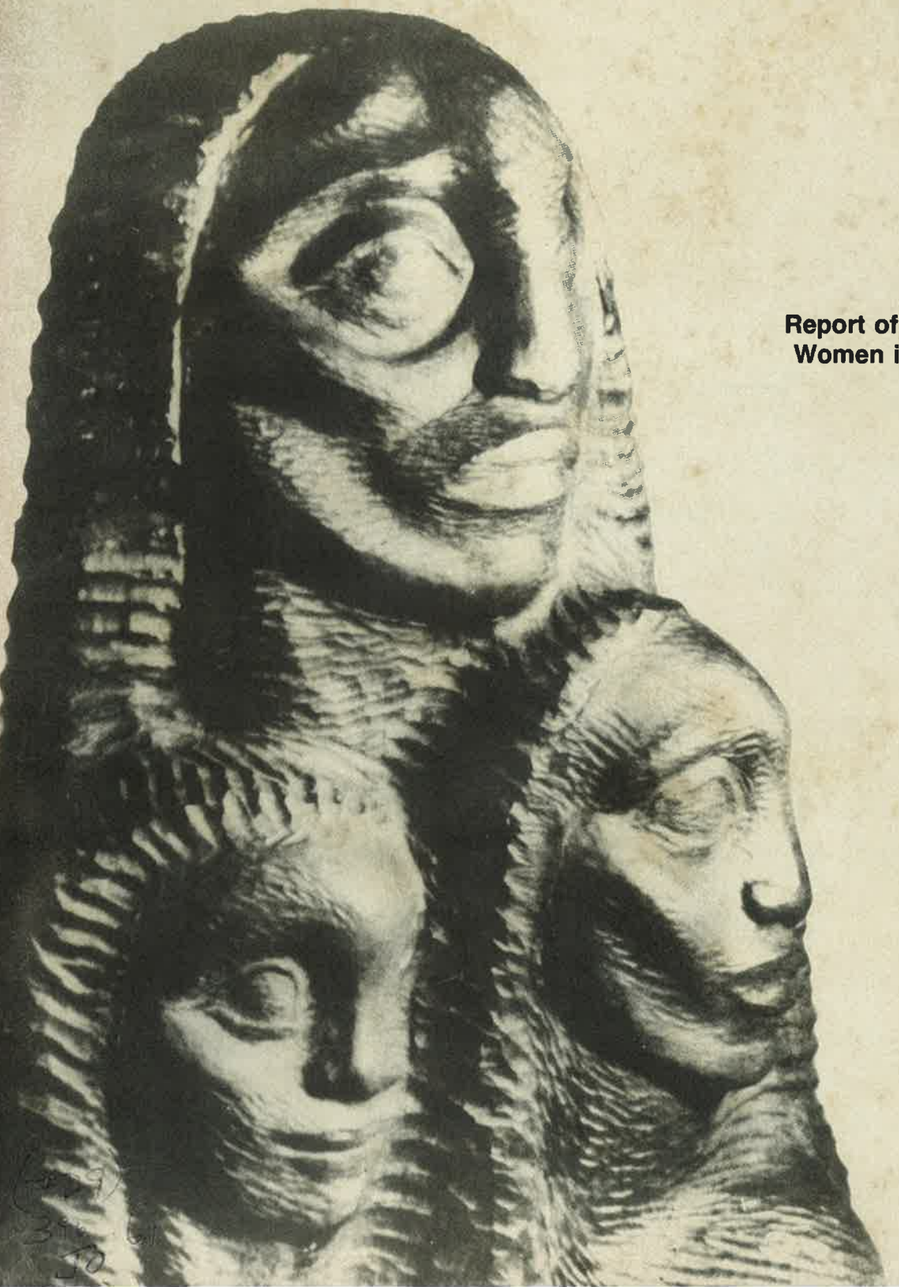
Journey in the Shaping



Report of the first Symposium on Women in Caribbean Culture — July 24 1981

by

Margaret Hope

Dedicated
To the late Professor Elsa Goveia
Historian and Teacher
and the two distinguished women
honoured by Carifesta 1981
Edna Manley
Sculptress
and
Beryl McBurnie
Dancer-Choreographer

Mountain Woman by Edna Manley
Photo courtesy of Maria La Yacona

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Printers	Letchworth Press Ltd.
Publishers	Women And Development Unit (WAND) University of the West Indies

Funds for the publishing of the report were provided by the Ford Foundation and the Inter-American Foundation.

FOREWORD

"It must be known now how that silent legacy nourished and infused such a line,
Such a close linked chain,
To hold us until we could speak out,
Loud enough to hear ourselves."

"Poem" Christine Craig

These words through which Christine Craig of Jamaica pays tribute to her female ancestors; the women who nourished "a close linked chain" allowing her today to proclaim:

I, me, I am a free black woman",
a truth which they knew but had kept hidden

"To compose up their strength",
can be said to be at once the raison d'etre, the apologia and the promise of the first Symposium on Women in Culture ever to be held in the West Indies.

In this symposium the Caribbean women broke their silence as a group. If the presentations were sometimes not as full as they could be, if more questions were asked than answers given, if opportunities for a more significant discussion of points were not always taken — some the inevitable result of limitations of time both in the preparation for the symposium as well as in the presentations — these weaknesses did not detract from the totality of the enriching experience.

From the words and performances, particularly the content of the performances, two statements on the role of women in culture emerged. The first is that the Caribbean women must be allowed to realise her full potential in Caribbean society for out of this, the liberation of both Caribbean men and women will take place. The special role of the Caribbean woman is that of guardian of the races and cultures from which the Caribbean has sprung. She can therefore, with unique creativity born of this experience and by assuming an earlier role of activist, urge on this new order to its realization.

The second statement is that some of the Caribbean women's techniques of survival and adaptation, despite their history of pain deprivation and oppression, offer a positive archetype of "womanhood".

Some women's voices were not heard at the symposium. It is clear that future symposia on Women in Culture must draw upon all the skills of the Caribbean people, the artists, the journalists, the photographers, the film producers, the researchers, the historians, the sociologists and the political scientists, utilising if necessary the techniques of the modern electronic and audiovisual aids to bring all the voices within "hearing".

As Olive Lewin has said, "culture" is all that which enables us to understand our world, find our place in it and to constitute to its evolution. Only then can those concerned with matters relating to Caribbean women and the work being done by Caribbean people on other aspects of Caribbean life, — work which impinges on women — economics, politics, migration, etc., offer substantial documentation to the process of the rewriting of Caribbean history.

It is in fact, a model "already" offered us sometime ago by one of the Caribbean's most distinguished historians, the late Elsa Goveia. Its fruition would be a worthy tribute by the Caribbean researcher of today to this "mother of search and research".

The symposium can be seen as one of the many exercises underway in the Caribbean which is examining women in all their dimensions. Examples are to be found in the major research project on The Role and Status of Women in the Caribbean by the ISER under the direction of Joycelyn Massiah and in the work of WAND and other agencies, both governmental and non-governmental organisations, at regional and national levels.

WAND and the editors of the report see this document and the symposium as only the beginning. WAND has already committed itself to supporting the continuation of this dialogue through symposia at both national and regional levels, and within the wider framework of CARIFESTA. To quote from Marina Omawale Maxwell's keynote address "Labour has begun".

Footnote:—
Conversation with C. L. R. James and Author. Carifesta 1976 JAMAICA.

REPORT ON SYMPOSIUM
— WOMEN THROUGH CULTURE —
CARIFESTA 1981

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The first symposium convened to examine the role of Caribbean Women in Culture was held on July 24, 1981, as part of the official programme of Carifesta 81.

The symposium was co-sponsored by the Barbados Ministry of Education and Culture; the Department of Women's Affairs of Barbados and the Women and Development Unit of the University of the West Indies (WAND). The executing agency was WAND.

RATIONALE

"Women in Culture" was one of two projects, under the general heading of "Consciousness-raising Mobilization of Caribbean Women" for which WAND sought funding in 1981. Support for funding the projects came from the Ford Foundation of the United States of America and the Inter-American Foundation.

The project document argued the need for mechanisms such as the "Workshop on Methodologies for Popular Education", and the "Symposium on Women in Culture", which would act as vehicles for a thorough understanding of women's issues, since one had to move beyond the more traditional methodologies of research, beyond the statistical analysis to hear the voices of women speak of their reality.

It has been generally acknowledged that women, through their central position in the nurturing and socialization of children, play a major role in shaping the cultural climate of our society. Yet, their active participation in the literary, performing, graphic and visual arts has been limited by their pre-occupations with domestic tasks and responsibilities.

Thus, the interpretation of women's experiences in the various art forms has mainly been given by men. While some male writers and artists have been able to capture the truth about women's experiences in their work, too often the portrayal has been partial, distorted and damaging. This partial and distorted interpretation has influenced the thinking of both women and men. To counterbalance this, there is a need to recognize this factor and to highlight the contribution of those women who use or have used their art forms to express their reality. This effort can in turn help to increase our awareness of the situation of women in the Caribbean. The voices of women projected through the visual and performing arts offer special insights. The arts perform a unique function in our efforts to understand the reality of women's experiences and to develop programmes to improve their social and economic well-being. For while the arts are an expression of the deepest hopes and fears of a people, they also contribute to the shaping of those hopes and fears. They also serve as a basis for the type of conscientization which is an essential step in the process of mobilization for social transformation.

PROPOSAL

It was within this theoretical framework that the symposium was defined and its deliberations guided, and a committee was set up for the purpose of planning its structure, procedures and directions.

The members of the Committee were: Peggy Antrobus, Margaret Sardinha of WAND, Pearson Bellamy, representative of the Barbados Ministry of Education and Culture, Shelly Carrington, representative of the Barbados Department of Women's Affairs, and specialists in the field identified for inclusion in the

programme, Daphne Joseph-Hackett, Keane Springer and Cynthia Wilson.

Cynthia Wilson of Barbados was appointed co-ordinator of the programme. The Women and Development Unit assigned Margaret Sardinha to complete the more detailed planning. It was decided that the specific objectives of the symposium should be:

1. To focus on the role of women in culture;
2. To explore the factors which encourage or inhibit the participation of women in various art forms;
3. To discuss ways and means of encouraging and promoting the increased participation of women in the performing and visual arts;
4. To demonstrate how women have used various art forms to express the experiences of women in the region.

Since the issue of women's participation in the arts has not been adequately documented nor has there been any event to date which has brought together women artists in the region the programme was designed both to facilitate exchanges between artists and to provide examples of how women have used art forms to express their reality through literary presentations and through the performing and visual arts.

PARTICIPANTS

Women well-known in specific areas for their contribution to the performing and visual arts were selected as resource persons. These included:

Marina Amo Omowale Maxwell	— Trinidad	— feature address
Daphne Joseph-Hackett	— Barbados	— discussant — drama
Ivy Baxter	— Jamaica	— discussant — dance
Olive Lewin	— Jamaica	— discussant — music
Marjorie Thorpe	— Trinidad	— discussants — literature
Keane Springer	— Guyana	— discussants — literature

It was agreed that invitations to perform should be extended to the following:

Sistren Theatre Collective	— Jamaica	— Workshop
Pandora Gomez	— Bahamas	— Story telling
Louise Bennett	— Jamaica	— Poetry Reading
Christine Craig	— Jamaica	— Poetry Reading
Liz Clarke	— Barbados	— Poetry Reading
Olive Lewin and her group	— Jamaica	— Folk Music
Molly Ahye	— Trinidad	— Dance
Heather Forde	— Barbados	— Dance

Many of these participants were members of the official delegations of their countries but it was decided that participants should include not only members of the official delegations but also groups and individuals selected by the Committee.

One outstanding example of this decision was the participation of the Sistren Theatre Collective from Jamaica. Sistren is the first group from the English-speaking Caribbean whose work is specifically structured to allow for a process of self-discovery and the presentation of the reality of life of working class women in our society. The group comprises working class women from an urban ghetto whose main aims are self-help and the provision

through drama workshops and theatre, produced and organised by themselves, of a forum for the lower-income group.

RECORDING OF THE SYMPOSIUM

Finally it was agreed that a report on the symposium should be prepared by journalist Margaret Carter-Hope and distributed throughout the region by WAND.

Arrangements were also made for a video taping of highlights of the symposium by photographer Ronnie Carrington and tape recordings for distribution to national television and radio stations in the region. The television documentary was produced by journalist-broadcaster Lorna Gordon assisted by Leslie Watley-Barrow.

METHODOLOGY OF THE REPORT

The challenge of preparing the report was to distill from papers presented, papers laid but not discussed, free discussions, art forms and subjects presented by the performers, the substance which elaborated the role of women in Caribbean culture and their contributions as artists. To do this the entire symposium was treated as one statement and the story pieced together, placing events in time, by utilizing the actual voices of women, as discussants, as artists, or through art as critics, and by sub-dividing contributions under three general heads.

Part one describes the background to and the actual proceedings of the day; part 2:1 deals with the Caribbean woman in the culture of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and the art forms used to describe that experience; part 2.2 deals with the Caribbean woman in the culture of the 20th century Caribbean and the 'myths' and 'realities' as defined both in the work of male and female artists in the Caribbean and through the papers presented or laid at the symposium; part 2.3 consists of a description of Caribbean women as artists today: the factors which encourage or inhibit their art and the recommendations for the future; part 3 provides a summary of the papers delivered at the Conference.

Opening Ceremony of CARIFESTA 1981 — Barbados.

The Sistren group's presentation has been reproduced almost in full (pages 52 to 58) to allow for its application by groups experimenting with workshops aimed at consciousness raising. The report does not include the papers made available to the symposium by Keane Springer, Elaine Fido and Honor Ford-Smith. These papers can be acquired from WAND on request.

SYMPOSIUM

Over 200 women, most of them born in the Caribbean, some of them residents of the Caribbean either by marriage or "adoption" and some visitors from overseas, most of them either artists or teachers of the arts, gathered at the Hilton Hotel in Barbados along with a few men to participate in a cultural odyssey. It turned out to be a journey into the Caribbean past, the role played by the woman in that past and the artistic manifestations of those roles in Caribbean culture. It was a journey through the looking glass of the present, defining woman's presence in 20th century Caribbean culture and her reality through artistic expression. Finally, it was the preparation for her journey into the future. Dance, drama, story telling, song, testimony, were combined, creating the vehicle for this journey. During the journey, tribute was paid to the women of the past and the present; the myths and realities of the Caribbean woman were examined; the reasons for the gaps in women's artistic monologues and/or her silences were tentatively explored. At the end, the women pledged their support to each other, as they struggle separately to express liberating truths.

It was the first symposium in which Caribbean women as a collective body opened themselves for inspection. They surfaced as mother, priestess, lover, artist, worker, the oppressed, agent of destruction and liberator within an environment of racism, sexual and economic exploitation and social under-development. The "woman" to get the greatest attention in this exercise was the Afro-Caribbean woman.

Head Table at Symposium — Marina Maxwell delivers feature address.

Four different categories of Caribbean woman can be said to have been in attendance:

1. The African woman in the Caribbean in her role as priestess, the link between society and the creator, and the unique keeper of the past as represented by the Kumina Queen of Jamaica, Miss Queenie;

2. The "mother", the woman who combined the traditional roles of mother and teacher using her traditional art form of story-telling, dance, music and song to pass on the traditions of and thus document the experiences of her society. She was represented by Ivy Baxter, Olive Lewin, Daphne Joseph-Hackett, Louise Bennett, Edna Manley, Molly Ahye and a much younger version, Pandora Gomez;

3. Those who might be classified as "cultural midwives" and who represented the Caribbean woman who had benefitted from the expansion of the educational system in the Caribbean. They were to become the first women to enter in large numbers the doors of scholarship and professionalism, which were once limited to white and black men and a few exceptional women of both races. They are the women who engaged in deliberate consciousness-raising. Representatives of this group were: Marina Maxwell who gave the feature address; Cynthia Wilson, Chairperson; Marjorie Thorpe and Kathleen Drayton, university lecturers; Peggy Antrobus, Tutor-Co-ordinator of WAND — the institution which organised the symposium. Sisters to those were European women with similar backgrounds who have adopted the Caribbean: Helen Camps (Irish), Elaine Fido (English);

4. Also in attendance were women who, to borrow a term from one of the participants, can be called "Daughters" — the products of the teaching, both formal and informal of the former categories. Having been born of this tradition and experience, they are the experimenters; they have clearly defined roles of "what they will not be" but are still groping to shape "what they shall be". This category was represented by Christine Craig, Heather Forde. Honor Ford-Smith and Sistren.

