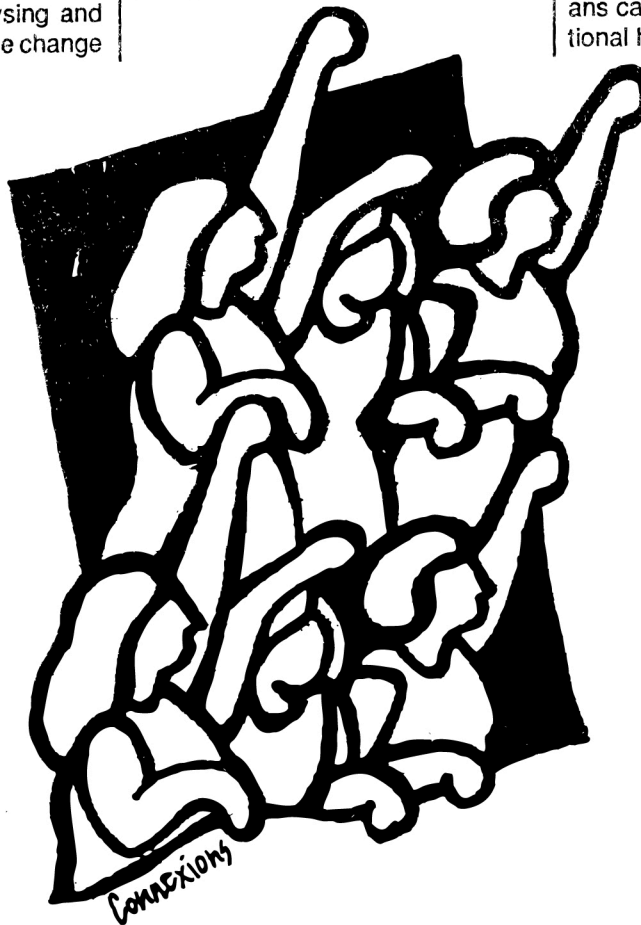
The absence of twenty-five tons of government documents constitutes a major

gap in the Grenada government's ability to analyse the economic planning of the PRG and to formulate policy.

Control of this material makes the USA and whoever it chooses to make privy to it the only source of hard information and interpretation on Grenada's history during this period. Caribbean scholarship is again denied the basic right of documenting the people's history from the people's perspective. Continued USA control also increases opportunities for tampering with records.

The Women's Forum urges the Grenadian government to recognise the loss of Grenadian lives during the 1983 crisis. The Prime Minister of the country was assassinated along with members of his cabinet. The Women's Forum regrets that the only official recognition of lives lost in Grenada is the prominent plaques on the two campuses of the St. George's University School of Medicine honouring American soldiers killed during the invasion. We recommend that the Grenadian government provide official acknowledgement of the loss of Grenadian lives, otherwise Grenadians cannot begin the process of national healing.

The Women's Forum recommends to the Grenadian government that they rename the Point Salines Airport the Maurice Bishop International Airport. Bishop and his administration implemented as its biggest capital investment project the construction of an international airport. This was to replace the inadequate Pearls airstrip and provide the necessary infrastructure to increase trade and tourism. It is ironic that this airport is now the main plank of the tourism development strategy of the New National Party (NNP) government. The Women's Forum sees this renaming as an appropriate acknowledgement of the foresight and planning of Maurice Bishop and his government.



C Caribbean Encuentro

Readers may recall that the March and June issues of CAFRA News gave notice of a forthcoming 'Feminist Encuentro of the Caribbean Islands', to be held in the Dominican Republic in mid-1989. This meeting has now been postponed, as the following extracts from a letter received by the CAFRA office in November explains:



(The Committee charged with organising the Encuentro is unable) to host it on the proposed dates for the following reasons:

1. We don't want the Encuentro to be undertaken by only two or three islands, and thus far, most of the Caribbean women and groups to whom the proposal was sent haven't responded.
2. Without support from the whole, it is difficult for the provisional international committee to carry out its work.
3. Setting up such an event as this one requires a substantial amount of funds, which we were not sure could be obtained in the period of time remaining.
4. An event of such importance requires careful planning, as well as the establishment of a wider communica-

tions network so that information may reach all the islands. This is a lengthy process which we doubt can be accomplished by next year.

5. As to the possibility of holding the event in the following year, two obstacles arise: first, the Dominican national elections are to be held in 1990 and the political outlook for the period is somewhat uncertain; second,

the Fifth Latin American Encuentro is scheduled to take place in Buenos Aires that year.

For the reasons outlined above, we've come to the conclusion that we would not be able to host the Encuentro in either of the next two years.

We do, however, welcome the challenge for 1991, unless another country is willing to assume responsibility for organising it at an earlier date. If so, we would appreciate your letting us know as soon as possible so that both the international committee and the national group now preparing the Encuentro for 1991 can redefine their tasks.

At the present time, and in preparation for the regional event, we are in the process of organising the First National Feminist Encuentro, now scheduled for the summer of 1989.

With hope that the dream of this Caribbean meeting so many of us share may come true, we send our warmest sisterly greetings. For the Dominican organising commission,

Sagrada Bujosa and Sergia Galvan.

Cafra Vacancy

Accountant

(full-time)

Qualifications and experience required:

- (i) A.C.C.A./C.P.A. or equivalent;
- (ii) familiarity with computers a must; and
- (iii) minimum 3 years experience. Auditing background preferable.

Please send detailed C.V. to the CAFRA office by 15 February, 1989.

WOMEN WORKING WORLDWIDE

an organisation which supports the struggles of women workers internationally through information exchange

seeks contact with individuals, groups or trade unions working and/or organising in the global micro-electronics industry for contributions to a handbook for women working in the industry. We're especially interested in examples of organising actions (whether formal or informal, successful or not) which will strengthen the struggles for better rights and conditions in all countries.

**Please write to: WWW, PO Box 92,
Upper Street, London N1 1RQ,
England**

C onference Reports

Ten years later ... WAND's 10th Anniversary Celebrations

Barbados, 7-11 November, 1988

For those of us who have been involved in the Caribbean women's movement over the last ten years, the 10th Anniversary Consultation and Symposium of the Women and Development Unit (WAND) was certainly a historic milestone. The initial part of this two-part event, the three-day Consultation, was limited to representatives of selected women's organisations of the region. The two-day Symposium which followed incorporated a wider representation of regional and international agencies and organisations.

The Consultation was particularly significant, as it provided an opportunity for the growing women's movement in the Commonwealth Caribbean to evaluate its progress, strengths, weaknesses, gains and losses and to begin charting strategies for the future.

While for some of us immersed in the movement its existence is never in question, the Consultation reminded us of the large constituency of organised women, let alone women not involved in organisations, who have been only marginally touched by the new women's movement and by feminist discourse and action. Of particular importance were the large number of women organised in religious, trade union and political party-based organisa-

tions, some of whom were exposed for the first time at this Consultation to the issues raised by the movement. At the same time, some of the representatives of these organisations gave us the feeling that they were now ready to take on this aspect of their struggle, if the right kind of advice and support could be made available from sister organisations.

The request by Cynthia Satney of the St. Lucia Union of Teachers, for example, for support in the struggle for the rights of unmarried teachers was

Female loyalty and allegiance to male-dominated structures - party, trade union, organised religion - was identified as a major issue for consideration by the movement in this sub-region in the future.

Juxtaposed against these mass organisations of women were the smaller feminist-oriented women's groups. Examples of these included The Group of Trinidad and Tobago, SISTREN of Jamaica, the Belize Rural Women's Association (BRWA) and the regional feminist network, CAFRA.



Peggy Antrobus (right) at the closing ceremony

one such case in point.

Those of us present will never forget the historic declarations made by women of various political parties of the region, varying from left to centre. They all recognised the need for women to overcome party divisions and work together in their own interests as women and for the Caribbean people in general.

What became clear from these discussions was the relatively smaller size/membership of these organisations vis-à-vis those mentioned earlier. In spite of their small size, however, these groups have sometimes performed a vanguard-type function by raising key feminist and wider social issues such as sexual violence, free trade zones and media exploitation of women's bodies. This has had the effect of

radicalising or 'feministising' (if we may coin a new word) some of the traditional women's groups and the wider society. This has been achieved through a variety of mechanisms and media, including the use of theatre, newspapers, public forums and campaigns.