PROGRAMME

The Symposium began with remarks by the Chairperson, Cynthia Wilson, a welcome address by Shelly Carrington of the Women's Affairs Division of Barbados and a statement by Peggy Antrobus, Tutor-Co-ordinator of WAND. It can however be said to have opened with the song "Women Time A Come"* sung by a group of working class women of Jamaica, and supported by a group of master drummers, and as their chorus died away the reggae record, "No woman no cry"** followed. This was a dramatic introduction for the feature address by Marina Amo Omowale Maxwell of Trinidad and Tobago. The topic of Ms. Maxwell's address was **"Woman, the Weakened Sex".** Her speech dealt with the present condition of the Caribbean woman, which derived from a history of patriarchy, colonialism, racism and slavery. She examined in some detail how these factors have affected women's relationships with their men and stifled their creativity, delaying their participation in the liberation or birth process as she called it, of the 21st century woman.

Olive Lewin, Director of Culture of Jamaica and Founder/ Director of the Jamaica folk singers showed how music, both in traditional and modern societies, has been and still is expressive of women's relationships and roles. She argued too for the expression of forms of art from women which bore a resemblance to the art of women in traditional societies: art forms which were spontaneous, instructive and integrated into women's work, life and roles in the widest sense. With reference to the problems of the Caribbean women, she argued that the future sits on women's knees since on them children are socialised. Women, therefore, had to ask themselves some very harsh questions when things began to go wrong.

Footnote:—
***variation of the Rasta song Bongo Man by Marina Maxwell**
****song by Jamaican artist the late Robert Marley.**

On this point she received support from choreographer, dancer, teacher, Ivy Baxter of Jamaica, who made no distinction between women who created and shaped their children's destiny and women as dancers, musicians or sculptors. In her paper Ms. Ivy Baxter also described the evolution of "dance" in Jamaica and the Caribbean, enlivening her presentation with a dance of her hands. She said the experience had been shared by women like Beryl McBurnie and Molly Ahye (Trinidad), Helen Taitt (Guyana), Joyce Stuart (Barbados), Lavinia Williams (America/Haiti), Pearl Primus (Trinidad), some of the initiators of folk dance as an "art" form in the Caribbean. She also described how dancers in Jamaica had been influenced by their association with dancers from other Caribbean countries such as Trinidad. In so doing she created links between dance in Jamaica and dance in the rest of the Caribbean which caused the Chairperson, Cynthia Wilson to say that Ms. Baxter's contribution had taught important lessons "which we either knew and had chosen to forget or never knew at all".

Daphne Joseph-Hackett, drama teacher of many generations of school girls in Barbados, used the tools of her work to present her paper "Women in drama in the Caribbean". She outlined the development of theatre in the Caribbean and the role women had played in it.

Daphne Joseph-Hackett pointed out that the expatriate European women had been first in the development of theatre in the Caribbean and they had been followed by black middle class women. She argued that this promise of women's involvement was not fulfilled after the social upheavals of the 30's and 40's when black men, rather than women, emerged as leaders of the drama movements. She left the symposium with this question — "why had this happened even though the Caribbean today could boast of some distinguished women in this field?"

Marjorie Thorpe, lecturer in English at St. Augustine Campus, UWI, presented her paper on women writers in the Caribbean and argued that through their work, female writers in the Caribbean presented Caribbean woman in three different roles: woman as a survivor; woman as a destructive agent whose influence could be spiritually and psychologically crippling; and woman as embodying and imaging the creative, nurturing, life-affirming potential of West Indian society.

These papers were followed by a short discussion which revolved around the reasons why women were not more represented in the literary arts and prescriptions for improving the condition of female artists were considered.

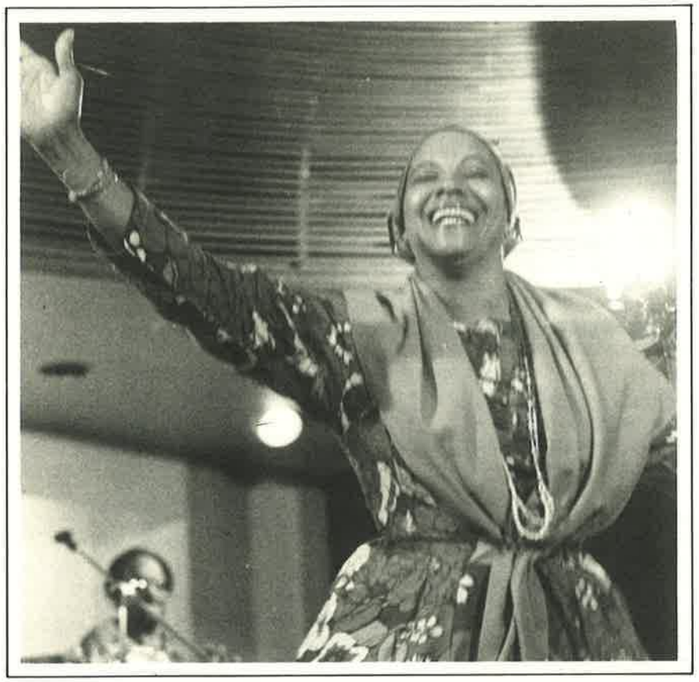
PERFORMING ARTS

In the afternoon session a number of performances were given during which women used the tools of their art to define their reality.

Molly Ahye began the performances with a chant to the Yoruba goddess of water and followed this by tributes to Beryl McBurnie with the rendition of Beryl McBurnie's "Plantain Woman" and to a Trinidadian character "Tourist Annie". In her tribute to the latter she danced, sang and threw flowers and kisses as she moved up and down the aisle, her skirt whirling to the accompaniment of drums and guitar. Barbadian dancer Heather Forde danced "Many Rivers to Cross"* from the movie "Roots". The modern piece was choreographed by Richild Springer of Barbados.

Then there were the poets, women like Cynthia Wilson, describing women's pain in the broken relationships between men and women, and of course Louise Bennett — Miss Lou — who

Footnote *Theme song from Roots



Molly Ahye dances a tribute to Beryl McBurnie and Tourist Anne.

expresses in her poetry the conditions of the Caribbean working class woman, her hardships, her humour, her dual nature. Louise Bennett added to her poetry Jamaican sayings and proverbs. With one saying which means that "even a meagre cow can produce a bull" she summed up what woman's work has sought to express; that she is altogether producer and sustainer and keeper of the race.

Louis Bennett

Pandora Gibson

Christine Craig of Jamaica read "Poets and Artistes", "Crow Poem", "Love Poem", "Lost From The Fold" and concluded with a new poem, "Coda" still in folio. The message of "Coda" is that "man's truth is an empty yabba for a woman".

Woman has to shape her own truth. The shape of this truth will define a journey for her which she would undertake and could take her on a road to "shape something new together with her mate".

Cynthia Wilson read "Desolation", "No Change" and "Death".

Olive Lewin, an initiated Maroon*, introduced eight members of her fifty strong choir. Miss Lewin said that the choir was more than an artistic entity since its members functioned as a support group for each other and their families, as individuals moved about in their day to day lives. The choir presented renditions of folk songs including "All me Sunday Clothes in Kerosene Pan" ("immigration"), a Maroon Song, a Work Song, a lullaby, and a Send up Song. These songs were used to support the theories she had presented in her paper. At the same time they spoke of the roles Caribbean women had played in the development of the culture of the Caribbean.

Footnote:—
***Maroon: a run-a-way slave and descendants.**

The next performance was given by Queenie, the Kumina Queen of Jamaica.* A tiny woman with a tiny body moving over the stage, white flashing teeth in a black uplifted face, she performed a dance representing a fertility rite. Her dance performance brought her a standing ovation because of the recognition of the special significance which Queenie's presence gave to the symposium.

Footnote:—
***Miss Queenie is the leader of a religious cult — Kumina in Jamaica.**

Pandora Gomez of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas used the technique of "story telling" to present the image of Caribbean woman as mother in the society disciplining children of any household and as figures of authority. She offered too the image of woman as mother or tante passing on some of the distorted images of "black" to the young — "her hair is nice so don't straighten it".

These performances came to an end with a workshop presented by the Sistren group of Jamaica. In their work they demonstrated the value of women's traditional work which goes unrecognised and unrewarded, and the exploitation of women in Caribbean society. Here the symposium saw ten working class women along with Honor Forde-Smith and Joan French using theatre to express the reality of the "working class Jamaican woman".

Cross-section of audience at Symposium.

THE TRADITIONAL ART AND IMAGES OF THE EARLY CARIBBEAN WOMAN

Part two: one

The history of the West Indian woman can be said to have begun when she was catapulted from the culture of her home into a new world as indentured servant and expatriate wife or mistress (European), as slave (African) or as indentured labour (Asian), during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

Here on a landscape, barren but for the few vanquished remnants of the indigenous population, she began a new life, in what Patterson has described as "one of the rare cases of human society being artificially created for the satisfaction of one clearly defined goal: that of making money through the production of sugar. **(O. Patterson — Sociology of Slavery).**

The Symposium gave its greatest attention to the Afro-Caribbean woman, but also alluded to contributions of the European and Asian women, as they shaped and were shaped by early West Indian society. It examined how the early Caribbean woman adapted to and survived in her environment. She clung stubbornly to the traditions of her homeland, modifying them only slightly to suit the new "landscape". Some engaged in an imitation of the ruling classes of the new society, or the majority engaged in the construction of a Caribbean mode by combining traditions from the ruling class culture with the sub-cultures.

WOMAN IN SLAVERY

In Caribbean society of the slave period we find the black woman as slave-labourer exposed to the same harsh conditions, hard work, indecent exposure and severe punishment as her male counterpart.

In addition to this it was argued that she was further burdened by being subject to the needs of the plantocracy, both to produce a labour force and to satisfy its sexual needs.

WOMAN AS WARRIOR

Caribbean women opposing this situation, introduced the face of woman as "Rebel". This image was embodied in "Nanny"* the Jamaican maroon heroine, fighting for the "right of her people to control their own labour" and opposing the power of the colonialists on many levels. (Forde-Smith).

First, we observe Nanny as warrior, using battle strategies requiring the use of nature, working along with it rather than dominating it, using the caves, the trees of the region in her guerilla struggle.

Secondly, we see her as a keeper of the past, utilising that past as a weapon against her enemies. "She used the language and traditions of Africa, of the ASHANTI, in her struggle. This was all the more frightening to the Europeans because it was unknown to them". (Forde-Smith — Woman, The Arts and Jamaican Society).

Thirdly, Nanny also introduced another image of the woman — that of medicine woman: "She (Nanny) was able to reproduce her people through her use of medicine. She was able to extend her power to produce life as mother, to a greater co-operation with nature in her capacity as nurse".

The woman on the plantation also became "rebel", says Forde-Smith, resisting the plantocracy's interest in them for reproductive purposes. This was especially so after the abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807:

Footnote:—
Nanny's name is probably derived from (i) nen-nen-from the Twi nana- and efik or 'ne' term of address to an old woman; (ii) Nana -from the twi nana grandparent, grandfather, grandmother.
A grandmother or any old woman: often as a respectful term of address.
A midwife
p 315, Cassidy and Lepage, "Dictionary of Jamaican English".

"In St. Kitts on one plantation there were no births for ten years. It was later discovered that women were using the okra plant as a contraceptive device.

Women's rebellions also took the form of adhering to traditional African rituals which were often illegal but which they passed on to their communities.

Miss Queenie — Kumina Dance.

Many African women came from traditional societies in which women's place, although clearly defined did not carry the connotations of inferiority prevalent in the culture of the ruling class in the new society.

Marina Maxwell in her address stressed the respect for and freedom of women in traditional African societies:

> "While patriarchy had caught up with Africa also, women were still free people within their own cultures, with languages, customs, respect, dignity and belief systems of their own which they brought with them into slavery and which informed and still inform our societies". (Maxwell)

THE DIVINER

The next role we find the new Caribbean woman assuming is that of the high position of "diviner", the link between the creator and man. The presence of a Kumina Queen, Miss Queenie of Jamaica at the symposium, performing a fertility dance gave evidence of the survival of this face. Miss Queenie is of Congolese descent.

After a "calling"* in her youth, she spent twenty-one days under her guardian cotton tree, in communication with the unseen, learning spiritual experiences, and earning as a result the respect that entitled her to a place of authority within the Kumina Bands.

THE DIVINE

Keane Springer, in her paper on the "Image of the West Indian Woman in the Works of Caribbean Writers", sees the image of the Caribbean Woman as "divine" as revealed in the works of the Guyanese writer, Wilson Harris and other male novelists. She cites Gilkes describing "Petra" in **Heartland**, "Magda" in **The Whole Armour** and "Mariella" in **Palace of the Peacock** as "the archetypal female presence, the inarticulate, suffering woman who nevertheless acts as the vessel of a new consciousness". For Harris, says Springer, "these women are vital presences seen in

Footnote:—
Trinidadian Maureen Warner who has researched some of the survivals of African traditions in Caribbean society and the Kumina and Queenie herself, points to the similarities between Miss Queenie's calling and that which has been described as being a similar phenomena among the Lugbaa of Congo and Uganda. The belief is that God called a would-be diviner in her adolescence (mainly women), she wanders about in the woods and after several days, returns with the power to divine. The community then erects a shrine to her which is referred to as the Hut of God. Diviners are called the children of God. (Maureen Warner-Lewis, 'The Nyuku-Spirit Messengers of the Kumina' Savaccu 13).

the context of the landscape they occupy and consequently from positions of strength and historical validity". Similarly in Mittleholzer's **Corentyne Thunder**, Beena and Kattree move to the centre of the plot and remain there because the novel involves a naturalism, a Corentyne presence that dominates and superimposes upon their thoughts, feelings and actions. (Keane Springer — "Image of the West Indian Woman in the works of Caribbean writers").

The concept of woman as Divine was carried to its extreme with the appearance of the image of goddess at the symposium. In her presentation, Molly Ahye, Trinidadian dancer, choreograpner and research-writer, began with a chant to Yemajaa. Yemajaa, according to Yoruba mythology is the water deity whose domain extends to rivers, lakes, lagoons and the sea. She is accepted as the protector of fishermen and sailors.*

Religion, the symposium argued, provided the woman in the New World with a way of holding on to her past and her authority. Elaine Fido in her paper "Radical Woman: Woman and the Theatre in Anglophone Caribbean", suggests that it also provided her with respect, since it was a route which could take her to the top of the church community as elder in a cult or as a dominant and active member of the Afro-Christian church; the latter being the combination of African religions and the Christian religion introduced to the Africans and creoles during slavery and after emancipation.

WOMAN AS FARMER

Honor Forde-Smith presented Caribbean women in their role of farmers as "emancipated", compared to the position of women in Western society at the time.

Higgler

Footnote:—
In her book Golden Heritage which was published in 1978 by Heritage Cultures Ltd., Molly Ahye points out that Yemajaa is still worshipped in Trinidad and Tobago, in Brasil and Cuba. The Grang Etang, a volcanic lake in Grenada was also dedicated to her.