One conclusion which could be drawn from this is that the practice which has already developed in this sub-region

Cont'd

of collaboration between feminist and traditional women's organisations, such as the YWCA, Business and Professional Women's Club, etc. has to be strengthened and widened to incorporate structural programmes with women organised in the mass organisations discussed earlier.

Another issue raised was that of special interest groups of women, groups which have not as yet received adequate attention from the regional women's movement. In this case, the two groups identified were the aged/elderly and disabled women. The presence in this Consultation of two stalwart representatives of these groups - Sybil Francis and Nathalie Giraudel - ensured that these women had a voice.

All of these discussions took place

within the wider context of the present (Third World) economic crisis and the policies of structural adjustment which have been adopted to varying degrees in most of our countries. This theme was carried over into the 2-day Symposium and elaborated upon in the Keynote presentation of Professor Rex Nettleford, head of the University of the West Indies Extra Mural Department of which WAND is a unit, and the panel presentations of DAWN (Developing Alternatives for Women Now) and PACCA (Policy Alternatives for the Caribbean and Central America) on 'Alternative Visions for the Caribbean'.

For me, this 5-day meeting marked in an embryonic way the emergence of a new feminist politics in our region: a politics which challenges traditional notions of power and the organisation

of power structures in society. Most participants, however, were a bit disappointed that a new economics or political economy was not visible on the horizon. The new feminist politics is nowhere without a viable economic base. The call for economic alternatives was loudly made on the last day of the Symposium - alternatives which do not necessitate the exploitation of oppressed classes and ethnic groups or of women by men. And an economics which is not antagonistic to mother nature/the environment. This to me is one of the greatest challenges still facing our movement as change at one level is only possible with change at the other.

Rhoda Reddock

Continued on following page.

News, News, News

Help for Hurricane Victims

Money was collected from participants at the 10th Anniversary Celebrations of WAND (see p. 28) for victims of Hurricane Gilbert in Jamaica. Hearing that the meeting had received an appeal from Nicaragua for assistance in the wake of Hurricane Joan, however, a decision was made by the Jamaican sisters present to give the entire sum collected to victims of that storm living on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, the majority of whom are descendants of Jamaican migrants.

Secretariat Members Move on

Ramabai Espinet, previously a member of the CAFRA Secretariat and Co-ordinator of the Women's History Project, has moved to Canada and is working with the Centre for Caribbean Dialogue. Gemma Tang Nain, who was the National Representative for Trinidad and Tobago, is now studying at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Holland.

Cont'd Conference Reports

III Meeting of the Women's Continental Front Against Intervention, October 3-7, 1988, Havana, Cuba.

On behalf of CAFRA, I attended the III Meeting of the Women's Continental Front Against Intervention, which was held at the International Conference Centre in Havana Cuba.

I left Trinidad and Tobago on Wednesday 28 September for Jamaica, along with four representatives of other organisations. Here, I attended a meeting of the Women's Research and Outreach Centre (WROC), at which I delivered greetings from CAFRA and explained the role of the association. I was also pleased to present them with a box of foodstuffs and clothing collected by the CAFRA Secretariat for distribution among families who were affected by Hurricane Gilbert. In Jamaica, the sisters were kindly hosted by members of Sistren Theatre Collective.

The contingent arrived in Cuba on 29 September. The next day, a meeting of the Caribbean representatives was held so that we could introduce ourselves and develop a spirit of solidarity. These representatives consisted of: one from Antigua; three from Haiti; eleven from Jamaica; three from Suriname; two from Guyana; and five from Trinidad and Tobago.

The conference, which lasted for five days, with one day dedicated exclusively to tours, was attended by 1,200 delegates from Latin America and the Caribbean, along with observers from other countries such as the U.S.A., Italy, Australia, Czechoslovakia, Namibia, Germany and The Phillipines.

The basic objectives realised by this conference (from my own point of view) were: (i) the debating of the pressing problems of women of the Caribbean; (ii) strengthening the struggles and encouraging solidarity; (iii) strengthening ties and developing the network of women's organisations in the region; (iv) increasing the awareness of mutual concerns; and (v) the promotion and strengthening of the work of the Front.



Centre for Women's Resources

The delegates were separated into workshops according to their choice of topic. The topics (which were discussed in accordance with given guidelines) were: (i) Women in Politics; (ii) Women and the Crisis; and (iii) Communications. I chose to attend the first of these, and made two presentations: one on the way women are perceived in politics in Trinidad and Tobago, and the other on the topic of solidarity. I attempted to show how CAFRA promotes solidarity among women's organisations and individual feminists through its role and function.

I also attended a meeting of black women who were in attendance at the conference, the stated objectives of which were: (i) to analyse the situation of black women in Latin America and the Caribbean; (ii) to develop a proposal to be submitted to the Front; and (iii) to develop a strategy of communication among ourselves.

The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) who hosted this conference must be commended for their organi-

zing abilities. In addition to the conference, we were entertained with several cultural and fashion shows and exhibitions, including a dress rehearsal of the National Ballet of Cuba. We also visited and were entertained by the women operating at the level of general membership in the FMC, and tours were arranged to places of interest in accordance with our choices.

The conference was closed by the Head of State, Commander in Chief Fidel Castro, who held a reception for the delegates at the Palace of the Revolution.

This conference enabled me to meet and speak with a diverse number of women belonging to several organisations and therefore develop new links for CAFRA. CAFRA News was disseminated, but I regret that more copies were not made available to me for distribution and that we could not supply newsletters in Spanish.

By reason of its aims and objectives and its work, I see CAFRA as the Caribbean counterpart of the Women's Continental Front Against Intervention. It is therefore necessary for CAFRA to decide whether and how it will accept the challenge to establish itself as a priority co-ordinating point or base of solidarity for women's organisations in the Caribbean, and the major bridge between the women's movement in the region and the world at large, including the Women's Continental Front Against Intervention.

Karen Bart-Alexander

Carifem Update

GUYANA

Women's Health Workshops

The Women's Progressive Organisation (WPO) has embarked on a series of seminars which are geared to assist rural women with facts pertaining to sex education, family planning and menopause. These seminars will serve to educate women about questions of their bodies especially in view of the fact that abortions in Guyana are not done legally at government-owned hospitals. As a result, many women who have become pregnant and cannot afford to have an abortion at a private hospital, are resorting to out-dated methods which can impair them severely. Few have any idea of birth control methods. While there are family planning clinics in some parts of the country, there is still a need for de-centralisation whereby this type of education can reach out to more women.

Our experience has shown that social workers in the WPO have come up against many young women in the country areas who are ashamed or embarrassed to discuss sex openly. Therefore, we see it as an urgent task to discuss this matter with them in the hope that initial barriers can be broken down and then it will be easier for frank discussions to take place. It is not an easy task. However, each worker uses her own technique in reaching out to the women. We start by "gaffing" with them about mutual interests and then gradually introduce the topics. Once the initial barrier is broken down, women tend

to ask many questions about all aspects of sex life.

Once this period is over, a programme is planned whereby a medical expert gives a lecture to the women, followed up by discussions at a later stage.

The subject of menopause is one which has not engaged enough attention of medical personnel here, in dealing with women who are going through that period of their life. We feel that there is a definite need for this type of dialogue since a certain section of women, especially those coming from the underprivileged group, are the ones prone to this lack of understanding of the different changes taking place in their bodies. The WPO in a series of lectures on this subject last year found that many women in the rural areas were ignorant of menopause and expressed amazement when the doctors referred to symptoms which they all agreed they had had or were having.

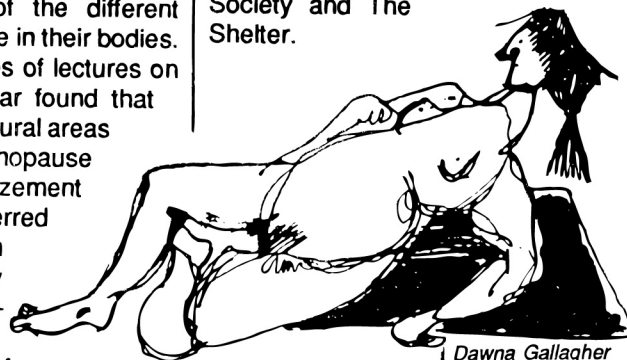
Women complained of how much money they spent on doctors' bills because they thought they had some serious illness. Therefore, we feel that this type of education is vital for the underprivileged women who are unable to spend much needed cash when a little education can solve the problems. These seminars are on-going, and we see them as projects that can assist tremendously.