She argued that the "plot of land" became for the women, an institution of resistance, certainly in Jamaica, since it institutionalised domestic organisation in direct opposition to the Western concepts of sex and legitimacy. In Jamaica "the land was passed from generation to generation, regardless of sex or legitimacy, and shared between families, regardless of age". At the same time British Law of the 19th Century held that women could not own land, the inheritance of illegitimate children should be limited and that the eldest legitimate male had the first right to land. Although, the women in the Caribbean could own land she could lose that plot of land if she married.

Honor Forde-Smith argued the point that at this stage in history a deliberate strategy was used by missionaries (as unwitting agents of 19th century capitalism) to have the West Indian family organised along Western models in an attempt to guarantee the reproduction of the labour force which would serve the plantation.* This she said, eventually forced many women into the home or on to the farm tilling a plot of land to supplement the man's wage.

Out of this situation too emerged the Caribbean woman as higgler or hawker, as small farmer and as domestic in the "great house".

WOMAN AS HIGGLER

Woman as "higgler" appeared in song, in dance and in drama at the symposium.

Louise Bennett presented her poem "Me Too". Molly Ahye used the dramatisation of this image to pay tribute to the **outstanding Trinidadian dancer, choreographer, and artist Beryl McBurnie, with a rendition of McBurnie's "Plantain Woman".**

Ahye said in her introduction, "women had to sell food, they had to tell their offspring and customers of the value of the food grown around them and it is out of this need that such a song came".

Olive Lewin's Group — A Work Song.

WOMEN AS DOMESTIC

"If the plantation system created a nation of clerks, it also produced a long history of female slaves and servants". (Ms. Maxwell)
This disadvantaged, predominantly black girl who is unable to challenge the authority and behaviour of her superiors, was presented by Olive Lewin in this way:

> "In the days of the great house when you might have a large room to clean, kneeling on the floor with coconut brushes it was tough. (many of us know that sort of cleaning from our childhood). They had to work from dark to dark for no pay and they had to do it on pain of being punished".

Lewin offered the symposium a woman's work song, a song which grew out of the tradition of women sharing their work, "moving from 'great house' to 'great house' as a 'body collect' SINGING TO make the work load lighter.

WOMAN AS CREATOR

In so doing, she presented the Caribbean woman as artist. She said that in this situation art was not a product, but integral to the process of life:

> "When a woman sings to ease her burden, to help life to go better, to express her sadness, there is nothing self-conscious or contrived about that song, it is a natural outpouring of her expression of her condition".

WOMAN AS MOTHER

The Caribbean woman in her most celebrated, creative role, that of mother, was an image which dominated the symposium. The term "mother" did not even mean a woman with children of her own. It could be a term of respect for an older woman or someone who nurtured life.

'Mother', bringing from Africa its own mystique was to become one of the earliest and most persistent of Caribbean archetypes:

> "So earth is mother and earth supports us and keeps us alive, if we understand her and respect her and work with her, not rake and rape her.
>
> "In a similar way we transfer that idea and see woman as universal mother. She does not have to give birth to a child to be a mother. She is the mother spirit and we see it daily in our societies in grandmothers, in teachers, in police women, bus conductors, nurses, and community workers, the mother as seen in the cosmic plan.
>
> "Her art forms were the songs, stories, plays, dances with which she regaled, taught, encouraged, comforted and chided the little ones".

These, Lewin argued, were really subtle but very powerful means of passing on values. "Values that have been proven throughout the centuries, that have allowed them to conquer life where they are". (Lewin).

MOTHER AS FATHER

The importance of woman in the creative process was emphasised by Ivy Baxter in her paper "Women and Dance". She stressed that in the nuclear or in the "extended family" it is often the woman alone, who after conception and birth, creates the environment in which the child grows and develops. Women of varying ages, with or without the help of men, conceptualise the progress and development of the child. The ability or willingness

Footnote:
Others hold the view that after emancipation wherever there was a stable union the black male refused to let his woman continued to work on the plantation. This saw the beginning of her staying at home "to mind baby". If the missionaries did anything, they merely reinforced this.

Footnote:
Her importance in the presentations of the artists lay not only in her domination of an informal sector of the economy but in the perpetuation of a role which she had in West African society and which carried weight in the society.

of the child to take over the task of conscious conception for itself, depends upon the connection between the woman and the child. This process can go on for a long or short time:

> "I know some Caribbean women or some women living in other parts of the world, who live in the mental style of Caribbean women, who are still involved in their sons' conceptual progress through life, either overtly or covertly". (Baxter).

An extract from **Shadow Under the Whip***[1] by Merle Hodge, was quoted by Elaine Fido to underscore the dominance of the Caribbean woman in shaping the children; introducing a definition of mother to include the socialisation and economic roles ascribed to fathers in most societies: "Women became mother and father to the race".

Ivy Baxter described this socialisation of a child as a process similar to that of the manipulation of raw material in the creative process:

> "This manipulation can be compared with the manipulation of the media to produce a work of art, just as seen in the manipulation of stone and wood to create sculpture, and words and ideas to create literature.
>
> The power to create a visual picture in her own mind, or in the minds of others is the power of art which Caribbean women possess". (Baxter).

Keane Springer pointed out that Edward Brathwaite*[2] in **Mother Poem** had seen the need to recognise the importance of the Caribbean woman in forming consciousness.

> "Here the figure of the mother dominates the poem, but is quite versatilely handled. The mother is a definite reality in that she is rooted to "the porous limestone" and the sea round and about it, but her moral strength and authority are unquestioned as the poet relates her suffering both past and present".

The Mother in this period also surfaced as "destructive agent". The examination of the book, **The Wild Sargasso Sea** by Jean Rhys,*[3] unleashed the voice of the West Indian creolised woman — "the ambitious mother trying to overcome her predicament through the progress of her child". Of the victim, Antoinette, Marjorie Thorpe states, "her mother's unthinking indifference to her emotional needs starts her off on the road to insanity and suicide".

WOMAN AS VICTIM

Keane Springer in her paper "Image of the West Indian Woman in the West Indian Novel", also introduced 'Antoinette', but as the 19th century creole middle-class woman "caught in a crisis of identity".

She is rejected by the blacks who work on the family plantation, and also by Rochester, her white husband. Her inability to cope, forces her into total emotional and economic dependence on Rochester and subsequently into a final alienation of the psyche.

But Antoinette, like her mother before her, is unable to control her environment and withdraws from reality. She further experiences a kind of double alienation in travelling to England which had always seemed to her a place of myth, somehow not real. Finally, Antoinette's end comes in a dream which foreshadows the reality and emphasises her complete withdrawal. She leaps to tragic death — her final annihilation.

Footnote:*[1] Author of Crick Crack Monkey — London: Heinernann, 1981.

Footnote:— *[2] Barbadian poet, historian, and lecturer at the Mona Campus, UWI.
***[3] Dominican Novelist and Short Story Writer.**

Mulatto Woman

WOMAN AS SURVIVOR

However, Antoinette appears not to be the typical image of the Caribbean woman who, one contributor argued, has largely been depicted as a survivor in the literature of the Caribbean.

Marjorie Thorpe argued that it is in her role of survivor that the woman dominates the literature of both West Indian male and female writers. The methods she chose, as depicted in the novels of these writers, she said in her paper **"The Images of the Caribbean Woman in the Novels of the Female",** have been as various as they have been successful. She may pursue a policy of unequivocal pragmatism or she may be sustained by a total self-sacrificing commitment to some chosen goal:

> "She may rely on the consumation of religion or she may depend on her physical charms and her sexuality, or it may be a combination of both of these and more. But whatever her methods, she is shown to survive. She survives social and economic repression, sexual rejection and frustration of her ambitions and the betrayal of her dreams".

THE CARIBBEAN WOMAN IN THE 20TH CENTURY AND THE USE OF HER ART TO EXPRESS THIS REALITY

Sistren's song, "Hands 85", part of its workshop on the value of women's work, and its exploitation and under-valuation in Jamaican and Caribbean society, offered us some of the many faces of the 20th century Caribbean woman.

> "Me say mothers/me say sistren/me say nieces too/me say higgler/me say Bar maid/me say dancers too/me say housewives/me say dress makers/me say nurses too.
>
> Me say storekeepers/me say hairdressers/me say prostitute/a me say secretary, teller, cashier and office maid/ helper and mistress/poetess and teacher, florist, designer, conductress, leggo gal, rebel gal and boo chuckibo and fly-lu night/Bambastical basoon".

The symposium argued that unemployment, economic dependence, the master-slave syndrome of the man-woman relationship built into patriarchy and the Western nuclear family, the poorly paid job and unequal pay, different socialisation processes for boys and girls in the home and the wider society, the position of the mother who had to father, stereotyping,domestic violence, and racism, were the factors which weakened the

School Girls

position of the woman in Caribbean culture, and kept her from taking her full place today.

One paper suggested that these factors contributed to the eventual disappearance of the voice of "mother" by the second half of the 20th century, silent in her role as "dawta"*

Footnote:
*** "dawta" is used in derogatory sense by Forde Smith.**

which was articulated by the Rastafari and the reggae culture. This was described by Forde-Smith as a continuation of a male protest movement created by the "strong mother".

"She lisper to me dat me name what me name dat

Me name is me main an it am is me own and Lion eye name". (Brathwaite)*[1] Or as Honor Forde-Smith puts it: "Brathwaite's mother gave the Caribbean male the vision of a lion and through this dreadness offered him the possibility of overcoming the threat and the destructive forces of oppression".

THE FORTIES

The nineteen thirties and forties had seen the rise of a black working class movement in the Caribbean, aimed at ending the post-emancipation exploitation and oppression.

This movement, on which the black educated male rode to limited political power, was one stage in the revolt of the Caribbean male in the 20th century.

The image of the Caribbean woman as destructive emerged in the literature and the calypsoes which coincided with the assumption of power by Caribbean blacks.[1]

Ms. Maxwell saw the use of the image of matriarch*[1] as a means to shut women up,to cripple them and thus retard the creative development of Caribbean people:

> "The problem is that the stronger she has been thought to be, as she nurtured and sustained her man and her children against the brutalities of slavery, of poverty and racism today, the more her own black men have found weapons to cut her down.[2] Bitterly, a lot of women have given up the black struggle since this obtains even in the black revolutionary movements and the organisations for change.
>
> "What we have been viewing are not matriarchal societies at all but matrifocal or matricentric societies, where the woman has been the centre of the household, largely not from choice at all, but through force of circumstances. She has whatever power she wields in the home, thrust upon her most of the time or she has used every manipulative skill and devious strategy to get her way against the domination of man".
>
> (Maxwell: "The Weakened Sex")

Honor Forde-Smith noted that in the sixties (when independent West Indian countries were created), there also appeared the weakening of the 'mother' both as a dominant image and as a voice in Caribbean culture, particularly in the literary arts. And so we find Honor Forde-Smith in her paper "Women, The Arts and Jamaican Society" asking **Mother Poem*** ,[3] What of the daughter? What of her womanhood?

In Ms. Forde-Smith's opinion both the literature of the Caribbean and the popular arts of Jamaica merely reflect the serious situation confronting the woman. That is, "that out of the contradictions imposed on the tradition of a very strong woman, a much weaker woman is emerging".

Conditions had worsened for the mass of women during the period of the 40's to the 60's and alongside that came the intense disillusionment of the poor with rural life. Migration from country to town followed. Neither in town nor in country however was life any better for the working-class* woman.

Louise Bennett expressed this condition in her poem "Dutty Tough" written 30 years ago:

Footnote:—[1]

The preponderance of the matrifocal family has produced a tendency for the Caribbean male to put mother on a pedestal and to hold all other women in low esteem. In Trinidad the calypsonian is the folk-singer whose ballads faithfully record our social values and attitudes and the theme of most calypsoes is the worthlessness of woman, who is seen always as the temptress trying to trap her man and frequently unfaithful. Dr. H. M. Beauburn Keynote address Fourth Caribbean Conference on Mental Health, Curacao, 1965 pp 27. 35.

Footnote:—[2]

The evidence cited from the Mental Health Conference about the state of world' to which the male singers are reacting supports our view that the calypso songs and the aggression they express are fundamental aspects of the normative "life-ways" peculiar to a particular society. Of course they are illusional but herein lies their therapeutic value. Repressed anti-female hostility underlies the aggressive derisive songs the calypsonians sing about women. The absent-father syndrome in a society of mother-child families accounts for the scarcity of anti-father songs. Oedipus cannot hate his father: this figure is usually too migratory to frustrate his son. Instead "Zeus jealousy" develops the female as the threatener of the male figure. She propvokes his anger by supplanting his role in the society. She fixates him perennially "arrested" at the psychic parturition stage — infantile oral stage of dependency. She is most capable of perpetuating his fear of loneliness and separation. And so the adult male-figure regresses to orality and oral need — satisfying behaviour. The male employs his mouth "to create" where he must face the reality of his inability to imitate the female, to acquit her role of mother. THE MALE/FEMALE CONFLICT IN CALYPSO. J. D. ELDER CARIBBEAN QUARTERLY Vol. 14 No. 3 September 1968.

... Noh care much we da work fa
Hard time still eena we shut,
We dah fight, Hard time a beat we,
Dem might raise we wages, but
... Saltfish gawn up, mackerel gawn up
Pork and beef gawn up same way
And wen rice and butter ready
Dem just go pon holiday
... Sun a shine and pot a bwile, but
Tings noh bright, bickle no nuff,
Rain a fall, river dah flood, but
Wata scarce and dutty tuff.
(Louise Bennett)

Migration

During this period* too, black labour began to move around the world to satisfy the needs of white capital and the household headed by the woman became even more institutionalised. When migration took the male population to all corners of the globe, hardships as expressed in this song by Olive Lewin and her Folk Group, increased:

All me Saturday day Clothes
In kerosene pan
As the man in Colon so far away
My man does not treat me like he use to do
Like he use to do
For he loves another girl with me
And if I ketch that girl
I'm going to beat her
And the man in Colon so far away.

Religious faith became a technique for survival, a technique which Erna Brodber looks at in her novel, **Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home.**

> "Granny Tucker prayed on Sunday morning. In truth she always prays. Kneading her bread, she prays for health and strength to continue making bread to supply to the shops, to bring in money to pay Brother Jack to run the Sugar Mill to

Footnote:
It should be noted, however that this period coincided with the increase of opportunities for women, particularly the middle class woman.

Girls in Choir

make sugar to feed the district. Granny Tucker prays for those who cannot afford to buy bread, for those who sing rag songs and stray from the good book, waste their money on cockfights and cannot buy their bread. She prays for rain to moist the cabbage suckers, she prays that rain will stay away from the ripening tomato field. She prays for Parson Blair and the whole church militant. She prays constantly against ole Joe, the devil who can tempt you, who can hide one foot of shoes and have you hunting for the other, who can cause your dough to fall. But on Sunday morning Granny Tucker prays especially for her children dispersed to the end of the world".

WOMAN AS MANIPULATOR

The symposium next examined the techniques for the social and economic survival of Caribbean women. We saw her as a manipulator of her man in order to acquire money to survive. Marriage too was used as a route of escape. Through marriage, often for social and economic reasons alone, women sought the security of and dependence on a man, to find only frustration and unhappiness. Marjorie Thorpe showed how this condition has been expressed in literature.

There is the woman in **Hills of Hebron** who marries for social and economic security, suffers miscarriages many times in a loveless marriage, and ends bitter and frustrated. There is too, the woman in Merle Hodge's **Tante** who enters into a number of transient relationships which have adverse effects on her godson, even though they pose no problems either socially or psychologically for her.

As for the middle class women, her predicament, Thorpe says, is equally that of Enid Hutson in Paula Marshall's **The Chosen Place, the Timeless People.** She marries for money and prestige and in so doing barters for them her highly respected family's name, her saffron-tinted white skin and lush, somewhat sluggish sexuality. In the end she is left an abandoned woman in a huge, costly house. Ms. Thorpe also gave Helen in Marion Patrick-Jones' novel **Jouvert Morning** as another example:

"Standing at her window, Helen ponders the meaning of her life as she contemplates the mountains. They gave (her) a tight feeling across her chest and the burn in the pit of her stomach. She had seen them every day of her life. They had watched her when she was young and continued watching her now that she was growing old. She wondered idly what they saw. What memories they stored and if they laughed at them at all. Each day had begun to bring a fear of facing the mountains and a growing belief that they knew when time would stop. In the old days she had looked up to them after seeing her children off to school in the morning and Mervyn to work. She would whisper to herself 'I look up to the hills from whence cometh my help' and they seemed bound up naturally with a future and God's caring. Now the mountains like the psalm were part of the silences, part of the darkness".

NEGATIVE SOCIALISATION

Pandora Gibson-Gomez gave expression to another face of the Caribbean woman as she struggled to survive in this period. Caribbean women became 'hairdressers', 'cosmetologists', thus strengthening another negative socialisation role of the twentieth century Caribbean woman.

"In the old settlement everybody is getting ready for a wedding and everybody want their hair straightened so it could look like white people own. Nobody ain't want no afro ting for no wedding. They wake me up at 6 o'clock, cause I could straighten hair and I straightened hair from dawn. It is now four, and one foot swollen and eight months pregnant and I straightening. I have a little cousin name Bunny whose hair is (she grabs a mulatto girl in the audience) like this child's own, but she sitting there waiting too. Aunt Bess, who would tell you the same thing about 15 times, send my cousin with a message. "Pam, Auntie Bess say, 'don't bother wid straigtening Bunny's hair cause Bunny got good hair. Auntie Bess say put a pony tail in the back of Bunny hair and a bang in the front and let Bunny go so, cause Bunny hair don't need straightening like B hair, Bunny hair is good hair'."

Sistren

But all along women had become, the symposium felt, the victims of institutionalised violence and the Sistren workshop presentation showed how institutionaiised violence was expressed through low wages, sexual exploitation, the sacrifice of the female child by the mother who had to father it, and unemployment:

> "To tell you the truth, we ourselves tired of talking too. We talk to the Government, we talk to the men, we talk to the sisters who say they is expert, we talk to the boss. And now we think it is time to take the case to you. And is not only those of us who work in factory and restaurant and hospital and school who going on strike. We striking against the work we do, that nobody even think, is work, for we certainly don't get no pay for it, so-so thanks and charity. We tired of holding baby we one, we tired of scrubbing floor, we tired of cooking every Jesus day, to mention that we even have to grow the very food that we put in the pot.
>
> On top of that we have to scrounge around, higglering here and hustling there to buy what we can't grow or make, for most of us don't have any regular salary. That must be why them don't think we work. Look how much work we do and we don't have a one-cent to show for it. We wake up 5.00 a.m. and we go to bed 11.00 and scarcely a moment to rest. Scrub, clean, wash, cook, look after baby — and if we lucky enough to get a little wage work, we still don't find a way to hustle and get a little money of our own, the men treat us like dawg.
>
> Then again, if you look at where we get the wage work, so-so Housework again. Teacher look after pickney, nurse look after sick, secretary look after boss, bedwork included. Or she lose the job, and domestic look after everybody — and that is what most of us do.
>
> The men them don't recognise our work, the Government don't recognise our work, and most of the aid agency don't recognise it either, ignore us or issue birth-control pills just to control us. But is we produce most of the food they eat, we clean their dirt and grow them pickney, is we produce and care for the nation from baby to old people. So how come we always so poor? How come we always so destitute? How come when we ask question them always go on as if it is our fault. That is why we say: Give aid to the women who feed the nation".

LOVE AS TYRANNY

In their relationships with men survival also becomes necessary. Indeed it was argued the relationships of the slave and colonial periods continued to dominate the existing relationships between Caribbean men and women. This condition Ms. Maxwell delineated as the last colonial territory and said even the word 'love' has become a tyranny:

> "The word love becomes a tyranny, often subtle and always possessive. In the name of love women have become the slaves of both husband and children. Roles reinforced by our churches, over religiosity, where the most atrocious actions are ignored in order to keep up the image of sanctity (read respectability) of marriage. Ethnic factors contribute here too. The East Indian woman in the Caribbean is well known for her greater socialization into a submissive role than her creole and coloured sisters. In Trinidad, the highest suicide rate is among the young East Indian woman".

Ms. Maxwell had noted in commenting on the death of two distinguished Caribbean women that suicide is the extreme form of women's inner protest.

East Indian

Ms. Maxwell said that all were subject to this syndrome which was not only inherited from slavery, but in truth is the result of a patriachal world which itself is exploitative. When women fought back they were termed 'devious', 'treacherous', 'someone to be put down', but as Maxwell explained, deviousness was in fact a technique of survival used by women against the dominance syndrome men supported:

> "They developed a situation where women must grow devious. Then they say they must control women however to stop their "promiscuity" and "deviousness".

VIOLENCE

The techniques of control she argued gave support to the violence, violation and racism, both personal and institutional of which many Caribbean women are the victims. Maxwell drew attention to a report of an investigation into Domestic Violence in Trinidad and Tobago, and identified various arguments offered in support of domestic violence, some even accepted by some women. Some of these included that violence is "normal".

> "Thanks to many of our fine calypsonians, it is further perpetuated. It is normal for a man to prove his love by blows. And women are supposed to naturally love it."

But Pandora Gomez gives an example of both the violence and the acceptance of it in this story:

> "Yuh know how West Indian man fast. The man struck he wife a blow and broke her collar bone. Her mother and father had him arrested but the man and women make up. When de Commissioner call the case up he say: "Mrs. Johnson tell us exactly what happen on the day you got your jaw broken". "Sur, Me and John was playing sur, I fall down next the bed

stead sur, and I knock my mout on the hind part and my jaw broke". "Oh" said the Commissioner 'why did you haller murder, murder!" "O' it wasn't murder, murder I said Sir, I did say mudder, mudder".

"Violence is rationalized or excused and we see the martyred, super-religious wife playing one of the games people play", said Maxwell, "continually forgiving her man as he consistently abuses her and her children".

"When some of the children are not his, it's far worse. She faces guilt, jealousy, suspicion, incest, anxiety and fear Depression and breakdown are the names of that game. She herself may end up locked in the church or a passive alcoholic".

RACISM

Racism, or 'the put down' of the black woman "as ugly", was offered as another of the debilitating forces used against the Caribbean woman, strangling her creativity and destroying relationships.

Giving examples of the pro-white biases and white images of beauty which pervade minds, particularly the black man's mind Maxwell continued:

"Our social stratification in the West Indies still supports the iniquity of the "blacker you are the more inferior you are as the late Professor Goveia put it so cogently in her invaluable analysis of the social framework. When women fight back against this distortion of themselves they are given every label you can think of. It has only changed marginally and is another form of violation between our men and women, a heritage of slavery perpetuated in every ridiculous beauty contest and Miss Universe Show today, in every shade discrimination, in every job situation where the light coloureds or Indians are chosen instead of black. All this still remains despite the black is beautiful rage and promise".

In one of her stories Pandora Gomez offers us the mother denouncing blackness. The girl is not allowed to go into the water, because 'yuh black enough now and salt water would only make you blacker".

"What go in sea. Go in wha sea. Gal you look like sea. Cry if you want cry you still aint gwine. Go in sea; you black enough now ya all gal children too like to bring trouble. If you get any blacker and any scrubbier, it is old maid that I be having on me hand. Old maid till the saviour come and whey that gwine leave me. I will be worse off than Saffareta holding the bag. Everybody know how hard she did wuk trying hard to get marriage for the child Bev with the double head.

Blows, drug store, run out of face cream — couldn't do no good with the scrubbiness hanging on that face. Grater is dull compared to that. Go in sea! Go bathe you skin in that old sink tub if you in heat".

RASTAFARI

"It is changing slowly", said Maxwell: "But it is changing too slowly. In our West Indian societies, black people are still being hounded and hunted because they assert their blackness". She cited the Rastafari cult as examples of the victims of this persecution, a group which she said was making serious statements about the acceptance of blackness and the rejection of white western consumerist exploitation in Caribbean society.

She continued: "It is a most serious statement and lays foundations for a reshaping of many of our accepted norms.

However, the patriarchal, paternalistic relations between many Rasta men and women bear watching and exploring for future insights or we might be swapping white dog for monkey".

Honor Forde-Smith said that Rastafari, which has given 'oppressed men a language with which to name their oppression and begin to throw it off, ascribes to the woman a restricted and tightly controlled role'.

As a matter of fact she argued that reggae, the musical expression of Rastafari, superceded the voice of mother and introduced the woman as "daughter".

ESCAPE

What then are the solutions? One solution is that offered by the Calypsonian, Singing Francine: (Quoted by Maxwell)

"Cat does run away
Dog does run away
Fowl does run away
When men treating them bad
Wha happening to you

The failure of women to 'run away' from their normal habitat is evidence of the impossible odds against which they are struggling. Sophia, Marjorie Thorpe points out, Esther's mother in **Moon on a Rainbow Shawl** dreams of Esther winning a scholarship and escaping from the **hell of Nigger yard** in which they live; in fact all the people living there see Esther's potential progress as symbolic of their beating the system once and for all. Esther's father, Charlie, abandons his allegiance to respectability; he breaks into Old Mack's cafe to buy Esther a second-hand bicycle so she could keep her head up with the other high school girls.

Ms. Marjorie Thorpe showed too how middle class women engage in the battle of survival by escaping. They use psychological material and social techniques to do so. Strength of personality becomes a weapon and 'escape' takes on a new meaning. Citing Sylvia Wynter's **The Hills of Hebron**, Ms. Thorpe showed how Miss Gatha used determination to escape what was a psychological and materially inimicable social environment. She thus gave herself the ability to cope with her recognition of her husband's exploitive manoeuvrings, her own sense of having been humiliated sexually by her husband, and rejected by her only son.

Ms. Thorpe drew the attention of the symposium to 'woman' as a destructive agent, as she emerged in the works of the women novelists. She is seen through the women whose ambition is to better the life style of her family and to secure for them the social and economic advantage which she herself lacked.

But as the novelists see it: "this ambition at times encourages the woman to be less than sensitive to the emotional and psychological needs of her family and to deny them the compassion required for their own spiritual survival and growth".

Ms. Thorpe drew an example from **Hills of Hebron** in which Miss Gatha destroys her son and almost an entire community because, in the words of the author, "she wanted to see her son fulfilled as she had never been and now whilst he was young". Ms. Thorpe pointed out that it was not the children alone who were destroyed. "Aunt Beatrice's husband is reduced to a mere presence in the home in Hodge's **Crick Crack Monkey** and the father who dreams of moving the world with his music in Marshall's **Brown Girl Brown Stones** commits suicide, defeated because he is not a good provider".

DESTRUCTIVE MATRIARCH

All women do not mourn the death of the matriach or if they do, do not judge the stereotype too harshly. For through their arts they are saying that in fact the woman as mother has had her destructive roles, a fact which should be accepted if both sexes are to move forward.

In Pat Cumper's play the **"Rapist",** Sharon has been asked by the man who had committed the rape against her to testify against him so that he can seek psychiatric help. At the same time she is being asked by his mother not to. In deciding to testify against him Sharon tells the mother:

> "Ya know, me a go testify afta all — an you know why? Cause me like you son. Im hurt mi and I still hole a hatred in me heart for dat but mi seen now weh it mighta be di best t'ing all around if me just sent him to prison one time and see wha 'appen. Mi don't see how he could be much worse off if he stayed with you. If im no go mad in jail, im would a go mad with you around him".

Ms. Elaine Fido in her paper, "The Radical Woman in Theatre in the Anglophone Caribbean" saw in the **"Rapist"** a woman, offering a reason why men feel the need for violence. Violence is a protection against the destructive female.

The other family in the play is made up of a tough and man-hating mother who openly scorns her weak and drinking husband as he sits around the house, and who flaunts her economic independence, her good job and her sexual scorn at him. All of which has turned the son, Errol (the rapist of Sharon) into a mother-hating man who criticises his father for his toleration of such a situation.

> "Me feel feh you, like wen di ole hawg talk to you like dat
> Why the rass yu no tell her fi shut up — you fraid ar —
> What fi understan — dat you sit down inna di house all day
> A drink an a seh 'ow yu belly a bun yu, as she go to dat
> Blasted club ebery night fi go rub up on the boss so she
> Woan lose di wuk — manageress my backside".

Elaine Fido noted that Pat Cumper's approach to the problem of extensive rape in Jamaica is "importantly original" in that she does not blame males entirely for the occurrence. Cumper offers an explanation which combines male weakness and dependency on maternal strength with the kind of aggressive revenge on woman as sexual object which Merle Hodge describes in her paper on male-female relations "Under the Whip". But unlike Hodge, she goes further to suggest that mothers, in being human beings, are not necessarily paragons but are sometimes vengeful, spiteful and selfish people whose very importance in the lives of their husbands and sons make their capacity to damage them immense.

> "In this sense Cumper is more deeply radical in terms of thought than the collectively inspired **Belly Woman Bangarang** of Sistren who both put the blame for women's problems on to male responsibilities of various kinds, even while they argue for greater female independence from him. Even where, in **"Belly Woman Bangarang",** maternity is shown as a brutalising force for both mother and daughter, the enacted brutality of enforced pregnancy undercuts this with a greater emphasis on the exploitation of women".

Fido gives **Belly Woman** — full marks for using a black aesthetic to express the reality of woman.

WOMAN ALONE

The symposium moved at last to examine the 'new woman' turned inside exploring herself; the woman who as Ms. Thorpe argues is the woman "alone", but embodying the creative life-affirming potential of West Indian society as revealed by Merle in Marshall's **The Chosen Place The Timeless People:**

> "Merle Kinbona is the character whose experience of life suggests most completely the experience of West Indian womanhood. Marshall deliberately makes Merle a woman alone. Ignored by her wealthy upper-class father for most of her life, she has at the age of two witnessed the rape and murder of her mother, a black labourer, a murder supposedly committed by her father's white wife. As a young woman she goes to England and becomes involved with an English woman who exploits her and then betrays her. Her marriage of two years falls apart and her husband deserts her, taking their only child with him. For Merle, says Thorpe, "the action of the novel constitutes a rite of passage, a movement out of the void, the gradual reintegration of a disturbed and divided self".

But the new generation of female writers like Christine Craig seem to feel that the generation of Merles still need the criteria set by men to determine woman's success or failure; in fact, her truths.

Coda, the new woman appearing in Craig's poem argues that man's truth is not woman's truth:

Christine Craig

"Poor women, the man's truth is an empty yabba* for you.
Vainly you try to fill it with a whirling, shifting
Liquid of your own.
Where can we meet, my brother,
My lover, my friend, to make something new together.
I will meet you on the road for I have done with waiting.

I will help you with your load and welcome your greeting
I will meet you on the road for I have shaped my journey".

Footnote:—
***Yabba — a container used in the preparation of food.**

THE CARIBBEAN WOMAN AS ARTIST TODAY

Part Three:

The voice of Caribbean women was loudest, and their image most positive in the folk culture of early Caribbean society. In this period, women used story-telling, song, language and ritual dance, largely derived from the cultures from which they had sprung, to define their reality as mother, and religious leader, as rebel, and worker. "Art was integral to the process of life, the link between the spiritual and material". (Olive Lewin)

Woman Dancing

It was argued, however, that in the early 20th century it was only in the field of dance that the Caribbean woman had dominated the arts. The choreographers, teachers, and founders of dance companies raised to the level of "respectability" the dance traditions of the folk and eventually contributed significantly to the evolution of "West Indian Dance", with all its national and regional characteristics. She left the field of drama largely to expatriate women in the 20's and 30's and later on to the Caribbean male except in the role of actress.

It was argued that there are indications that this is changing. Evidence of this is the work of Sistren of Jamaica.