Indra Chandarpal

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Coalition Against Domestic Violence

The Trinidad and Tobago Coalition against Domestic Violence was formally launched in Port of Spain in October 1988. The Coalition comprises three non-governmental organisations which were established in response to the problem of violence against women and children: the Halfway House, the Rape Crisis Society and The Shelter.



According to Annette Rahael, Secretary/Treasurer of the Coalition, the groups decided to unite since they were working for the same cause and competing for the same limited resources. The objectives of the Coalition include sensitizing and educating the public on the problem of domestic violence as well as raising funds to assist organisations which provide services for the victims of domestic violence.

It has been found in other countries that the incidence of domestic vio-

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lence decreases when people become aware of what it is and what can be done about it. Thus the first activity of the Coalition was to initiate Domestic Violence Awareness month in October, during which various activities were held including public lectures, radio and television programmes and exhibits in shopping malls throughout Trinidad.

The Rape Crisis Society runs the Rape Crisis Centre in Port of Spain. The Centre was set up in November 1984 and provides counselling services for survivors of crimes of sexual violence and public education programmes. It is partly funded by the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

The Halfway House, a shelter for battered women and children, was set up in April 1986 by the Business and Professional Women's Club of South Trinidad. It caters to 20-30 persons at a time. Residents stay up to three months, during which time

they receive counselling and assistance. The shelter costs TT\$8,000 per month to maintain and its continued operation depends on fund-raising activities and donations from the public.

The Shelter, a home for battered women and children in Port of Spain, has been in operation for just over a year. It is run by a group of women and is funded by private donations and volunteers. Residents can stay for up to four months and receive counselling and assistance in budgeting, stress management, assertiveness training and life skills.

BARBADOS

The Women's Forum

The Women's Forum is a recently formed body of women in Barbados dedicated to analysing Barbadian and Caribbean society and working to-

wards progressive change. Their major objectives are:

- to strengthen women's voices in discussions of political, economic, social and cultural developments;
- to provide a forum for concerned, progressive Barbadian and Caribbean women to express their views on the socio-political economy of Barbadian and Caribbean society; and
- to influence policy makers exposed traditionally and primarily to the views of men.

From time to time, the Forum plans to release statements on issues important to Barbadian and Caribbean society. The first of these is featured on p. 27. For further information, contact Diane Cummins, Chairperson, The Women's Forum, Pegwell Park, Christ Church, Barbados.



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CAFRA NEWS.

NEWSLETTER OF THE CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATION FOR FEMINIST RESEARCH AND ACTION

CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATION FOR FEMINIST RESEARCH AND ACTION

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

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

PRIORITY RESEARCH/ ACTION AREAS

PRIORITY AREAS FOR RESEARCH

- (i) The Caribbean Basin Initiative.
- (ii) Population Control Policies in the Caribbean.
- (iii) Peace in the Caribbean.
- (iv) History of women's labour and struggle in the region.
- (v) Women's cultural expression as an instrument for the building of power.
- (vi) Sexual violence.
- (vii) Women and trade.
- (viii) Social and Economic conditions of women.
- (ix) Women in Caribbean Agriculture.
- (x) Caribbean family forms: - history, present trends and future directions.
- (xi) Women in Caribbean Literature.
- (xii) A directory of feminists and female professionals in the Caribbean region.

STRUCTURE OF CAFRA

1. The Secretariat
 - (a) The Executive
Co-ordinator - Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen
Admin. Assistant - Tina Johnson
 - (b) The Committee
 - Patricia Mohammed
 - Gaietry Pargass
 - Stephanie Pile
 - Rhoda Reddock
 - Cathy Shepherd

2. The National Representatives

Belize - Diane Haylock
Dominica - Noreen John
Guyana - Indra Chandarpal
Jamaica - Joan French
Martinique - Liliane Marchal
St. Vincent and the Grenadines - Nelcia Robinson
Suriname - Marja Naarendorp
Trinidad and Tobago - Karen Bart-Alexander

In the following countries, CAFRA has members but no appointed National Representatives: Anguilla, Bahamas, Barbados, Canada, Curacao, Dominican Republic, England, Guadeloupe, Puerto Rico, St. Croix, The Netherlands and U.S.A.

MEMBERSHIP

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

Annual Membership Fee

Individuals: 25 units in currency of residence
Organisations: 35 units in currency of residence
(Payable by cheque, money order or cash in currency of residence or US\$)