The symposium did not deal with women's contribution to the visual and fine arts. Despite the tools of an elitist European education which she shared with her Caribbean male counterpart, it was felt that it was in the literary field that the Caribbean woman has made her smallest contribution, producing only a handful of writers and poets, when compared with the significant body of literature produced by the Caribbean man since the 50's.

This conclusion led to a major discussion of the reasons for this "weak" input by women in this field, and the discussion finally came back to the question of the problems which faced the Caribbean woman as artist.

GARGANTUAN PRESSURES

It was argued that Caribbean women as artists faced gargantuan pressures. One speaker described their positions as one involving enormous sacrifice, loneliness, never-ending adaptation and compromises, heartaches, defamation, lack of time and space for creation, smashing of wings and shattering of internal unique rhythms while holding jobs as wife, mother, domestic, factory worker, secretary, teacher, taxi-driver, civil servant — each being a full-time job.

It was pointed out that women's own choices affected their achievements as artists. Women often used their strength to survive with destructive situations rather than running away to save their children and creativity.

The symposium suggested that a lack of respect for women's artistic endeavours was another main factor which affected their production as artists: a lack of respect demonstrated even by women.

This lack of respect of women as artists, it was argued, was demonstrated also by the excuses which publishers often gave for not publishing work by women. It was noted, however, that this treatment by publishing houses was not restricted to Caribbean women. One speaker pointed out that it was not surprising that women writers were not taken seriously when it was only recently that the male writers had been taken seriously in the Caribbean. If the society was not prepared to take even its men seriously, it would take even longer for women writers to be taken seriously.

All women writers, even when they were accepted as writers, were expected to be limited in sensibility and in the depth of their exploration of the human condition.

MOTHERING MORE IMPORTANT

Women, too, had also accepted the role of mother and wife as being more important and since writing was a demanding business, many of them could not afford or would not lock themselves away, since they wished not to accept the consequences of abandoning traditional responsibilities.

Time then, it was agreed, was a major factor working against women. The demands on women as wife, mother, worker, were so great that their creative energies at the end of the day were not

equal to the discipline and concentration required by writing. Some women's work had been published but at great personal and financial sacrifice.

DIFFERENT VALUE SYSTEMS

One participant, unhappy with these answers, asked whether it was not a fact that men and women had different value systems:

> "I reviewed a beautiful book of poems by Jamaican female poets and as I read the book it occurred to me that one of the problems we women face, is a difference in value systems. What came home to me when I reviewed that book is that women are concerned with relationships, men with protecting independent rights: 'being myself', 'being free'. I do not know to what extent involvement in relationships makes it difficult for women to isolate themselves to put their thoughts on paper, women express their creativity in thought and relationships".

RELATING

Another participant suggested that women were more interested in 'relating' in art. Therefore, there was greater participation in dance and music for example, since the Caribbean was more responsive to the performing arts than the literary arts, because of its oral tradition. Art, she said, was partially informed by the existence of an audience, "you dance and sang because you knew someone would come to see or hear you. You would write books if you knew someone would read them or at least knew they would be published".

In conclusion, the symposium felt that as artists, women were not given the respect they felt their work deserved either by the men and women in their homes or in the wider society or by the publishing world. Women therefore concentrated on those areas of activity like dance and drama, for which they knew there was an audience.

However, it appeared from the discussion that the Caribbean woman's future contribution to literature would take the form of poetry, of largely informative books on dance, drama, cooking and so on and of novels with autobiographical and biographical themes.

It was argued that basic changes had to be made. There was a need for the creation of institutions to assist women in their role as artist and there was a need for the transformation of present-day Caribbean society so as to alter their present status and give relief from some of the burdens which have been imposed upon them.

NO IVORY TOWER

Lucille Mair in a speech circulated at the symposium seemed to feel that social activism was a requirement of women artists. She said that women must therefore incorporate a fundamental element of social activism, a concern with helping to shape social changes.

> "Her creativity must have simultaneously a private and a public face. Not for her the ivory towers, the luxury of a key in a lock of a door or a room of her own, that shuts out a world, that will leave her in private to endure or perhaps enjoy the agonies and the estacies of self-discovery.
>
> Her options do not involve the luxury of non-involvement for the world she is part of is one which is today in convulsion, in which every scholar and here I would like to extend Frantz Fanon's definition to include the artists as scholar, must also be activist. The internal well-spring must also be a creative source for the community".

Proposals for Work Programme

A Committee on women in culture convened at the end of The Symposium made a number of proposals for increasing the involvement of women in the visual and performing arts. It further proposed that a number of mechanisms be created which would bring into focus the role of culture in development and focus on the roles of women in culture thus allowing them to play a fuller role in the on-going developmental programmes in the region.

Mechanisms proposed fall under five general headings: Symposia; Training and Scholarships; Support and Programmes for Artists; Research and Documentation; and Artists exchange.

It was proposed that there be:

SYMPOSIA

(a) A standing symposia on "Women in Culture" in the Caribbean Festival of Arts and Crafts. A full scale Caribbean Artists Conference in 1983 on women.

(b) Local mini symposia held by women artists on a regular basis in each country dealing each with a differenct aspect of the arts.

(c) The creation of a forum for providing links between female and male artists in the Caribbean and linkages between this group and groups in the Third World.

Training and Scholarships

WAND would seek through Government or other agencies.

(a) Provision of scholarships for women to schools of Creative Arts..

(b) Provision of funding by agencies for individual artists to conduct short workshops with women's groups throughout the region.

(c) Creation of workshops for developing dramatic techniques and shaping content in the context of the consciousness-raising exercises of women on-going in the region.

(d) Provision of funds and facilities for artists to produce written and visual material for inclusion in national literacy and post literacy educational programmes geared specifically to deal with three categories of women: lapsed literate, the women on the urban ghetto, and women in the rural areas.

Support Programmes for Artists

(a) Provision of funds for the partial or total funding of the publication of manuscripts written by women and approved by an Editorial Committee set up by WAND. Manuscripts could be literary, dance scenarios, short pamphlets, folk material, music scores, calypsoes, cook books and so on.

Research and Documentation

(a) Encouragement of research on women and women artists in the Caribbean.

(b) Records on VCR and film of worthwhile work by women artists for dissemination to radio and TV series.

(c) Sponsorship of relevant films (16mm) to record work of quality on women's condition and art.

(d) Investigation of copyright laws re music and literature.

(e) Development or establishment of resource centres in each territory which would include libraries, bookshops, bibliographies.

Artist Exchange

(a) Sponsorship of cultural exchanges and tours of individuals and groups.

(b) Organisation of the exchange of material by women artists throughout the region.

PAPERS

SUMMARIES

Part 3 — 1

WOMEN IN CULTURE — THE WEAKENED SEX

BY

MARINA AMA OMOWALE MAXWELL

Marina Maxwell

Part 3

Marina Ama Omowale Maxwell began her feature address on "Women in Culture — The Weakened Sex" by asserting that:

"We are witnessing the birth of woman's time and are caught in the pangs of the tremendous and terrifying orchestration of the second movement of birth, the birth of the 21st Century woman.

"It is a cusp time — just when the quality of pain, the quality of tension, of contractions are changing, when the lateral, horizontal and vertical muscles shudder in motion, change into a different gear and move towards crescendo. As we know, it is not an easy time. It is a glorious, terrible and fulfilling time — this officiating at our own birth, this self-creation which means blood, expansions and relief, which mean creation and life".

"And woman is going to have to give birth to herself. It will and must be a natural child-birth with few pills and potions and anaesthesia — and we have already refused the forceps — which distort and retard in the hands of the wrong obstetricians. We have had our share of still-borns, of damage, of mistakes. It is a natural, gradually unfolding and essential child-birth, this tearing into Being. And we will have to learn to breathe properly, to breathe as needed, to breathe in Life in order to produce Life, to choose to breathe Life instead of choosing desperate silences and Death. It is not and it will not be always easy".

"There are some men who will help us. There are some who most certainly will not. We will have to be our own midwives, cutting our own cords. The time is not easy. But it is essential and when labour has begun, it is only death and dying that can stop it coming to fruition. Labour has begun..... In the Caribbean, compared to the rest of the developed world, the pangs, the contractions have been delayed — by history, the birth has been slowed down, by the very context of the formation of our West Indian societies, by underdevelopment, malnutrition, by our own choices and by our state of structural female dependency. Our women artist are particularly affected, limited and delayed here. We have to find the solutions necessary to come on stream.

"In delineating the climate in which women operate and before attempting to give an historical perspective of woman in culture, in the broadest sense with Caribbean woman being the focus, I want to draw two parallels, two further metaphors to the condition. We are in a global cusp time — specifically for the Third World which is the Caribbean context; we are inside the pangs and throes, the eco-spasm of the re-shaping of a new order".

She said that the search, the exploration was on to create a new international economic order — and it had to be, will be, a new cultural, social, political and economic order. If it is to be more than just a strategy it has to be an order that is serious where the inequalities of history and exploitation between the centre or developed nations and the periphery or underdeveloped nations will be righted and given balance. It is a time of transformation and transition to a new modality when valid developmental potentials can be arrested or allowed to grow. The development-undervelopment contraditions of the world capitalist system have embedded in them all the potential to be transitionally valid or arrested. I think of women today as the periphery nations in a

patriarchal, male-oriented and male-dominated system where the men are the centre nations. The dialogue between them is at a stage of transformation and transition. And there are endless contradictions: the need for compassion on both sides, the need for firmness and fight, for love and for caring, for an insistence that the inequality must end, that potentials be allowed to grow, that balance and justice be achieved. But the centre nations are not going to give up power easily. The peripheries have to develop their own patterns, structures, choices, integrities and insist on claiming them, themselves. The parallels are amazingly strong.

"In the same way that the centre nations have emerged as colonizers and exploiters of the periphery nations of the 3rd world, so too have men colonized and dominated and exploited women over the last centuries, sometimes with the best of intentions. In the search for the new order today lie many paths and solutions which women need to be cognizant of and to understand if they are to fully be aware of their own condition.

"The second metaphor. It has been said before that "women are the niggers of this world".... black women moreso. There is a not so old male chauvinist joke which is no joke at all — it goes like this — "Women are like gongs, they should be struck regularly". And you know — I agree with it. Pause — for all the hate-stares of amazement!

"I agree with it in this sense — if the violence, violation and conflict which exists in far too many relationships were externalized more often in blows — then and only then might women (and men too) see clearly, and become absolutely aware of the true state of what these relationships mean. In this way they can save themselves. Women, like the niggers, the blacks of the black diaspora live in a state of personal and private violence, violation and conflict and a state of institutional violence. Racial discrimination and racial prejudice as we know can be personal or institutional. Women face both of these violences as well as racial problems in our Caribbean cultures.

"How can I truly and in any other way agree with the violence and violations which some women face every day? It is a miracle and a wonder that women, particularly sensitive artists have survived and produced at all. Perhaps it is why there are so relatively few productive and artistic women in our Caribbean cultures in that specific sense — women who paint and write and dance and choreograph and sing. Artists, I mean artists are purely entertainers — we have endless female entertainers around who generally are part of the skin trade for this is what they have been allowed to do or what they have been able to do. The women artists are few — one novelist here, a poet there, one outstanding actress of real quality in a country, one fabulous dancer.

Marina Maxwell said she was speaking of the Anglophones since the Latin countries had been taking art and artists seriously for a long time and their women though caught on the skirts of the duenna have surfaced with the institutional support. "In the Anglophones we have had very little state support and this reinforces the already difficult position women artist are caught in. So it is a marvel that there have been so many creative women artists in the Caribbean. Too many have fallen silent or been driven underground smothered by husbands, children or jobs".

Maxwell felt despite this it was still possible to have very close and sensitive friendships with men because of the fact that as a result of centuries of freedom, despite the oppressions of our history, men were very often fully individuated, more fulfilled or can be more fulfilled, interesting and interested deeply in their own creativity, confident, alert and aware human beings.

"Many of these men who are individuated and concerned about developing their different levels of consciousness are not

always interested in the domineerinig role society has set up for them. Sometimes these are the ones who are themselves shattered by violence and conflict and can suffer from what is called 'tabanca' in Trinidad as terribly as any woman who has lost her mate. Lest we forget men are very capable of deep feeling and emotion and hurt and pain too. And many try to be as good fathers and husbands and lovers as they can despite the context and roles of power often reinforced by women themselves.

Marina Maxwell ended in this vein: "I think we are moving towards the **Autumn of the Patriarch** to steal a magnificent title from a fantastic book by Gabriel Garcia Marquez who is a magnificent, fantastic and individuated man, one of those conscious men I truly like, revere, respect and admire. But it is only as yet autumn and the giant is still far from sleeping. Male patriarchal domination alias male chauvinism is still very much alive and well on this planet earth and especially in our neo-colonial societies ridden by the machismo tradition still full-blown in Puerto Rico and the Latin regions. There are still endless mothers who are fathering he, she and many, and not yet by choice either, which is bound to come as women gain more economic independence. As the pendulum swings to median, there will be many changes.

"In the Caribbean — from the stables and the canefields, through the mulattress and house-slave poisoning the masters and the molesters to the trade-union woman strugglers fighting inside and outside the home, on the factory-floor, woman have articulated and demanded and continue to demand equalities for their class, race and sex.

"One trade-union shop steward who is also a fine woman-painter in the Haitian primitive tradition, feels that women will continue to be house-slaves and under-dogs, once the present capitalist system continues and women will continue to be victims in a man's world. But is it only the system that must change? We in the Caribbean, especially our women artists will have to decolonize our minds as well if we are to initiate or keep abreast of the movements of change. The cinematique artists in Cuba explore this in two very fine films on woman; **Lucia** which is a comparative tale of three women under the systems of Machado, Batista and Fidel, and this film ends with the still very much male-chauvinist **physically** nailing up his woman in their cabin and the woman breaking out, escaping, running away to go and follow what she sees as her own business of working for the revolution. At the last Carifesta, in Havana, we saw **Teresa,** the premier of another film on woman, fighting for herself and her right to be artist and whole. Cuba is also the only Caribbean society that I know of which has developed a Family Code which publishes the view of how men and women should cooperate and break stultifying roles.

"But societal change and institutional support are only part of the story. We ourselves have to choose to grow. Despite the tremendous pressures, we have to choose to live. But when we find little support as women and artist from society, state or friend — we can choose to die — and it is with great and deep sadness that we have had to record the recent deaths of two of our finest creative Caribbean women — Dr. Elsa Goveia, a historian who gave us back our black societies and Haydee Santermaria who supported and developed artists for many years as the Director of Casa las Americas. There are far too many of our women artists who have gone under to the pressures. Suicide, it has been said is the extreme form of woman's inner protest.

"I must close, though I have not touched on endless points. I have not been able to touch the Latin or Frankophone Caribbean although I think that a lot of what I have presented applies to those societies also with changes in detail and time-lag. I had

wanted to talk more about the plight of the working-class woman and her fight to be artist since most of our Caribbean are grassroots working-class women. I had wanted to let women talk more for herself about the sadness, joy and silences between her and her man. For this is very central in our attempted conversations with our "Adams" — the silences, the communication gaps. Research, and tears show that role relationships in the Caribbean between men and women in our cultures are ambiguous, unclear and consumed by patriarchal and patronizing strategies and game-playing instead of straight honest talk when the usual, to-be-expected fun of the initial fan-dance is past. This silence is particularly, excruciatingly draining for our women and particularly for creative women artist who want to get on with their work and who usually are in the process of life as an experiment with truth.

"And it is only our truths that will save us, save our art, our children and our men — for as we liberate ourselves we will help men in their liberation process as well. We have to go on in all the difficulties, to seek our own Self-Realization, self real self, made real, have to seek our own shape of cosmic strengths, our own spiritual and creative paths, belief-systems which support us and help us in our birth".

"Sri Aurobindo gives us guidance here when he talks about the urgencies of true individuation so vital to all people, to artists and particularly to our women artists of the Caribbean".

"Jung one of the 20 C greatest psychiatrists and philosophers details what individuation is all about. Women today benefit tremendously from the developments of these sciences and we need to get next to them. Individuation lies in the human factor; it is beyond systems and into Self-hood. It is the specific choice of women and men, mothers and fathers to truly embrace and respect growth and creativity of whole human beings. Until men and women face this realization that the aim is wholeness for the one **and** for the "Other", the syndrome of domination and servility will remain. Until we do this for ourselves how can we do this for our children and their mind-flowers and creativity? How can we do anything for our societies?"

She continued: "Particularly in the Caribbean we need to make these choices; when one grows up in a context of paternalistic dominations, capitalist exploitations and where love is another product in the market-place, where people are aware of the lack of principles of leaders, of corruption, of graft, of contempt, of sickness and directionlessness we can only expect to breed generations of distortions — Unless we choose differently, choose to develop the principles and impulses of our inner landscapes. Our revolutions must be different in this sense from those which have gone before. It is here that the Third World artist, woman artist makes serious contribution. If we ourselve are frustrated and broken, how can we help to build nations? How can we play serious political roles? Why should men expect us to, when they themselves are not serious?

In this time when we are about our own business of re-shaping our societies we have to begin at home — we have to begin reshaping the order there, feel the flowers urgent inside of ourselves, wanting light to grow to birth. It is only this way that men and women will truly understand, and also understand, the urgencies of their children of the 21st Century.

Women artists have to be selfish with their time, minds, bodies, energies and so on, in the truest and best sense especially in our societies with all their freakish and superficial demands which waste our time, energy and life-force. No artist, woman or other can run with the herd, bow down to silly Master/Slave rules

or totally sacrifice herself to family, collectivity, system or community.

> Sri Aurobindo in his **Future Evolution of Man** says this:
> IT is wrong to demand that the individual subordinate himself or herself to the collectivity or merge into it, because it is by its most advanced individuals that the collectivity progresses and they can really advance only if they are free. But it is true that as the individual advances spiritually (creatively, artistically) she finds herself more and more united with the collectivity and the All.

"To give to the collectivity of family, of society or of nation an artist must first free herself to come to full growth. It was Nkrumah who said that the quality of revolutionary change and political growth in our new societies will be dependent on the quality of contribution our women make. It was Ladner in her fine book **Tomorrow's Tomorrow** who stressed that the standards by which black women must judge themselves must be developed internally. There must be this turning inwards to our true selves, an exploration of our inner landscapes since Liberation like Blackness is a state of mind".

"Fanon has stated that it is only war that will break oppression; Cross suggests that we pick the "degree of war" in both our personal and in our institutional discriminations. As the niggers of this world, black women artists have to go through what William Cross Jr. calls the Negro-to-Black Conversion experience with all its stages, pain and growth. We not only have to declare black, which we are, in all shades and sizes and levels of consciousness, and which in the Caribbean is cardinal to our wholeness, individuation, creativity, claiming of our freedoms and identities but we also have to declare, claim, live and struggle for liberation of the black woman artist".

"Neither by fight nor by guile will this freedom be won — but by a consummate giving" says Cecil Herbert, and Octavia Paz reminds us that "when man has put down his domination and woman her servitude then can they fly together like incandescent eagles".

Labour has begun.

WOMEN IN DANCE IN CARIBBEAN CULTURE

BY

IVY BAXTER

Ivy Baxter introduced her presentation on the growth and development of "The Dance in Jamaica and the Caribbean" with a short description of the evasion she used to "go away" from Jamaica to study the dance:

> "We had a party for those of us who were going abroad to study — and my friends were there, and they didn't know what I was going to do. Medicine? No! Law? No! Teaching? No! Nursing? No! Physical Education! Yes! That was the only way dance could be put into a context so you could come back and get a job and earn a living".

That was the only way she could do what in truth she wanted to do, i.e. dance, and have it accepted; but now it had taken her around the world.

Ivy Baxter

THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Ms. Baxter next described the first festival her group had attended, how they had acquired their invitation and the experiences they had. The festival was the Caribbean Festival of Arts sponsored by the Puerto Rican Tourist Board. Ms. Baxter's group had not been officially invited but she and her group had, with the help of Philip Sherlock and other persons interested in the arts in Jamaica, been able to make the trip. In Puerto Rico they met other groups — groups such as the Geoffrey Holder group and the McBurnie group — from all over the Caribbean and were astonished and delighted to discover that what her group was attempting in Jamaica was being attempted all through the Caribbean. The experience was useful in that her group learned form other groups and gave some of what skills they had to other Caribbean groups.

She explained that in these circumstances the group helped every other group with their rehearsals. This was particularly true of the stage manager of her group. He did not know anything about a road march, and he put on a pair of rubber boots and marched behind the Antiguan Brute Force Steel Band, but he knew about stage management. And so we helped others to present their shows and they helped us with ours.

She admitted that what the Caribbean Festival in Puerto Rico did for them more than anything else was to make Jamaicans realise that there were other places in the Caribbean. At this point Jamaicans were completely and mentally isolated and really did not know that other places in the Caribbean existed. They had never met Barbadians, they had never met Martiniquans, they had met no one and were seeing for the first time people like themselves speaking French, Spanish and English. But that was only the beginning. They began to learn from the Trinidadians and other groups and they began to move forward from then on.

Ivy Baxter turned next to a definition of the 'Caribbean Woman'. She asked:

"Now who are we Caribbean women — What are we?" Her answer was that Caribbean women are all shades of colour, all material sets, some are still white, some are getting black. You can't consider Caribbean women to be a 'one picture business' Baxter said. Some are integrated and some are isolated.

It was important to her that these factors be faced because women need 'to think within themselves about what are their goals in relation to art'.

Baxter asserted that every Caribbean woman has some goals. These goals are incorporated into her art for her art is related to her people and her family. Art, she said is the conceptualisation, the visualising, the manipulation of a medium.

"If you hit it in stone, you are a sculptor, if you hit it in paint, you are a painter, and if you hit it in movement, you are a dancer or a choreographer", she said.

MOTHERING — AN ART

Ms. Baxter continued and expressed the view that given the present circumstances of Caribbean society, many women in the Caribbean are concerned with the simple 'art' of raising a family; getting the children functional in a situation and an environment that is not the most agreeable, in terms of opportunities. In performing this task the Caribbean women are artists in the techniques of conceiving and manipulating.

The importance of women in this particular creative process is well-known in the Caribbean, Baxter argued: "In the nuclear or the extended family it is often the woman alone, who after conception and birth, creates the environment in which the child grows or develops". She went on to say that women of varying ages, with or without the help of men, conceptualise and internalise the progress and development of the child. The ability or willingness of the child to internalise a conscious conception of himself, depends upon the relationship between the woman and the child. This process can go on for a long or short period of time. She knows some Caribbean women or some women living in other parts of the world who live in the mental style of Caribbean women, who are always involved, either overtly or covertly in how their sons conceive and internalise progress through life. This type of manipulation can be compared with how an artist manipulates the media to produce a work of art, or manipulates stone or wood to create sculpture, or words and ideas to create literature.

Ms. Baxter concluded this theory with the idea that the power of art which Caribbean women have is their ability to manipulate ideas, forms, and their environment. She expressed the view that:

> "Caribbean women are good at the manipulation of the environment in the home. They create comforts of home, of food and surroundings, by manipulating either out of bits and pieces or out of plenitude. They can manipulate people. They can introduce positive or negative career designs into the conception of their native Caribbean land to London, New York, Toronto or Mississaugua".

CULTURAL CONFRONTATION

Ms. Baxter turned finally to consider how the confrontation or race and culture in the Caribbean has affected the meaning, style and structure and technique of dance. She pointed out that each Caribbean society has what may be termed a traditional dance, which was born of combinations of the traditional dances of the racial groups which make the society.

She said that every society in the Caribbean has some ritual or social dance and each country its own dance, but out of the confrontation at the national and regional levels there is emerging a total Caribbean dance.

She said, however, that there are recognizable and distinctive movement patterns which are expressions of individual groups and societies so that one is able to identify what is distinctively

Trinidadian, what is Jamaican, what is Martiniquan and what is Guyanese.

To support this view she chose at this point to give illustrations through a dance of her hands. She showed how a Trinidadian calls to another — palms upward, all fingers moving towards the caller. She showed how, "when a Cuban calls another the palms are turned downwards all fingers moving while for the Jamaican engaged in the same movement the palms were turned upward, with the index finger moving downwards".

Ms. Baxter pointed out that in the dance of the calypso, for example, one moves a vertical plane, while for the mento the dancer moves on a horizontal plane. She said that all of these dances, all of these natural patterns of movement can be analysed either through video or through notation and what emerges is that your technique is developed as you set inside your own body the pattern of the group to which you belong.

> "You set your breath up — in your body — if you are dancing Calypso and your centre of gravity rises; and you set it down, if you are dancing certain eastern dances or certain African dances".

Ms. Baxter concluded by asserting that all of these aspects of the dance was clearly recognizable and that they have in the Caribbean evolved along with the patterns of the dance to the extent that she had had the experience of showing to North Americans in Canada and the U.S.A. how dances and drumming from the Caribbean 'set up' feelings distinctive from the accustomed feeling in their bodies. It is from evidence such as this that 'we are able to say that Caribbean dance exists'. It does not only exist, but its effects are spreading outside the Caribbean.

WOMEN IN DRAMA

BY

DAPHNE JOSEPH-HACKETT

Daphne Joseph-Hackett

In examining the role of Women in Drama in the Caribbean, Daphne Joseph-Hackett noted that the major contributions to drama in the Caribbean in the 30's and early 40's were made by expatriate women who came mainly from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and even Australia.

She said that these women, the wives of men whose work tied them to the region, were often unemployed and had either some direct connection with the theatre in their home countries or had missed the entertainment the theatre offered them as spectators. As a result they attempted to fill this void with local productions, often drawing local women of similar racial types with similar social patterns into their activities.

As was to be expected their efforts centred around foreign material such as farces "full of non-West Indian humour and pieces lacking any real dramatic merit".

BEGINNINGS

Despite the deficiencies of these productions, these activities stimulated interest among local women and formed a base for the later development of Caribbean Theatre.

She noted, however, that in a few territories this thrust came from men, so that when the political and social change came in the late 40's and 50's men took over the lead in the field of theatre.

Women, Joseph-Hackett said, especially in Barbados, continued to work quietly in the theatre. Mrs. Olga Symmonds wrote and produced sketches; Mrs. Sealy organised operatic productions at the Government Industrial Union. In Guyana there was the founding and sustenance by women of the Theatre Guild and in Jamaica there was Louise Bennett, dialect poet and dramatist who "not only enriched the cultural experience of her native territory but helped to spread West Indian Culture abroad".

Joseph-Hackett argued that today some very definite roles are being played by Caribbean women in the theatre, through involvement in the Drama School of Jamaica, working class theatre and puppetry. Some examples of such women were Jean Small of Jamaica, Helen Camps (Little Carib Theatre) of Trinidad and Tobago, Cynthia Wilson of Barbados, Christine Craig of Jamaica, and story-teller actress Pandora Gomez of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. She especially mentioned the work of the Jamaican Group, Sistren, who were involving working people in a new form of drama. The productions were on the actual experiences of these women and they expressed resistance to the oppression which threatened to destroy them.

Joseph-Hackett concluded that although some women were playing some very positive roles in the theatre today, too many women were only dabbling in the field, sharing some interest but failing to sustain it. As a result men continued to dominate the theatre in the Caribbean.

WOMEN AND MUSIC IN CULTURE — THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

BY

OLIVE LEWIN

Ms. Olive Lewin, in her presentation on the relationship between music, in particular folk music, and the role of women in society, began by considering the relationship between music and women in traditional cultures. "Culture" may be considered to be all that which enables us to understand our world, find our place in it and to contribute to its evolution", Ms. Lewin noted.

Olive Lewin

CULTURE

In the light of this definition, there is a marked distinction between "culture" and the "cultural products", and Ms. Lewin determined "the arts" to be among the "cultural products".

She pointed out that the more she had investigated traditional cultures as a musician, the more she realised that it is not the manifestations of the culture which are important, but instead what gives rise to these manifestations. For this reason she would speak about "woman" in traditional cultures.

"In traditional cultures", the arts are fundamental to the process of living. When a woman sings to ease her burden, to help life go better, to express her sadness, there is nothing self-conscious or composed about that song, it is a natural out-pouring of her expressing her condition. Within this context Ms. Lewin turned next to consider the effect of music on the process of living. She saw music as a powerful medium of communication because music can communicate where words cannot:

> "Music transcends all barriers, even the barriers between all bodies — human, animal, plant, earth, water, stone — where life lives".

HARMONY

We know, even if we do not know the science, that all life has vibrations in it. The traditionalist argues that music is the link between the vibrations that we are conscious of and the vibrations that we are not conscious of. Therefore, it is an absolutely vital link in keeping the harmony that was intended by the creator; harmony which is essential if we are to continue our existence on this planet. Music then, is the bridge between the spiritual and material worlds. It is a very necessary tool, since in our human frailty and insufficiency we often disturb the cosmic harmony. Traditional people see the need to maintain that harmony, or when it has been disturbed, restore it, often through music/dance and so on. Music was used as a form of therapy: that which allowed the spirit to remove itself from ugly situations, thus remaining undamaged by a situation in which the body found itself and which could be harmful to both body and spirit. Thus for instance in the slave setting, the master may have been very cruel, grasping and greedy, but that was not the slave's problem. What was essential was for the slave to remain untouched by his situation. She drew illustrations from figures such as David, Jonah, and Daniel, who appeared weak and powerless but who defeated their giant foes. They were popularised in folk music and sung over and over again not because they were in the hymn book, but because they were powerful symbols for persons who felt powerless but who did not wish to be totally destroyed and broken by their situation, or as she poetically puts it "to blot his copy book". In reply to her own question, why not 'blot one's copy book', she explained that in traditional societies this plane of life is only a school; death the door that leads from one plane to another; birth

the other door. Evidence of this perception of life as a cosmic whole is expressed in a Jamaican Wake Song which she proceeded to sing for the symposium:

> "Although the road be rocky and steep I ask my
> Savious to be my guide
> And when I turn my eyes up to heaven I saw Mary
> At her master's feet
> An' me say bam, Uncle Rufus sen' me dung a Brown's
> Town fe go hear dem sing dem cyan sing at all, a rum
> Dem want a Mama Tully Yahd
> King David slew Goliath wid a sling an' a marble
> Stone (repeat)
> Chris' is coming an' me no wan' no condemnation
> So me pick up me cymbal, me lick dung me cymbal
> Cymbal a go roll and cymbal a go roll away".

But slaves were human and therefore sometimes they became rebellious. There are songs to prove the truth of this:

> War dun a Monklan
> War dung a Moran Bay
> War dung a Chigga foot
> The Queen never know
> War, war, war oh
> War oh, heavy war oh
> Soldiers from New Castle
> Come dung a Monklan
> With gun an' sword
> Fe kill sinner oh
> War, War, War oh, War oh
> Heavy war oh.

We know we are going to rebel just as we weep when somebody dies, though death is only a door. Don't hold back the hatred and the anger because in that way you damage yourself. The man who is bitter and nasty to you has to face his comuppance. What you have to do is not let it remain in you, so if you feel angry, bitter, express it. Sing it out, weep. That is what they did. They danced it out, they drummed it out, they sang it out and they talked it out.

SEX IN SOCIETY

Ms. Lewin then turned to the view of sex in traditional societies. Sex is seen as the Creator's way of continuing life on this plane. In some traditional cultures sex is referred to as a sacred rite. It goes so deep that you will notice that in rituals where drums are used there never is one drum. There must be at least two. One symbolises the male and the other symbolises the female, in keeping with the Creator's plan. When one looked at sex in this way, from it flows an attitude to children as extremely important vehicles in the continuity of life because: "as the adults pass on, the children take over". Ms. Lewin pointed out that from this we can recognise how important women are in traditional societies, for life's continuity is eloquently expressed through the image of the child on the mother's knees. The future sits on women's knees. That is how the Creator planned it.

THE TRANSMITTER OF VALUES

We can transfer that idea and see woman as the universal mother and as such, responsible for transmitting the values of the society to those who sit on her knees. She does not have to give birth to a child to be a mother. She is the mother spirit and we see it daily in our societies, in grandmothers, in teachers, in policewomen and bus drivers, bus conductors, nurses, community workers — the mother is seen in the cosmic plan:

"So earth is mother and earth supports us and keeps us alive, if we understand her and respect her and work with her, not break her and rape her".

The songs, stories, plays, dances with which mothers, grandmothers and mother figures, regale, teach, encourage, comfort and shield the little ones are really subtle but powerful means of passing on values. Values which have been proven through centuries and which have allowed them to cope with life wherever they are.

Ms. Lewin also advised planners in the Caribbean to study carefully the traditional mores of societies before taking decisions. She cited family planning programmes as an example.

At a certain level in society a child is a liability. We think, how many children can we afford? At the traditional level a child is an investment:

"So when you say 'don't have so many children', you will have to tell me who will tie the goat in the morning, who will look after the young ones when I can no longer work; what I am going to do when three of the children die". We have to understand all this before we say "don't have so many children".

A BRIDGE

Ms. Lewin also made a plea for the women in the Caribbean to make a bridge to the past so that the wisdom of the past, expressed in song, stories, and so on, could be combined with modern methods and technology to solve the problems which Caribbean societies faced.

Finally Ms. Lewin left the symposium with a number of questions: How do we handle the transition from the traditional wisdom which has stood the test of centuries to the modern technologies? How do we handle the transition from the grandmothers telling stories with their underlying values to the modern teacher and community leader? Have we been afraid to listen to messages from those lips because their owners don't look right, because they have no teeth, because they misuse the Queen's English?

TOLERANCE

She ended with a plea for tolerance by women for other women allowing each to discover her own way of expressing her uniqueness, honesty to see things as they truly are. "Is it fair for us to blame the male editors of papers for centre spreads of women in the nude when some women feel that this is their way of expressing their freedom? To expose or not to expose. Let us think, find out and do what we are here to do and leave the others to find out what they are doing", she concluded.

WOMEN IN CULTURE — A LITERARY VIEW

BY

DR. MARJORIE THORPE

The sources of this paper are various West Indian novels written by West Indian women. It seeks to discover if there exists an imaginative continuum in the works of these women novelists, to isolate any recurring patterns of female experience in these novels and, through them to determine what West Indian women novelists perceive to be the reality of West Indian womanhood.

Marjorie Thorpe

WEST INDIAN WOMANHOOD

Dr. Thorpe said: "It would appear from a study of these novels that there exists three clearly defined concepts of West Indian womanhood. The first stresses the image of the woman as a survivor. The second presents a view of the woman as a disordering , destructive agent whose influence may be spiritually and psychologically crippling. And the third celebrates the woman as embodying and imaging the creative, nurturing, life-affirming potential of the society.

"Let us begin with the image of the woman as a survivor. The woman who survives is one of the most familiar figures in West Indian fiction. She spans several decades of creative writing by our male novelists. We meet her very early, for instance, in the heroine of De Lisser's 1914 novel, **Jane's Career**. She reappears in the figure of Mrs. Rouse in C.L.R. James' **Minty Alley** (1936); in the figure of Tantie in Selvon's **The Lonely Londoners** (1956); in the figure of Shama in V.S. Naipaul's **A House for Mr. Biswas**; (1961); and even in the character of Miss Cleothilda in Earle Lovelace's recent novel, **The Dragon Can't Dance** (1979). From the outset, then, the West Indian woman has been presented as a survivor in the imaginative works of West Indian men. And the methods she is shown to employ, have been as various as they have been successful: she may pursue a policy of unequivocal pragmatism, or she may be sustained by a total self-sacrificing commitment to some chosen goal. She may rely on the consolation of religion, or she may depend on her own physical charms and her sexuality; or it may be a combination of all these and more; but whatever her methods, she is shown to survive. She survives social and economic oppression, sexual rejection, the frustration of her ambitions and the betrayal of her dreams. And if the men perceive this clearly, so too do the women".

ESCAPE

"If we consider the character of Miss Gatha, a major figure in Sylvia Wynter's novel, **The Hills of Hebron**",Dr. Thorpe continued, "we will find that it is her unshakeable determination to escape what is a psychologically and economically inimical social environment that enables her to cope with her recognition of her husband's exploitative manoeuverings and the opportunistic responses of her fellow Hebronites; to cope as well with her own sense of having been sexually humiliated by her husband and rejected by her only child, Miss Gatha survives because of the strength of her personality. The same may be said of Tantie in

Merle Hodge's novel, **Crick Crack Monkey** . Hodge's Tantie is a much less complex character than Wynter's Miss Gatha. She is also a much more sympathetic figure. Tantie must contend with the full force of West Indian middle-class "respectability" in all its negating glory. The conflict in the novel is presented in terms of her struggle with the status-conscious Aunt Beatrice for the guardianship of her brother's two children, Tee and Toddan. Refusing to be demoralized or to deny the positive values inherent in her own world view, Tantie struggles, affirms and insists; and in her brief moment of triumph, she expresses her rejection of West Indian middle-class values in the earthiest, most comprehensive and graphic terms".

"It might be said then", Dr. Thorpe noted, "that Miss Gatha survives because of the driving force of her ambition; and that Tantie survives because of the strength of her moral integrity".

FAITH

Turning to the grandmother figure in Erna Brodber's recently published novel, **Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home**, Dr. Thorpe noted that here the woman survives because of the quality of her religious faith:

> 'Granny Tucker prayed on Sunday mornings. In truth she always pray. Kneading her bread, she prays for health and strength to continue making bread to supply to the shops, to bring in money to pay Brother Jack to run the sugar mill to make sugar to feed the district. Granny Tucker prays for those who cannot afford to buy bread, for those who sing rag songs and stray from the good book, waste their money on cock fights and cannot buy their bread. She prays for that rain will stay away from the ripening tomato field. She prays for Parson Blair and the whole church militant. She prays constantly against Ole Joe, the devil who can hide one foot of shoes and have you hunting for the other, who can cause your dough to fall ... But on Sunday mornings Granny Tucker prays especially for her children disperses to the ends of the world ... three, eight, forty miles and even overseas doing what she does not know but God knows best .. Granny Tucker prays for Eliza married before her time, married yes Lord but to a sinner ... She prays for Rita. In Colon. But you know best Lord ... Keep her from the pomp and vanity of this wicked world. Keep her from lip rouge and straighten hair ... And Naomi. Only you dear Lord know why you take her in the prime of her life and leave these two little ones motherless and fatherless ... She pray for the boys. Don't strike me Lord, if I pray a little harder for my boy children, Lord .... Bring them back Lord. Bring them back. I not kneeling down here for nothing. Bring them back Lord. You know I need them. Me one can't carry on. Brother Jack help. I thank you, Lord. But blood thicker than water ...'[1])

Dr. Thorpe added: "The examples I have chosen so far suggests that our women novelists are sensitive to the variety of psychological defences which the West Indian woman employs to cope, at the personal level, with her own adverse social and economic situation. But psychological survival is not the only concern of these novelists. Of equal importance is their exploration of the theme of social and economic survival".

DEPENDENCE

"The figure of the woman who is dependent on some man for economic and social survival recurs constantly in these novels. Hers is not a happy situation. Kate Lansing of **The Hills of Hebron** marries because she desires economic stability and so-called respectability. Her husband is a master carpenter, and one of the few black citizens of Cockpit Centre, socially worthy enough to be

a member of the Wesleyan church there. On her part it is a loveless marriage, but one which, for a while, brings her the social satisfaction she seeks: '.....she worked hard at being a good and proper wife of Aloysius. She helped him in the shop, cooked his dinner and served him at a table set with a knife and fork and a white tablecloth and paper flowers in a cheap vase; and washed and ironed his white shirt and high collar for Sundays. She wore a hat and shoes and stockings and a long-sleeved white dress to church, and looked at her husband with great pride when he passed the plate round for the collection'.[2] A series of miscarriages, however, turns Kate into a frustrated woman, too embittered even to preserve the image of respectability she initially sought. Hodge's Tantie, on the other hand is obliged to enter into a number of transient sexual relationships for economic reasons. While these relationships do not pose any social and psychological problems for her personally, she has to endure the hurt and embarrassment suffered by her godson because of the derisive comments of his friends."

Dr. Thorpe noted that the predicament of the middle-class woman who marries for money is shown by the women novelists to be equally harrowing. Enid Hutson, of Paule Marshall's novel **The Chosen Place, The Timeless People,** barters 'her highly respected family name, her saffron-tinted white skin and a lush, somewhat sluggish sexuality' [(3)] for social and economic security. When we meet her several years later, she is an abandoned woman living in a huge costly house. And finally we have the figure of Helen, one of the women in Marion Patrick-Jones' novel, **J'Ouvert Morning:**"

> 'Standing at her window, Helen ponders the meaning of her life as she contemplate the mountains: "——They gave...(her) a tight feeling across her chest and the burn in the pit of her stomach. She had them every day of her life. They had watched her when she was young and continued watching her now she was growing old. She wondered idly what they saw, what memories they stored and if they laughed at them at all. Each day had begun to bring a new fear of facing the mountains, and a growing belief that they knew when time would stop. In the old days she had looked up to them after seeing the children off to school on a morning and Mervyn to work. She would whisper to herself: 'I look to the hills from whence cometh my help', and they had seemed bound up naturally with a future and God's caring. Now the mountains, like the psalms were part of the silence and part of the darkness'.[(4)]

DESTRUCTIVE

But while the women novelists may be seen to recognise and to be sympathetic to the woman as survivor, they also present a second image of the woman as a potentially destructive, disordering agent. "Time and again," she stressed, "we are presented in the novels with a woman whose very worthy ambition is to better the life-style of her family, and to secure for them the social and economic advantages she herself has lacked. But as the novelists see it, it is precisely the quality of this ambition which, at times, encourages the woman to be less sensitive to the emotional and psychological needs of her family, to deny them the compassion and the sympathy required for their own spiritual and psychological survival and growth.

"I would refer you again to Wynter's Miss Gatha who destroys her son and almost destroys an entire community because, in the words of the author: 'she wanted to see her son fulfilled as she had never been, and now, whilst he was young'. In the drought which descends on Hebron, Wynter images the destructive life-denying power of the woman as destructive agent. Or, we may think back to Hodge's Aunt Beatrice. Here, it is the

woman's single-minded pursuit of social advancement that leads the young Tee to seek annihilation, and turns Beatrice's own children into hostile strangers, insecure in themselves and contemptuous of her. A similar theme is present in Paule Marshall's **Brown Girl, Brownstones,** and in Jean Rhy's novel **The Wild Sargasso Sea.** That the heroine of Marshall's novel survives is due, in the main, to her own spiritual resilience and to the intensity of her felt rebellion.

"Rhy's Antoinette" she continued "is less aggressive. Her mother's unthinking indifference to her emotional needs — a consequence of Annette Cosway's own struggle for social and economic survival — starts the young Antoinette off on the road to insanity and suicide.

"Moreover, the children are not necessarily the only ones destroyed. Aunt Beatrice's husband is reduced to a mere physical presence in the home. The father in **Brown Girl, Brownstones** commits suicide, defeated because he is not a good provider, at least not in material terms. He dreams of moving the world with his music; she wants to buy a house. And yet, these women are presented as being totally committed to the physical and material well-being of their families, and more than willing to sacrifice and endure on their behalf. They are not unloving. And if they do not enjoy the unqualified sympathy of their creators, it is only because they perceive that the commitment of these women invariably demands the sacrifice of the imaginative and creative life".

CREATIVE

Finally, Dr. Thorpe examined the image of the woman as the source of the **creative, life-affirming potential in the society:** "For this I would refer you to the figure of Merle Kinbona in Paule Marshall's novel **The Chosen Place, The Timeless People.** Merle Kinbona is the character whose experience of life, I think, both suggests and affirms most completely the experience of West Indian womanhood. Marshall deliberately makes Merle a woman alone and abandoned. Ignored by her wealthy, upper-class father for most of her life, she has witnessed the murder of her mother, a black labourer, at the age of two. It is rumoured that her father's wife is the murderess. As a young woman Merle goes to England and becomes involved with a wealthy English woman who first exploits her, and then betrays her. Her marriage of two years fall apart, and her husband deserts her taking their only child with him. Like Rhy's Antoinette, Marshall's Merle becomes a striking symbol of the West Indian woman as victim — and this image is heightened and underscored by Marshall's description of Merle's Bournehill environment:

> 'Viewed from the plane, Bournehill resembled a ruined amphitheatre whose other half had crumbled away and fallen into the sea' **(The Chosen Place,** p.15), Or again, 'It was... every place that had been wantonly used, its substance stripped away and then abandoned'. (P.108).

For Merle Kinbona, the action of the novel constitutes a rite of passage, a movement out of the void, the gradual re-integration of the disturbed and divided self:

> '——the dress with its startling print, the strange but beautiful earrings...:, the noisy bracelets, the shoes — all this oculd be easily taken as an attempt on her part to make herself out to be younger than she was. But there was more to it than that, one sensed. She had donned this somewhat bizarre outfit, each item of which stood opposed to, at war even, with the other to express rather a diversity and disunity within herself, and her attempt, unsciousness probably, to reconcile these opposing parts, to make of them a whole'. (p.5).

PSYCHIC RECONSTRUCTION

> "The process of psychic reconstruction is by no means an easy one for the protagonist" said Dr. Thorpe, "but the action of the novel suggests that it is grounded on two sustaining responses: first, a willingness to continue loving, not in a self-sacrificing or self-serving manner, both of which are ultimately destructive to the self and to the beloved — but in a more profound and a more compassionate way — in the manner of a Merle Kinbona; and secondly, there must be the ability to accept and embrace what is bad as well as what is good in the past and in the present: to glory in the annual blooming of the cassia tree, while recognising and accepting the transience of each year's flowering.
>
> 'By this and next week all this lovely gold will be gone and my lady here will be her usual naked, half-dead self again. But what to do, yes? That's all in life, as the old people say'. (p.372).

At the end of the novel Merle's future remains uncertain, her self-confidence is still shaken. But she has come through, not only come through but triumphed. Using the American social scientist Allen as her mouthpiece, Marshall offers an assessment of Merle's character and achievement: '——You have it. I've always thought of you as someone who was never too afraid to live, who took on life. Oh, I know the rough time you've had and the terrible things that've happened. But in a funny way those things, bad as they were, are to your credit: proof that you haven't held back. I almost envy you them...' (p.306).

ULTIMATE TRIUMPH

"In The Chosen Place, The Timeless People Paule Marshall explores the experience of the West Indian woman, exposing both her strengths and her weaknesses. And she records her ultimate triumph. But more than that, the patterning of the novel suggests that it is a triumph that moves beyond Merle herself to celebrate the triumph of the West Indian people, and indeed of all oppressed peoples everywhere. In the end, it is as much a celebration of the female principle as it is a tribute to the human spirit".

SISTREN — WOMAN'S THEATRE A MODEL FOR CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING

BY

HONOR FORD-SMITH

Background

Sistren is an autonomous theatre collective of thirteen woman. Today, it is virtually a full time company. It developed gradually over four years out of the increased social awareness which characterized Jamaica society in the 1970's. Originally, the women in Sistren were all employed in the Special Employment programme — designed by the People's National Party Government of Jamaica (1972—1980).

"Consciously or unconsciously, a social context developed in the Jamaica of the seventies, which offered women a chance to organise around their own concerns", says Honor Ford-Smith one of the co-founders of the group. So Sistren grew out of the Impact Programme and acquired its own independent identity.

"That is why Sistren spoke to me as they did when I first met them in an old broken down school house in Swallowfield, to talk about what we were going to do for a workers' week concert"

I asked them "what do you want to do a play about?" And they said "we want to do plays about how we suffer as women. We want to do plays about how the men treat us bad".

"Somehow", Forde-Smith continued "the women recognised at the workplace and at home that they shared something in common. And out of this they wanted to explore their situation as women. Two years later in a film about Sistren, Bev Hanson said "we have certain things in common. In the first place we are all impact workers....in the second place all of us live in the ghetto". So there was also a consciousness which Sistren had of themselves as representatives of working class women".

Sistren then defines itself as an autonomous theatre collective within which its members use drama to explore and analyse the events and forces which shape their lives. Later they use theatre and workshops to share their experience with other groups. Its members are no longer employed in the S.E.P. which was discontinued in 1981.

Sistren's contribution to The Symposium on Women and Culture was a lecture demonstration of a workshop designed to help the participants to a better understanding of what women's work was and its value to the society. Honor Ford-Smith explained the evolution of this form: "Recently I have been experimenting with ways of making performances or play-studies into discussion-plays. That is, I have been aiming to find a structure of play which can break down into discussion and then build up into narrative or scene structure again. One of the difficulties with performances and discussion is that very often discussion appears stilted and embarrassing after the deliberate exclusion of the audience from participation in the dialogue of the play. I have been aiming for a form which melts into discussion with the audience without losing the impact that a consciously planned dialogue as well as scenario can have.

"The workshops with the Community, and the rehearsal workships within Sistren itself offer an opportunity for bringing together for living study (drama) scholars, artists and poor people. What is discovered is shared through performance, which is then discussed, with the community so that even at this stage what is

learned can be incorporated into the dramatic study". The methodology of the workshop and synopsis of Sistren's presentation at the symposium offered an interesting model for Caribbean women using theatre to express the reality of women and therefore it is presented in some detail.

The production was centered around the chaos caused in society when women refuse to perform women's work of any kind.

First, the workshop, in its full form takes two hours, relying heavily on audience participation. It is prepared for a target audience of women's groups of about 20 to 30 participants. Prior to the workshop the group is given material telling them that there is a general strike of women in the work place and at home in the mythical Caribbean islands of Madata.

They are also given letters from the strikers and a list of statistics from the Department of Women's Affairs. The material was as follows:

THE LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS

Dear Participant:

As you know a rather serious situation has developed in the Caribbean island of Madata where there is a general strike among women.

At least, I am not sure if the word "strike" is the correct word to use — because the women have not only refused to work outside the home, but also they have stopped their duties as mother, wives, common-law wives and as housekeepers. For the past two weeks they have been occupying churches, community centres and other public places. The women have presented a series of demands to the Government, which they insist must be met before they return to their jobs or their homes. In the meantime, the entire economy has stopped functioning, the service sector is crippled and gangs of children are roaming the street.

This unusual situation has never occurred in this way before — the only precedent we know of was a strike in Iceland in the 1970's and that lasted for one day only.

I am an adviser on Women's Affairs to the Madata Government. We feel that in view of the depth of the crisis it is important to consult groups of Caribbean women before settling the issue. On the afternoon of the date I will be visiting you. I will bring with me some of the strikers. We hope that we will be able to make use of your experience and understanding of the problems facing women and that you will assist both parties toward a satisfactory agreement.

In order to help you prepare for the meeting, I am enclosing some information on the situation of women in Madata.

In a series of scenes, the strikers role play for the audience the problems of —

(a) the rural woman — who depends on her child's labour to help with the domestic work involved in subsistence farming and looking after the house. The child's father is in America on farm work and the mother hasn't heard from him. The child, Pully, is prevented from going to school and eventually runs away to town to her brother.

(b) the domestic helper who is aging and is about to be laid off without compensation by her employer, a nurse who finds her inefficient.

(c) the nurse — who remains in her unhappy marriage because her husband (a garment manufacturer, Vanderpump at Vanderpump Ltd.) has money and she

earns very little as a nurse. She exploits the domestic helper in order to work outside of the home.

(d) the secretary — whose boss, Mr. Vanderpump of Vanderpump Ltd. constantly makes sexual demands on her and expects her to do the domestic work, to be a sales merchant and to carry out her office duties all at the same time. Vanderpump claims that he has to lay off half the workers in his factory in the interest of increased productivity and efficiency.

(e) a wage worker — who Mr. Vanderpump lays off happens to be Joyce, Pully's sister-in-law, with whom Pully has been staying since her arrival in the city. Pully has been helping to do housework in return for board and lodging. Immediately the good relationship which existed between Joyce and Pully breaks down since Joyce tells her she has to go home to her mother. Pully, to make matters worse has been a victim of the exploitation, stealing money from Joyce. The repercussions of the lay off at Vanderpump Ltd. begins to be felt by many families and the other workers join in the factory strike to protect lay offs.

Gradually by sharing the problem, the issues broaden and the women of Madata, women of all classes strike, refusing to cook, clean, look after their children or work at their jobs.

The song "Rain a Fall" is sung.

Striker's Song

Rain a fall but the dutty tough
Work so hard and the money no 'nough
Deh pon we foot from morning till night
Give we we justice and give we we right

Chorus
Every mother is a working mother
Give all women equal right
Women have to help one another
Some make we fight, fight, fight.
We inna it up to we neck
The least little fall and we wreck
Pickney to feed and rent to pay
Ease the pressure on women today

Victory we'll get
So all a wi woman better get set
We have to work hard to win the fight
All struggling woman must unit.

At this point the dramatic action is stopped and the audience is asked by a teacher-director to list what they now think are the main causes of women's problems in the Caribbean.

These problems were listed on a blackboard during the symposium.

Meanwhile in Madata without women's labour, a helpless father struggles to feed a child, hospitals close, the garment industry is crippled etc. In a desperate attempt to keep production going factory owners allow their male employers to bring their children to work.

The strikers are invited to discuss with the audience their demands — stated on placards with slogans such as Down with High Class Prostitution: Independence is the Key: Taking care of children is a task for a Nation: Freedom from Domestic Slavery: Domestic Oppression affects the whole Nation: Freedom from sexual harassment, are questioned by the audience.

Finale

Finally, Gloria Service asks the participants to make recommedations to the Government on how to solve the problems of women, but in this case the actresses, rather than the audience make the recommendations. Honor Ford-Smith has the final words:

"The process of working in drama for women involves the creation of a community in which some of the hidden or taboo subjects about women can be exposed and the audience confronted with them. As such, drama is not a reflection of life but a de-mystification of it, by the full exploration of these realities. After three years of work, Sistren provides a dramatic forum for the problems of women from the labouring poor and in so doing helps to bring pressure for changes for women. By confronting whathas been considered indecent, irrelevant, or accepted, we have begun to make a record of ways in which our lives have been thwarted and restricted. We have begun to refute the forces behind those ways.

"Methods and techniques are not very important. It is where they take you that matters. What becomes of the work is determined by the content and the consciousness one brings to the theme. Work of this kind can perpetuate oppressive structures as well as it can help to change them. The form is only important in so far as it structures and analyses the content and in so far as it leads to new understanding, new knowledge and new collective action".

METHOD OF WORK

Step 1

In the first stage the aim is to evoke themes from group's experience. These themes are drawn from areas in which shared experience is strongest. The early exercises aim to teach the physical skills of actors because this is the medium the group has chosen to use. The group has to become comfortable with improvisation so that it releases energy rather than restricts it. No in-depth work can go on until this happens. From this stage, the first themes will emerge very obviously — if they are allowed to.

Physical Skills

The work in drama teaches the basic physical language of the theatre — character, objective, environment and obstacle. On another level the workshop also begins to gather childhood and "folk" games collected by the group. These kinds of games establish a relationship between the cultural tradition of the women — as black people — and the work to be undertaken. The work in physical skill begins with and through the body of the woman, it is her instrument she works with — not something introduced from outside. Initially, all work is group work, chorus work. Gradually individual work begins.

Exercises for physical training

Physical trust games: There are many of these kinds of games described by hundreds of different theatre directors. The main purpose of these games is to help the group to begin to work physically as a team and not be afraid of depending on each other's physical presence. I will give a few examples of this kind of exercise, though each group should aim to come up with their own.

(a) Group shape games: exploring the potential of silhouette, and the levels which can be used and inhabited by the body, machine making, making atoms out of different numbers of interconnecting shapes.
(b) Races — obstacle races, wheelbarrow races, blind man's buff, follow the leader.

(c) Group lifting — the group lifts one person, carries her, turn her in the air and gently puts her down.
(d) Group catching — the group makes two lines of people, facing each other with their arms linked to form a giant cradle. An actor jumps from a table at the top of the two lines and is caught by the group.

Relaxing — releasing physical tension and concentrating on thoughts and images, in the mind only.

Concentrating and working with objects — creating them from mime through memory, playing games with imagined objects, describing objects and environments from memory, inventing stories to go with them.

Creating Environments: Showing where you are by using the environment, creating environments of different sizes, environments based on costume, furniture, props or landscape.

Character: Showing age, occupation and class through the body, taking one character and breaking her or him into different roles vis-a-vis family work, education, race, age group and so on. Creating the biography of a character you know, e.g. one's mother or grandmother.

Photographs: Creating images which show relationship through skills or snapshots — which lead into scenes.

Objectives: Physicalizing what the character wants, playing an intention in relation to another person.

Using music to create mood for movement, short scenes.

Metaphors and images from folk games — many folk games have implicit metaphorical messages which can be developed into improvisations out of the actual structure of the scene, others make good physical games. One example of this is the game "bull in the pen" which can be expanded as follows: A group of players encircle a group of two actors. The players create a "pen" by encircling linking arms. The players give each of the players in the outer circle the role of one aspect of the society which they feel oppresses them. The two players in the centre plot and strategize a means of getting out of the pen.

Out of these exercises certain themes will begin to emerge. The next step involves pulling out a specific theme or themes around which to continue the work. The group should pick the themes which they will use to develop their testimonies.

Step 2

Testimonies

These are an important part of Jamaica tradition and they are also part of the women's tradition of labrish.[18] Their form is well-known to most women from the labouring poor, because she has learned their structure in churches, at wakes and from listening to her mother and grandmother. This is one reason why testimonies are a natural step to the results of the physical exercises and can be used complementarily. Testimonies drawn from personal experience are evoked from pictures, songs, a word, newspaper or simple actions. They need not always be personal accounts, but can be accounts of observed situations. Testimonies should trigger responses from others in the groups. All testimonies are grouped by themes, by the group itself in discussion.

In an interview, the women in Sistren say "one time one a them say, what happen behind closed doors not supposed to come out to the public... I used to think that you shouldn't make others hear your problems, like them will take it curse you or something. But I find that it is not so at all. By talking my problems I find that

others have the same and even worse ones... We shouldn't shame to talk them because by talking we help out not ourselves alone, but also other women". Again elsewhere, Vivette Lewis says "You have to have faith to live in the ghetto...you have to say to yourself, whatsoever problem come I supposed to know how to solve it". The first stage is the description of the problem, after follows the analysis.

A testimony can, as in the earlier example, serve as a basis for a workshop. Or, if the team is aiming at a play-study, they can then select the testimonies which they want to explore in greater depth. The testimonies are grouped around a basic outline for a working scenario. At this stage the scenario will be very rough and incomplete. The details will become clearer, much later. In fact the final version of the scenario will probably appear to have very little relationship to the first.

In working with the testimonies it is the director's task to help the group to find connections between the testimonies they are selecting. It is also her job to help the actors to reformulate as problems the questions raised by the testimonies that will determine and deepen the course of the work.

In our first year of working with testimonies, the themes which were names focussed mainly on childhood, adolescence and the question of domestic work emerged very clearly as a problem. Here is an abbreviated example of an early testimony — "I didn't get enough schooling. The reason for this: living in the country and my mother did'nt have any help. She had eight of us and I was the biggest girl. She had was to leave us and go out to get food. She have to work out during the day, so that she can find enough food for us. So you find that I have to stay home most of the time and do washing, the cooking and keep the smaller ones occupied at home. That is the reason I didn't get enough schooling". Beverly Elliot

In reformulating this testimony as a problem, the aim is to find relationships between various areas of the problem or between one testimony like this and another. As this happens the problem has now acquired a name and the situation is no longer just shared but social and political. In looking at the problems in the testimony the group formulates questions about the situation and its content. It is these questions which lead to the next stage — that of research. For example: Some of the problems from the above testimony are (a) to do with domestic work. Obvious question — why is it women's work? (b) Why did the mother have no help? In this case the answer to this question was that the father had gone to Kingston to get wage work...Which leads to another question. Why is wage work normally offered to men? How has the movement of people from the towns to the city affected women?

INTRODUCING RESEARCH

These questions cannot be answered from within the experience of the women only, which is where the material worked with had so far come from. The group has to go outside to find the answers to its questions. This can be done in several ways. If we continue with the example of Bev's testimony and we try to answer the question of why wage work is normally offered to men in the form of a scene, we will very quickly see the depth of our own ignorance. At this stage we begin to read. Inevitably we will find that there is nothing to read on the question in the library — or the newspaper. So we have to call on the help of a professional researcher, to work with us. The material she contributes must be in a form which the group can dramatize. The researcher is not coming in to tell the group what to do, she is coming in to offer her skills and to help answer certain questions. In another method of work the actresses from the community work

with other women in their neighbourhood to collect experiences and additional material on the theme.

Having researched the problem, we can then rewrite the scenario to include discoveries from the research and to keep a sense of the questioning process which helped us to arrive at our final product. At this stage we improvise the whole scenario again.

RECORDING THE MATERIAL

All the actresses work on recording their scenes. For Jamaican women, it is often extremely liberating to begin to write and read in the language of creole which one speaks. It is also very interesting to read one's own experiences explained and illuminated. Women, used to an oral tradition, record very accurately what they say, because the memory is often much more agile. Each person contributing to recording a scene or workshop has to delegate final responsibility to one person to put the whole thing together.

The recording and passing on of materials is an important step in the breaking down of one group elitism and the sense of specialness that individual groups doing "special" work engender. It is a way of making contact with other organisations of women among the labouring poor. The recorded material can be re-used and passed on. A great deal of unrecorded improvisational work has gone on in Jamaica, and one of the sad results of this is that we have no access to material which has been done before. This obviously slows down progress. In our own experience we have also lost a great deal of our work, because of inefficiency or lack of time. In a situation where women have been "hidden" for centuries in documents and records and planning, the recording of the play — studies and workshops become even more imperative.

PERFORMANCE

Plays are often more vital for the actors than for the audience. That is, the process of creating a play-study often is more complete for those who are doing it than for those who watch the end product. That is why the open structure of a workshop is often more exciting and useful for both actors, and participants. Nevertheless, plays receive more public attention and attract a wide diversity of audience — which can lead to a very stimulating exchange. One of the most important things about performances is that they can be an act of solidarity with a particular issue or struggle. Sistren's **Bandoolu Version** opened in the community of Kingston with a play peformed in solidarity with the struggle of women to get maternity leave legislation passed in Jamaica.

CONCLUSIONS

The process of working in drama for women involves the creating of a community in which some of the hidden or taboo subjects about women can be exposed and the audience confronted with them. As such, drama is not a reflection of life but a de-mystification of it, by the full exploration of these realities. After three years of work Sistren provides a dramatic forum for the problems of women from the labouring poor and in so doing helps to pressure for changes for women. By confronting what has been considered indecent, irrelevant or unacceptable, we have begun to make a recorded refusal of ways in which our lives have been thwarted and restricted.

Methods and techniques are not very important. It is where they take you that matters. What becomes of the work is determined by the content and the consciousness one brings to the theme. Work of this kind can perpetuate oppressive structures as well as it can help to change them. The form is only important in so far as it structures and analyses the content and in so far as it leads to new understandings, new knowledge and new collective action.

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